



Expansion: The Story of the Early Church (Part 7) – Awe and Astonishment

Jason Harris – 19 September, 2021

Alright, good morning. Welcome. Good to see everyone. Hope you've had a good week. Let's go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer as we're beginning this morning.

Father, we thank you for the opportunity this morning to come before you. We rejoice again in who you are for us. We ask that as we bring our attention now to your word, that we would see you, that we would see your gospel. We ask that your Holy Spirit would direct our hearts, would warm our hearts, would heal our hearts, and would challenge our hearts to be what we ought to be. We ask that you would use your word in your church this morning. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Alright, Acts chapter three. This morning, we're looking at verses one through twelve. Last Sunday, we looked at the early church in its primitive form, as it was summarized there at the end of chapter two. And we discussed the extent to which that is what the 21st century church is supposed to look like. And I argued then that we ought to be like the early church in substance, not in mere external appearance. That our goal is to truly emulate the early church, but not to cheaply imitate it. So we talked about the difference between those two things at some length. And I hope that that's going to be on our radar as we continue to work through Acts—that just because it's here doesn't mean we're supposed to do it. That we won't settle for simplistic or Biblicist approach to scripture. But rather that we will seek to go always to the heart of the issue and to the substance beneath the external appearance.

Now today we come to an incident in the life of the early church, probably in those very first days or weeks, that is not significant in itself—its a fairly ordinary event in the life of the church in that context—but it is significant because it gives us this glimpse into the normal

life of the church in this first few months. And I want to just go straight into the text this morning and look at this story.

So here we go. Verse one of chapter three. *"Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour."* All right. So we've got two guys, Peter, and John. We're very familiar with these two disciples and they're on their way to the temple. Two of Jesus' closest friends and the text says they're going up to the temple... this would be the temple Mount. We're going to do a bit of thinking and talking about geography this morning because it shows up in this story and it will help us understand a little bit of what we've done up to now. And a whole lot of what's coming in the future as we work through Acts. When he says, *"up to the temple,"* we have to understand, first of all, that the temple is built on a platform, a massive platform, which I'll show you in a moment. But everything in the first century, Jewish, cultural mindset goes like this: Everything in Israel goes up to Jerusalem, and everything in Jerusalem goes up to the temple. The temple is the centre of the Jewish world. Indeed, I read something last night talking about a rabbi, ancient rabbi, talking about the fact that Israel is the centre of the earth. And the Holy of Holies is the centre of Israel. So, this is very much the way a Jewish person looks at it. And so they're going up to the temple and we also know that the gate that they used is probably from the East. Okay, so they're going in to the temple, probably from the East. And I'll show you in a moment why that's significant, but the, the hour that they're going is the ninth hour and that's 3:00 PM. So mid-afternoon, they're headed up to temple.

And I'll just point out that last week we talked about in verse 42, it talks about *"the prayers."* And we said, is that just talking about prayer, like a general thing, or is that talking about "the prayers" like the Jewish temple prayers that happened periodically? And this here says they were going up at the hour of prayer—3:00 PM—which supports what we argued last week that probably it actually refers to the Jewish temple prayers. That they went to the temple as... this is the Christians had, had a habit of sort of, "when the prayers happen, afterwards we hang out. We get together at the temple area and we hang out."

All right, so that's verse one. Verse two, the, the text goes on. It says, *"And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate and asked alms of those entering the temple."* All right, so here's a guy who has been unable to walk his entire life and he has people—friends, presumably—who help him every day to get to the temple, to make a living begging. That's, that's his thing. That's his life. That's what he does. And he goes to this particular place and he begs.

Now I want to just take a moment to look at the geography of the temple. This map, or it's not a map... it's an aerial photograph... is Jerusalem now. Okay, this is an aerial photograph and looking down at the old city as it looks today. Um, right in the middle there, you can see... We don't have a laser, do we? Oh, we do... Over here, you can see the Dome of the Rock. This is a Muslim mosque built over a stone called The Foundation. This here is the temple precinct and... you can see out here, big, big intersection, sky... high-rises start to build... crop up around there. But this is Israel today. And I want us to, to mentally be able to kind of start to put some of the things we're reading about on to Google maps, which is literally what we're dealing with here.

