

No Running Or Dancing In The Temple

Acts 3:11-16 NIV

There are some things that only happen once in a lifetime. Occurrences that make you absolutely stop in your tracks and say to yourself, “I can’t believe that just happened.”

Just prior to today’s text - something like that happened - something that made everyone stop in their tracks and stand there in awe. A man who had been crippled from birth - who was over 40 years old and had begged at the temple gates for years, was healed and enabled to walk. As the people were about their daily routines, they suddenly saw this man jumping and running around in the temple courts. They would never forget what had happened that day. It was a miracle.

It’s at moments like these - time stopping moments - when a tremendous opportunity arrives. It’s like the blinders of everyday life are removed from people, and they’re so amazed that they’re willing to stop and listen - at least for a minute. Their hearts and minds are so shocked that they want to hear - want to find out what happened - and how it happened.

Peter is going to explain to the astonished onlookers the ‘what and how’ of this cripple from birth who is now dancing and leaping in their sight. But before we arrive at that part, I don’t want you to forget that John is with Peter.

This is the same John, who writes about another ‘once in a lifetime event:’

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1-2)

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,^[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The event of events: the Word became flesh and blood and grew up in a town called Nazareth.

The event of events that laid the groundwork, undergirding this ‘once in a lifetime event’ Peter is about to explain to the crowd that had gathered in Solomon’s Colonnade.

¹¹ While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be

killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:11-16)

In your mind’s eye, see two men standing over another who had no strength in his legs to stand on his own. Then, one or both of the men reach down to help him to his feet, and as he takes hold of the hand or hands extended to him, he suddenly leaps to his feet, shouting and running up to people, hugging them, and maybe dancing them in a circle; then skipping back to the men who helped him to his feet, hugging and thanking them, he hooks his arms in theirs, clinging to them, and together, they proceed into the temple.

Once a crowd begins to gather around all this activity, someone points to a sign that states ‘NO RUNNING OR DANCING IN THE TEMPLE.’ How do you think this man who had just been

miraculously healed would respond to a sign like that?

Do you think he would return to where he had been sitting and resume begging? How foolish, right? But some who were eye witnesses of the miracle and who would hear Peter's explanation would have this man return to the way he was, because the explanation Peter would give could not possibly happen in their world.

"Men of Israel," Peter asked, "why does this surprise you?"

Now, what kind of question is this: "Why does this surprise you?" Wouldn't you be surprised if someone who had been crippled from birth was now all of a sudden standing in the front of the church, jumping and dancing and praising God? Sure you would. But should you be?

Look at who Peter was addressing: he says, Men of Israel. In other words, these were Jewish people, believers in God, holy people, folks who knew the One and Only Begotten that John would write about – the Living God. They knew that this was the God who had created the world...who had given the Promised Land to Abraham ...who had given a son to barren Sarah ...who had spared Isaac from the knife of sacrifice...who had delivered the Israelites from Egypt by leading them through the Red Sea.

This was the powerful living God, who can do amazing things, especially a miracle like healing a lame man. Now,

look at how he says this: he says, "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you?"

Seeing a lame person walking should surprise the average person, but not you, not the Men of Israel. Not you who know that God is able to do great and mighty, miraculous things. You should expect that God is going to do great things.

But here they stand; bug-eyed, jaws dropped – mouth hanging open – how did this happen; how could this be?

Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? Peter continued.

The men of Israel would gawk at the once cripple man leaping about, the turn their gaze to Peter and John. Peter didn't focus much on the man or the miracle, but on the one who made the miracle possible – Jesus.

Paul made this statement to the Corinthians: **"²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

When we turn our attention away from Jesus for answers to life's questions, guess who is right there ready to tickle our ears with answers he knows will satisfy fleshly desires. That's right – the

ruler of this world- the one who tried to kill Jesus at his birth and is now out to destroy His bride, the Church. Satan is right there ready to whisper in your ear, "NO RUNNING OR DANCING IN THE TEMPLE."

