

Attention readers: I believe you'll find this material an interesting commentary on the differences between supernaturalism and a secular-religious approach to the study of miracles.

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

4 Topic: "Peter and John's witness" – with commentary.

Acts 3:1 – 10, "Peter heals the crippled beggar;" Acts 3: 11 – 26, "Peter speaks to the onlookers;" Acts 4: 1 – 22, "Peter and John before the Sanhedrin;" Acts 4: 23 – 31, "The Believer's Prayer."

The purpose of the Book of Acts is to record the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Vision and Ministry of Peter and Paul. Today's study is the 4th of 20 lessons.

A contextual statement:

Interestingly, *The Interpreter's Bible* makes the following observation. In the book of Acts, "The Lord is not returned, but in the meantime the word of God is being carried on by the church. The Gentile mission is itself the eschatological action of God." (*The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1971. p. 730.)

This I want to affirm as our perspective. **We will study this book from the perspective of the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit.** This puts us out on the cusp of a deep and foreboding spiritual hole that is eternally deep. The Holy Spirit is that intuited presence within us that urges us to "Jump." "Jump!" To take this leap of faith means to surrender ourselves to the eternal deeps. The discovery, to which I can personally testify, is that this deep, dark, mysterious hole is the place where God lives within us. As we lose control of everything— our-selves, our relationships to neighbor and to God— then we can discover that God really does sustain us. But the experience is like falling, and it is not entirely comfortable. But it works.

Now, to work.

Note: Today's study begins in section II.

Read the assigned scripture.

I. Acts 3:1 – 4: 31, The story of Peter and John Healing the Crippled Beggar.

As noted above, this scripture assignment is one story, and we'll treat it as such. One of the perplexing aspects of this assignment is the author's condemnation of the Jews. Although, Luke observes in 3:17 "I know that you acted in ignorance." However, one of Luke's consistent points is that God uses every occasion to illuminate God's will, the most important occasion being the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In order to decipher the work of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, Gut Trip Analysis is a valuable tool that always asks the question, "How does experience illuminate the topic?"

The suspension of disbelief is necessary--

Anytime we observe miraculous healings the initial danger is denial. Today's reader stands in as much awe as did those who are reported in the scripture. Somehow it is necessary for us *to suspend our disbelief and to push through to the significance of what we are reading. 1)*-- So, those of us who have trouble accepting healing miracles

we need to suspend our disbelief and accept that something unexplainable actually took place. **2)**-- Those of us who are troubled by metaphorical readings of such events, we need to suspend our disbelief and seek the deeper significance of what is taking place.

So, the first assignment is to adopt one of these two positions. **1)**-- Those accepting the first context tackle the **experience** of being healed. Put yourself into the shoes of the Crippled Beggar. **2)**-- Those accepting the second context tackle the **experience** to define the deeper significance of this healing. OK, go to it.

WS: Now, in light of our study in section II, how do you answer these two questions?

1) If we assume that miracles are literal, then how do we explain what took place in the healing of Crippled Beggar? *To answer this question, it is necessary to suspend our disbelief and admit there is no rational explanation. It just happened. In the language of literalism, God intervened in human history.*

The question then becomes, why doesn't a God of love relieve all human suffering?

2) *If we assume that the healing describes the experience of the nation of Israel who lived as a "crippled nation." In this way, the healing becomes metaphorical. From this point of view, the event is not supernatural but transformational. Also, in this way, the lesson can be applied to our own "crippled lives." This event mirrors for us the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and points us to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*

The question then becomes, what really happened to the Crippled Beggar? The secular-religious answer is to suspend disbelief and to observe that the unexplainable is just that, unexplainable. It is a part of The Way Life Is (TWLI).

Now, please go to Section III.

II. Beginning in 3: 19, Luke lays out a powerful progression concerning salvation. Using Gut Trip Analysis, ground each of the following terms in your own experience:

WS: The purpose of the following story is to illustrate the difference between a super natural approach to miracles and a secular-religious approach to miracles. The term "secular" is used here in a technical way meaning to "take seriously the current world view" in which we locate the search for both the truth and the good.

As a Chaplain at the Saline County Jail, I was called to interview a woman prisoner. Her complaint was a life-long, profound, sadness from which she sought escape in alcohol. She supported her habit by writing bad checks. I spoke to her of my own experience of a similar profound emptiness from which I received my call into the ministry at 14 years of age. My concern grew about a bottle of sleeping pills that a doctor once prescribed, but my concern was not suicide, *but in not living*, in the event the pills would be taken while still asleep under their influence! On one occasion, I stayed awake from three days and nights without sleep to keep control of myself. Upon discovering I could not go without sleep, I surrendered my life into

God's care so that sleeping, waking or serving is no longer my business but God's concern.

As the woman prisoner took this in she asked two questions: 1) did my surrender make me happy; 2) did my surrender make the emptiness go away? My answer was negative. However, I discovered my surrender made God happy, and the revelation that my emptiness is where God lives. So, when I learned to embrace my emptiness, it no longer was my enemy, but my friend, and this made God happy. Now, as long as I make God happy, I'm happy. Seeking to make only myself happy makes God unhappy, and in return I'm unhappy.

Now, during the IHOP Bible Study on Tuesday morning, this illustration was used to examine **Chapter 3: 11 – 21**. In particular, **vss. 19 to 21** were examined. The context is Peter healing the Crippled Beggar.