This is a reconstructed version of what it looked like in Jesus' day. Same photograph, just doctored to try to recreate what we know about the past. So I'll just go back and forth a couple of times. Here's the corner. At this stage, there's a huge colonnade here. This is all just flat, no trees. And you can see... okay, so right here, you'll see there's... just a wall, an outer wall, the outer wall of the city. Now it's just a road going by. Over here, you'll see, this is a major fortress. This is a Roman fortress, which is going to come up in our story later. Today, it's just some buildings there... can't really tell the fortress was there, but it was. And of course, let me just put my finger right here. Here's the Dome of the Rock. Today. And what I'm pointing to right now is the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple. So here is the temple precinct. This is kind of the whole campus of the temple. This right here is the temple proper. That's... when we think of the temple, that's, that's it. It's not just this... it's this whole thing right here. Just like the Tabernacle, that's the temple proper.

And I'm going to actually give us a little bit of a sketch... It's not quite as accurate, but it's probably easier to see and understand. Again, this is the whole complex. This is the temple proper. Everything out here is called the Gentiles' Courtyard or the Court of the Gentiles. Anybody who wants is allowed to just sort of waltz into that area and hang out. It's huge. And so many people came to Jerusalem for festivals that Herod, when he built this version of the temple—this is the third temple that was built, Solomon built one, then Zerubbabel built one, and then this one was built by Herod the great—and he kind of expanded the whole place, made it massive so there was room for tens of thousands of pilgrims who came each year. And then you have here in the front, you have the Women's Court. And it wasn't a court for women. What it meant was if you're a Gentile, you're allowed out here, but you cannot enter that door unless you're a Jew. You must be a Jew to enter that door. And then there's another door here... to the back half... and that is only for male Jews, which is why they call it

"the outer one." This is... female Jews are allowed this far. Male Jews allowed this far... And then there's the door to this little building here and only priests are going in there. And that's where you have the lampstand, and the incense, the table of shewbread. And then you have a veil. And behind that veil is the Holiest of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant would be in the first temple. That's where it was. Now, there's no ark. By this point in history, it's disappeared. Nobody knows where it is to this day. And nobody is allowed in there except for the high priest, once a year, who sprinkles blood now, at this stage in history, on the Foundation Stone, the rock that used to have the Holy of Holies on it, or sorry, the ark of the covenant on it. Alright, so here's the geography.

This, this text, verse two, it says, *"a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms."* Now three possible places where this gate is—scholars aren't 100% sure—it's either this gate (which is actually over here a little bit), or it's this gate into the temple proper, or it's this gate into the inner section of the temple. And almost certainly, it's not either of these two. It's almost certainly this one. They're pretty confident of that at this point. Meaning that they're on this side of the temple. They probably come in this gate and they're walking into the temple through this entrance. The thing about that is... let's go back one picture.... what do you see here? Nothing. This is a valley, right? All the city at this stage is inside these walls on that side of the temple. Most of the people who come into the temple come in from here, or here, or here. What's on the other side of this valley? The Mount of Olives... which is a garden sometimes known as the garden of Gethsemane. What are Peter and John doing, 3PM, walking into this gate? Probably they were at the Mount of Olives. I don't know if they met there in the morning. I don't know if they maybe slept there... It's possible that they have... that they live somewhere out here in the outskirts. But very possible that in their mindset, still just a few weeks ago they hung out with Jesus there all the time. And that that's where they're coming from on this particular afternoon as they head to the temple for prayers.