Christ crucified: men of Israel, don't stumble over Jesus.

¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:16)

It is only by faith in the name of Jesus that you are going to get the correct answers to life's questions.

I asked you earlier in your mind's eye to see the scene unfold between Peter and John, the cripple man, and the reaction to the miracle by the men of Israel.

Again, I'm going to ask you to use your God-given ability to paint pictures in your mind.

Imagine a tranquil scene at the ocean, where a painter sits with his easel, carefully applying paint from his palette to the canvas in front of him. He is painting the blue sky, the waves breaking in on the rocks, and the birds circling the lobster boat in the distance. As he nears the completion of this great masterpiece, the paint rebels, squeezes itself out of the tubes, off the canvas, and proceeds to

drown the artist in his own paint. The paint kills the painter.

Or, imagine if you went to the Symphony, and enjoyed the awe-inspiring music as the musicians breathed life into their instruments, giving them the song. As they reached the climactic moment of the concert, the instruments decided that they no longer wanted to be played by this group of musicians, and they took the life that had been given them and proceeded to clobber and beat the musicians and conductor to death. By doing so, they kill not only the musicians and the conductor, but they destroy their own song as well.

Imagine words jumping off the page and murdering the writer. Imagine actors in a play refusing to perform the way the playwright intended—and carrying him by force out of the theater where they hang him on the marquee as an example to other playwrights who want their work performed the way it was written. Imagine stained glass in a window jumping out of its leading, and slashing the artisan.

How is it possible that mere mortals snuffed out the Light of the world when one of the most powerful of God's angels couldn't do it?

The great paradox of the Gospel is that Jesus was light and life—and we killed Him. John said that He, Jesus, was there at the foundation of the earth; through Him all things were made: without Him

nothing was made that has been made, and we killed Him. From Him and to Him and through Him are all things. And yet, the creation rebelled and killed the Creator.

How is that possible? Did you see Jesus die? Were you there? I wasn't there, I'm sure.

But, we must never forget that even though we weren't in the crowd that shouted "Crucify Him," your sin and my sin nailed Jesus on the cross. We are just as responsible for the death of Jesus as the men of Israel, Pilot, the Sanhedrin, or even Judas. We can point fingers and say that we weren't there, that 'they' killed Him, but their hearts may not be as black as we suppose, and our hearts not as white as we would like to believe.

"All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God." Again turning to our mind's eye, imagine: we are just like the shards of stained glass attacking the artisan. We are like the paint trying to drown the painter. We are like words that kill the author, actors who lynch the playwright. We are like the instruments that kill the very musicians that breathe life into them.

We have killed the song, and chose to sing our own song instead. We have preferred our own ways of selfish living, materialism, and greed. We have indulged in our own lusts instead of serving our brothers and sisters. We have built our own castles and kingdoms at the expense

of the Kingdom of God. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. We have jumped off the stage and chosen to sing our own song and write our own play.

We participated in the death of the author of life.

On the day that a man forty years old plus, cripple from birth, was able to leap to his feet and on his own legs walk into the Temple for the first time, John, writer of a Gospel, epistles, and Revelation, along with Peter, witnessed an unforgettable event; a 'once in a lifetime' event possibly for most of these men of Israel. Would they ever witness another miracle or see anything like this again?

Peter and John, along with this healed cripple, saw something pretty amazing, though not a miracle – they saw men of Israel who witnessed a miracle walk away in unbelief.

And John didn't forget. Years later he would write, **"¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent,^[e] nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."** (John 1:10-13)

We may have killed the song. We may have murdered the very author of life. We may have jumped ship and started writing our own script. But the story doesn't have to end there.

As unbelievable as it may sound; as incredible as it may seem, considering the crime involved - the murder of the author of life - we are still invited to repent and receive Him, to believe in His name, and to become a child of God.

Amazing!