

A Church Alive: Who Am I?

*So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently **at us**, as though **by our own power or godliness** we had made this man walk?” – Acts 3:12*

Defining “A Church Alive”

One of the challenges to living the life that God wants for us is our perception of what that life is supposed to be. What we do or do not do, where we spend our time, even the language we speak is often judged by others before they know anything about us. Furthermore, we will do the same – judge ourselves before a single word or action has been taken.

What does “A Church Alive” look like? What are the characteristics of living Christians? The reason this is important is because of the emphasis we place on anything and everything: How we witness, how and when we pray, what we call “showing love” and our expectation of the gifts of the Spirit – all of it can become skewed if we have a wrong view of ourselves and who we are to be in the kingdom of God.

A Funny Thing Happened To Me...

*Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid **daily** at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple. – Acts 3:1-2*

Peter and John were not on their way to do ministry. They were not “looking for someone to save”, or trying to make something happen that would validate everything they had given themselves to in the last 3+ years. No, Peter and John were on their way to the temple for prayer. They were going because it was a standard prayer time for them, much like us coming to church on a Sunday morning. The difference was that for Peter and John, in this instance God did not show up “during the prayer meeting”... God showed up before they even got there.

The man was a fixture at the temple. His entire life was spent begging, to the point that he even had people that would carry him to the temple so he could get what he needed for the day. Each day if he was lucky, people would be gracious enough to fulfill his need so he could come back the next day and do it all over again. To the untrained eye, the man’s need was apparent: he couldn’t work, so the only way he was going to survive was to beg for money. What we are going to find is that God doesn’t limit himself to what we perceive the need is – He operates in ways that challenge our thinking, keep us on our toes, and ensure that He will receive glory in

the situation. In doing so, God shows us “us” – who we are, what we have and how best to use that for his kingdom

Stepping Into His Need and God’s Reality

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. – Acts 3:3-5

Put yourself in the man’s situation: day after day you have to watch people doing what you would like to do, taking care of what they can and not having to rely on anyone, and you are at their mercy. Those that had gone to the temple for years would see the same man asking for money. This was not something the man could take pride in – it was done from necessity. Many people in this situation – standing on a street corner, in a bus stairwell, outside grocery store have to watch people take care of their business and turn and say “No, I can’t help you”, if they acknowledge them at all. It is frustrating, humiliating, and breaks a person’s spirit day after day. So when Peter spoke to the man, of course he would give him attention, because of all of the people passing him by, at least one person was willing to help him out. To the man, Peter and John represented provision: Money to buy a meal most likely or something to help him survive one more day. For the man, this was normal, day-to-day business. Had someone told him that morning he was going to have an encounter with the living God, he would have laughed it off.

Peter and John were part of the crowd headed for 9th hour prayer. They had passed this man time and time again, but this time it would be different. God wanted to bring his reality to the man, to Peter and John and to the community. There’s no telling when God first prompted Peter and John – it could have been right then when they saw the man (that is our usual interpretation), or it may have been the last time they went to the temple. In any case, the Holy Spirit started something in Peter – first a realization of who he was and who he was not, and what he possessed that would bless this man.

What I Am... What I Have

Peter makes an interesting statement that on the surface sounds poetic and humble, but upon further examination reveals just what God wants to do in the lives of all of His children:

*Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not **have**, but what I do **have** I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. – Acts 3:6-7*

When we look at this it sounds like Peter is walking into the temple broke, and the only thing he has to give is prayer for healing. What he is doing, rather, is adjusting the man’s expectation of what he should be receiving. When Peter says “Silver and gold I do not **have**, the word for **have** is more appropriately translated as “to be”, “to begin”, or “to exist”. Peter was responding to how the man was looking at him, and

saying “when you are looking at me, you are seeing money – silver and gold – to meet your needs, but that’s not who I am. It’s not what defines me. The Holy Spirit through Peter was changing the man’s expectation of what he would receive. In that moment, Peter did not view the possession of money as a benefit or hindrance to God doing what he wanted to do in the man’s life. Similarly, when it comes to the reality of God, we need to know what we’re really about – who we are and who we are not. When we come to terms with that, we can live in the freedom of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit and do not have to question our testimony or actions with others.

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon’s, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man to walk?” – Acts 3:11-12

What did Peter have that, on the one hand gave him the confidence to pull a lame man up knowing he would stand whole, and at the same point say he didn’t do anything? What gave him the ability to tell people that they shouldn’t marvel at an obvious miracle? Was he just being overly humble, or was there something larger that he was identifying with?

And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. – Acts 3:16

Peter’s life and focus was not on his ability to affect change in anyone’s life. It was not on his reputation or identity. His focus in that moment was on the person and authority of Jesus – on His name and the power that comes in the name of Jesus.

Our challenge, in our consumer driven world, is to not try to be what people think we should be, but to be what God wants us to be for them. We think “if I can do this for them, surely they will become Christian”, and yet for Peter, his first impression for the man was exactly opposite of what we would normally do (look at me... I have no money for you).