So here we are. We've got a guy. He's begging and he gets himself set down at this gate. Almost certainly this gate... possibly this one, this is almost for sure not... but still one of these places every day. And one of the things to notice there is: this is not the common gate. If you're a beggar looking for money, where are you going to sit down? Where the most people come, right? That's your thinking? But this guy doesn't. And you think about why...? What can we perhaps learn about his personality from that? Maybe where he lived, but I mean, this is a mountainside coming up here. See these stairs here? It was higher than that. It's impossible to really reconstruct because the ground is literally gotten higher in, in the

thousands of years since then. But carrying a lame man up there probably not all that easy. So it very well may be something in his psychology. The way he's thinking is, "Oh, wait, everyone else goes to that gate. But I go to this gate. I get fewer people, but I'm the only guy there so better pickings." Or maybe he has some generous people that come by in that direction. But this is how this guy does his thing. He goes to the far gate, the one called beautiful. And he sits there. And this is also interestingly... because I've asked myself, how do you still have beggars? Remember, this is immediate... this is within a year of Jesus coming to the temple and cleansing it. How do you still have a beggar that everyone knows is there every day? And he hasn't been healed by Jesus? And this might be why. Maybe Jesus comes in the main entrance and just misses him every time. I don't know, but here he is. This is this guy's life. He begs, he asks for money. And verse three goes on to tell us... Verse three says, "*Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.*" Here's a guy doing what he does. This is his life. He asked people entering, "Give me money."

Verse four, "*And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."*" "Look at us." Okay. That's what's happening. Um, the things that strike me here in the demeanour are confidence, authority, and connection. Confidence, authority, and connection. Both of them look at this guy. The text says they gaze. They gaze. They saw him. They didn't glance at him in passing. They didn't just sort of sweep by. They stop. They look at him. This man is probably invisible to most people who pass through this gate. Even the ones who give him money probably don't really notice him very much. Why? What do we do? What do we do when we see something that's so awkward and so uncomfortable that it really unsettles us? How do you act when you see a homeless person, say, next to the door at the shop? It's awkward. You, you, you... you don't even want to kind of think about the reality that there are people out there in that situation. And you go to a third world country and this is not at all uncommon. Beggars are very numerous all over the world today. And many of them are in really, really bad situations and you see them and you might even help them if you can, but... I mean, I remember I've been to first-world countries where the beggars were so intense that you couldn't, um, if you were to give money to one of them, you'd be worried about being mobbed. That kind of situation. This is, this is fairly normal in cities around the world. And so even if you were to give some money to someone, you don't really want to connect with them, you don't really want to create a relationship. You want to, you want to do your thing and you want to keep on with your life because the human mind doesn't deal well with that kind of pain and destruction and sadness. We can't take it on all the time. And so here's a guy who probably doesn't get seen all the time, but Peter fixes his gaze on him. He, he looks

at him carefully and says, "Look at me." So he establishes this connection and he does so with a sense of confidence and authority that comes from knowing you are authorised by Jesus to do God's work. *"Look at us."*

Verse five. It says, *"He fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them."* So here's the guy. He responds by buying into this connection, right. These guys stop and really look at him and say, look at us. And he does. He fixes his attention. And then the text tells us he's got his hopes up, right? He's expecting to receive something from them. And that's like, that's a, it's a euphemism for he's expecting to get some money. Right? His hopes are up. All right.

So here we go. Verse six. *"But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!'"* Now, before we delve into what the text says and means, I just want to stop and just point out that this verse has been used by Christians so many times to say that we should focus on preaching the gospel to the poor; not on trying to feed them. Right? "That's what Peter did. Peter says, well, I don't have money, but here's what I have. And then he gave him spiritual help." Right? If I've heard that once, I've heard it a thousand times. Christians using this verse to argue, "It's not really our focus to focus on helping them physically. Our job needs to be to, to give them the gospel." Here, here's the argument: That's their most pressing need. The gospel is their most pressing need. Is that true? This guy's most pressing need is the gospel? But I want to point out to us what the text actually says. Peter says, *"I have no silver and gold."* In other words, Peter's got no cash on him. He doesn't have any money. Okay. This does not mean that Peter doesn't give alms to the poor. "Peter's not the kind of guy who helps poor people when he sees them." That's not what the text says. What the text says: "I don't have any money. Sorry. Got no cash. My bad." That's what the text says. And, yes, I would agree that the most pressing need this man has ultimately is the gospel. Right? But he also needs to eat. And so Peter says, "I don't have cash." But here's, here's something we, we totally miss when we do that with this verse. Peter didn't say, "I don't have cash. So let me give you the gospel." That's not what it says. What does it say? He says, "In the name of Jesus, get up."

Here's the point? Peter doesn't have the money to help him, but he doesn't go and say, "Well, let me talk to you about your soul." What he says is, "I can't help you in that way. Let me help you in this way." Do we understand? He physically helped him. If we're going to use this verse to say, "Well, we shouldn't really focus on giving to charity."... it says the exact

opposite. "Well, I can't give you money, but I can give you the ability to walk." Okay, the equivalent to that for us, if we don't have the ability to heal someone, is, "I can't give you a sandwich, but I can pay for your surgery." This, this guy is not saying, "I'm just gonna preach to you because, well, that's your most important need."

We ought to be good people who help those in need. Okay? The homeless, the sick, the vulnerable, the abused, the misunderstood, the displaced, the immigrant, the lost, the distressed... When you come across someone like that and they say, "Hey, can you give me a hand?" We should. If we can. Or let me, let me, let me say it another way that's more precise and more careful: Do not brush off the needy person who asks you for help lightly. I do not say ever. I say lightly. Okay? We need to be very discerning. We need to really think through how we can best help people and whether we can help people. We can't help everyone. I told you about being in first-world countries and literally they'll pound on the windows of your car asking for money. And you can't, you cannot... if you give a dollar to every person who begged for money, you would not be able to eat. So you have to discern. You cannot always say yes. But... but at the same time, we should not brush off the needy person who asks for help lightly. In the name of Jesus, we must help.

And that is why we don't just talk about this at CrossPoint. This is why we have a care fund. And I'm just gonna chuck this in here... We have a care fund—go on our website—where we have a nurse in Vanuatu who is going to try to get to children who will die of preventable diseases in the next several months and she tries to get to them first and help them with medicine. Right? We give money to World Vision to feed children in Africa. Um, as a church, this care fund reaches out to Christians in persecuted countries like Afghanistan. This... we... our church is doing something about Afghanistan, except it's very small and we want to do more. And so we, as Christians, need to think, you know, when, when a lame person says, "I need money to live", we think, "Do I have any money? Can I give?" and we want to give to them, we try to give. Us as a church, I want to see us do more for the Christians in Afghanistan... for the non-Christians in Afghanistan. I want to see us do more for Africa. I want us to do more in Vanuatu. I want us to help people who are in need because that is something that Christians do.

The text... Peter says, "*I have no silver and gold.*" "Sorry, no cash." But, but... Okay. Verse six. But—and here, the guys collapsed—but there's hope. And this is kind of what Peter's doing... he's like, I've got good news and I've got bad news. Which one do you want first?

Right? And so he's given the bad news, no cash, but here's the good news: "Um, you can walk now. You can walk now. Get up. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up.*" What an incredible, audacious moment! "Sorry, I don't have any money, but you can walk." And, Peter, you know: "I'm here for Jesus and Jesus says get up. Stand." That's what just happened. Verse seven, "*He took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet (right?) and ankles were made strong.*" He can walk. Suddenly. So he says... Follow the progression of Peter's "Look at me." He goes, "Take my hand. Rise up. Get up." What a powerful connection! What a beautiful way to relate to people! And what an amazing moment when God himself overrules the laws of biology and heals him... just fixes his foot and his ankle, and... heals him!

In verse eight, "*leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*" How does this guy respond to the notification, "Hey, you can walk now"? I would describe it as ecstatic. Okay. He's ecstatic. He's really excited. He leaps up, he stands, he walks, and he goes into the temple and he's leaping in there. Right, now let's, let's just be analytical about this. The first time he leaps up, what that means is he got up quickly. Right, so he didn't sort of like slowly get up. He jumps up. Okay. That time is functional. Right? To leap up. He was sitting, he was on the ground like he had been all his life and he leaps up. That's functional. Right. You gotta leap to get up, so, okay, that's functional. But when he gets into temple, that leaping is not functional. Okay? That leaping is jumping for joy. It is dancing. He's happy.

This is not... just, just... this is not a Benny Hinn healing event, okay. Where you have these sort of "too subtle to deny, but not distinct enough to really notice" healings. And you're like, like... the thing that nobody can tell has happened, and somebody gets very excited about it. But... it must've happened, but nobody's really, for sure. This is not corporatised faith healing. No, this guy goes from crippled to leaping in a moment because Peter said, "You're healed. You can walk now."

There are two kinds of healing in Christian theology. I want to spend some time talking now about the theology of healing, the theology of miracle. There are two kinds of healing in Christianity. The first one is, um, the miraculous healing. And when it comes to time, the miraculous healing is immediate. It's not gradual. It just happens. God does it. And you're healed and the means are supernatural. Okay? So it's not doctors doing what they do. There's not muscles growing. Like they do. This is God overruling the laws of biology or nature or whatever it may be. The second kind of healing in Christian theology is providential

healing. Providential healing. Providence means that God controls all of the circumstances of life. He controls all the atoms in the world. They all obey to him. They all bow to his authority. And when God heals providentially, the timing is... what I'm just going to say... normal. It's, it's not immediate. It's normal. It's just the way that thing would happen if it were going to go that way. And the means are not supernatural. They are natural. Providence means God works through the nature he has created.

So we've got these two kinds of healing: Miraculous and providential. And we can pray for both. When we pray for healing, right, we're kind of praying for both. "Please miraculously heal them, but really what I want is for you to heal them however you're going to heal them." And most often it happens providentially. God uses doctors. He uses means to heal and he controls the sequences for his ends, but we shouldn't confuse these two or blur the lines. We will mis-pray. And we will mis-think if we think of these as really kind of the same thing. Because they're different. We saw several weeks ago looking at Joel that the mirac—this kind of healing—the miraculous healing had a particular purpose in a particular place in a particular time. And it's not the norm. And it's for particular people as well. But all of that, we're going to put off till later. Talk more.

Right now, I want us to, to just sort of place miracle theologically for a second. A unique approach to it. I want us to do that by noticing the driving physicality of this story. All right? This is a very physical story. It has dust on it. All right? So the place is the temple. I've literally just shown you a photograph of the place like it looks now, what it would have looked like then. We've got the senses. He says, "Look at me." Right? "Look at me. You look at me, I'm going to look at you." Then there's minerals, there's silver and gold. They actually used coins at that time. And yet the text talks about it in terms of their mineral elements. Um, then you've got the senses again, "Take my hand." Touch. And you've got his body: his feet, his ankles are healed. And you've got him leaping up and standing and walking and he praises God with his mouth, his tongue, his lips. Right? So it's a very physical story. We're getting detailed physical description there. And I want us to notice this physicality because it stands in profound contrast to the spirituality that characterises the Christian faith.

So, Hebrews 11. We're all familiar with Hebrews 11: All these people of faith. Right and, and kind of halfway through, he stops in verse 13, and he does this thing: He says, "*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...*" Can I say... They haven't received it, but they've seen it. They've seen it. Not with their physical eyes... with their spiritual eyes... with their eyes of faith... "And

having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out... [the physical country they'd come from] *"they would have had opportunity to return."* You can go and have that right now if you want it. *"But as it is, [Verse 16] they desire a better country, that is..."* [clarifying... not a physical one where you can just walk to] *"They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."*

I want to just camp here and just notice the place of miracle in Christian theology. The miracle in Christian theology is not the daily staple of Christian life. Right? The miracle is not an ordinance for worship in the Christian gathering. You go to some churches and the way they talk about miracles, you kind of feel like it's one of the things that's supposed to happen on Sunday when we get together, right? If we don't have a miracle, we're not really.... Something's wrong, all right? We're not doing it right. No... what are the ordinances for Christian worship? Well, there's broken bread and crushed grapes. Oh, and we can like have a big tub and just get people dunked and get them wet. The Christian ordinances for worship are just profoundly simple and physical. Miracle is not necessary. That's not the point when we get... When we worship, it's supposed to be very simple and physical. Miracle is not an ordinance for worship in the Christian gathering. No, miracle is not typical of the daily experience in Christian theology.

Here's the location of miracle in Christian theology. Please get this, please get this. Miracle is a misplaced sample of what will happen when Jesus comes back to earth and finally, fully reverses the curse. I'll say it again. Miracle is a misplaced sample of what will happen when Jesus comes back to earth and finally, and fully reverses the curse. Revelation 21:4 talks about no more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain. Why? Because those things weren't in the creation in the first place. There was God who made man for his pleasure. There was no sin. And then sin came and with it came the curse and that's where we get nature trying to destroy man. Right? That's where we get man trying to destroy man. That's where we get deafness and blindness and lameness. Okay? The miracle, the role of the miracle, is, is this sort of misplaced sample.

Okay, so blindness. Let's take blindness. A person who's blind. There's not going to be blindness when, when the curse is reversed, when Jesus comes back and we live in the kingdom, there's not going to be blindness—either spiritual or physical—not going to exist. And so when Jesus comes into the world and then he heals a blind person, what that is,

“Hey, everyone, look. Come ‘round. Look, this is what that's going to be. Okay. That world that I came here from? This is what it looks like. Ready? I'm just going to give you a misplaced... this isn't... we don't live in that world. The curse has not been reversed. We are in the curse. But let me just give you a misplaced... let me just take a tiny bit of that and just put it over here for one moment. Just so you can get a glimpse... I'm going to give you this misplaced sample of another world. Now, take this, take this stunning thing that you just saw, this amazing reversal of the curse and just grab the edges and pull it away...” What you're seeing is what's going to be for all of eternity after Christ comes and finishes doing what he did at the cross.

In other words, miracle is an eschatological event. Eschatological. Eschatology. End times. What's going to happen after this. Miracle is an eschatological event. It is a tiny window into the future; into the way the world will be when this mess is cleaned up and God rules and reigns and makes right every evil and undoes every wrong and removes the destruction of sin from his creation. And that's why it's not normal. Miracles aren't normal. It will be normal then. And that's the whole point of the miracle. It's not normal, but it will be normal. So take this little window and don't think, “Oh, that, that window I need, I need that.” No, you don't need that window. We don't need just a couple more of those windows in this world. We need that world. And those windows aren't there to be clung to. They're there to remind us of that world so that we can live in faith in spite of the fact that this world is a mess. How did the passage in Hebrews 11 start? These all died in faith. Many of them died martyr's deaths. Peter is going to be martyred. Killed for believing in Jesus of Nazareth. He didn't say, “Ooh, wait, where's my miracle?” He gets it. Miracle is not normal here. It's here to point out that this isn't normal. Sin, destruction, the curse... is not normal. It is abnormal and it is going to be fixed in Christ.

So recognizing the exceptional nature of miracles helps us to understand that we're not supposed to be going to the Christian life looking for miracles. Rather we're supposed to be going through the Christian life looking for the eschaton, the end, the time when it's all made right because Christ has come back and done what he said he would do. And if an occasional moment comes when we get a tiny glimmer of that eschaton in a miracle? It does not draw us to itself. We don't love it. It points us to the thing that's coming and makes us love that world. Not for that world's sake, but for the God who gives it.

Verse eight, notice how the result of this miracle... Notice... It begins here and continues into the next few verses... There's this ecstatic joy. There's leaping. There's praise to God.

He praises God. When God heals someone miraculously or providentially, we ought to praise him. “Thank you, God, for this glimmer of what you're going to do.”

Verse nine. I'm going to look at verse nine and ten together. *“And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”* So here's what's going on. People see him praising. He praises. People see him. They recognize him. They're like, “Yeah, that's that guy that's always sitting at the gate.” And they're filled with two things the text says, *“wonder and amazement.”* The Christian Standard Bible translates these beautifully as *“awe and astonishment.”* Awe and astonishment. “Wow. Wow. Did you see that?” And in that word, “wow”, lies a world of Christian theology: The nature of who God is—that stunning nature when we see God and think, “Wow!” In fact, ultimately you could define worship as the moment when you say, “Wow.” Joy in God starts with, “Wow.” Right?

See this here: spreading joy in God. We're not talking about just feeling happy. We're talking about people seeing God and going, “Wow.” That's why CrossPoint exists. For people to see God and say, “Wow!”

See now what happens because of this. Verse 11, “While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.” So this guy's response to God's healing drew a spontaneous crowd. People seeing us living out our lives with God is important. This is one of the reasons why the interpretation of Acts chapter two (at the end there) that says, “Well, this is describing commune.” No, we looked last week at why that's not true. The text actually doesn't say that. But this is one of the reasons why, if that were true, and people who interpret it as, “well, Christians should get together in little communes” is dangerous. Because the church is not supposed to be isolated from the broader community. Rather, the church is part of the local community. So my encouragement to you is join a local club or team or group or committee. Join it. Get involved in your community. Be part of your community so that people can see you living out your life with God in front of them. This is one of the crucial ways in which God spreads joy in himself by connecting us in real relationship to other people who see us living out joy in God in the ups and the downs of real life. And here, what we see is, we get a spontaneous gathering of people.

And we're done, but I'm going to just run us back to these maps and just point out what's happening here because I think it'll help us. We said that this is probably the gate where he sits. Peter and John probably come in through here. They are going into the temple for the prayers. So here's what's happened: They meet him here on the way in. He's healed. He goes in with them, the text says, and he's walking and jumping around in the temple. Meaning other people who are there to worship—not just Christians, Jews—are seeing it. And then here it says that a spontaneous crowd gathered. Where? *“All the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.”* See this? Solomon's Portico. You can't really see it here, but it continues around just like here. It's pillars. It's a roofed area, a porch, and this eastern portico is where the New Testament Christian Church got together. This is where they hung out. Go back—this is modern Jerusalem right now... what it looks like. Right along here... somewhere around here... is where the Christian Church gathered. It was where they hung out. If you wanted to find the Christians, this is where you went in Jerusalem to find them. And so they would have gone into the temple, participated in the prayers... or tried to, but it doesn't sound like this guy was cooperating. A crowd gathers. They have come back out through the gate where it happened and they've gone to wherever along this line the other believers are gathered and people have followed them. People have... from in here, from perhaps out here... people have seen the commotion. People have seen this guy that they've seen and he's walking and they spontaneously come towards them to find out what's happening. What has happened?! And the text says they're utterly astounded. They're still thinking, “Wow!”

In verse 12, *“When Peter saw this, he addressed the people.”* And we're going to stop here. Next week, God willing, we'll see how Peter puts this moment to use with the explicit proclamation of the gospel. But for now I want us to just walk away with this: When God uses his absolute power in a way that seems to be directed on our behalf, either miraculously or providentially, we must not miss the point. The point is not here and now. The joy that we have in that moment is the gift God has given. The joy that we have in that moment in the gift that God has given ought to be swallowed up in the joy that we have in the giver of the gift. So God has done this amazing thing on our behalf and we're glad about that, okay? But we are not idolaters. We don't love the gift more than the giver. The point of the gift is to point us back to the giver and our joy in that is just, just pointing us back to our joy in that. And pointing us to the time when that'll be all the time, everywhere, in the future.

So we do not live for this world. We are not materialists who put our hope in what we can accumulate here to enjoy. No, we live for another world. One that transcends this one so

completely as to make this one look like a few childish scribbles compared to the masterpiece that is God's world with a reversed curse; working like it is supposed to be. When we get a glimpse of that masterpiece through God's providential or miraculous intervention at a situation, I pray that our response will be worship. "Wow! What a God!" An eschaton... look forward to the time when the relationship with that God is just wide open. Gladness in the giver of the good gift is the point of the miracle. Gladness, by the way, which cannot be taken away by the ups and downs, by the circumstances of life. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for these moments in the early church when the eschaton, the future, was brought into the present in a tiny, exceptional moment for us to see that everything you've promised you will do, you can do easily. And that you intend to do it. Help us to be like they were 2000 years ago when they sat under that porch and waited for you to come back and set everything right and finish the work of redemption and repair that you began at the cross just a few weeks earlier. Help us not, because years have passed, to think it must not be going to happen. Help us to be like Abraham who, thousands of years before it did happen, died in faith. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.