- a. **vs. 19a-- Repent:** means turning in the opposite direction. In the instance of the woman prisoner, she turned from being victimized by her unhappiness, to viewing her circumstances in a new way. Is this a miracle?
- b. **vs. 29a—Turn to God:** To turn to God means to turn toward hope and away from hopelessness. Did the woman prisoner turn toward hope? Is this a miracle?
- c. **vs. 19b— Sins wiped out:** Having one's sins wiped out means to be turned away from the antithesis of living At-One with neighbor, self and God (fulfilling the Gt. Commandment), and being left in At-One-Ment with neighbor, self and God. Were the "sins" of this woman prisoner "wiped out?"
- d. **vs. 19c— Times of refreshing may come:** The Crippled Beggar healed by Peter experienced a period of real refreshment in his life. This change was noted by all those who saw him. Did the woman prisoner experience a time of refreshment? About a week later, I requested an interview with her. At this time she could affirm that she still understood the dimensions of surrender and the idea of making God happy. You decide.
- e. **vs. 20— Send the Christ:** It is important to remember the Christ dynamic is operating here. The Christ represents the totally surrendered life! It is the life, death and resurrection of the Christ that becomes the example for our lives for our need to surrender. Did this woman prisoner receive The Christ? You decide.
- f. **vs. 21— Remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything:** To "remain in heaven" means that Christ lived in the presence of Perfect At-One-Ment until God sends the Christ to restore everything. From the point of view of literalism and supernaturalism, this means that Christ remains in a place called heaven until the Second Coming. This is Head Trip Analysis. From our perspective of Gut Trip Analysis, *whenever God restores something, the Second Coming takes place!* Did this woman prisoner experience the 2nd Coming of Christ?

Now, return to section I.

III. Read 4: 1 – 21, for the moment, take the sympathetic role of supporting the

priests, temple guards and the Saducees. Explain what is going on here. Reading in a commentary may help.

WS: There are two captivating moments in these 21 verses. **Vs. 12, and vss. 19 and 20.** In many ways, what goes before is only prelude to get these two verses before us. Read again **vs. 12:** "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Again, there are two points of view, one is exclusive, and the other is inclusive. To be generous, you must decide for yourself which speaks best to you. I'll let you know which speaks best to me.

The first captivating moment is the *exclusive position*. This statement is taken literally that there is only one name that will save us, and this is the name of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. Does this mean that all other religions do not offer salvation? Yes, when the exclusive position is taken, this becomes the missionary motivation to the spread of Christianity.

The second is the *inclusive position*. From this perspective, The Christ is a universal principle clearly to be discovered in the work and ministry of the man Jesus. But The Christ is a universal principle. Wherever a demonstration of the sacrificial spirit, a spirit that provides freedom, is experienced there the Christ dynamic is at work. In this way, The Christ is not limited in any way. This is not to say that Christianity is in any way inferior. Quite the contrary. For those of us with Western cultural values and a modern (secular) worldview, our understanding of Christianity offers us a mirror into which we can look to discover salvation. Salvation, from this perspective, is to be saved from meaninglessness, and to be saved to meaning-filled-ness; a meaningless life is a life that God does not intend for us to live. A meaning-filled life God does intend us to live. (This makes God happy, and when God is happy we are happy!)

As an addendum, I believe that the growth of Christianity in Africa and Asia proves the point that other cultural contexts and other world views also find meaning in Christian symbols. Their human experience of Gut Trip Analysis is no different from our own. However, the cultures and world views of the Middle East and that of India and China experience The Christ in symbols and language far different from our own. Although, it still is affirmed that their human experience is no different from our own. They use different language and symbols to point to the same reality.

The question is, what difference does it make as long as all people experience freedom, a transformed life, and a method to transform meaninglessness into meaningfulness. Yes, it can be said again, the World's Religions have much to teach us about Christianity when we really decide to listen.

I choose the *inclusive* point of view, because I am convinced that Perfect At-One-Ment is possible. I experience it all of the time. Exclusivity ends in separation (sin) and disharmony, while inclusiveness ends in togetherness and

harmony.

The second captivating moment comes to us in **vs. 19 and 20**. Peter and John defy the Sanhedrin by claiming they are unable to obey their edicts; because of what Peter and John have "seen and heard" can not be denied. What a great moment!

IV. Read 4: 23 – 31, "The Believer's Prayer."

a. Make use of a commentary to explain what is going on? Vs. 31— This is a surprise ending. What is going on?

WS: After reviewing my *Interpreter's Bible*, the following can be observed about this section of The Acts.

First, Luke likes to write in parallels, often doubling various parables in his gospel. One commentator surmised the possibility that here Luke has doubled the Pentecost experience. Observe in **vs. 31**: the shaking of the foundations can be compared to the wind and fire in chapter 2. In chapter 4, Luke reports the sporadic coming of the Holy Spirit, while in chapter 2 Luke reports that those present were "filled with the Holy Spirit." And, in chapter 2, Luke reports those present from all the known world "understood in their own language." In chapter 4, all those filled with the Holy Spirit "spoke the word of God."

One of my own interesting speculations is that chapter 2 represents the coming of the Holy Spirit to the gentile world; while in chapter 4 the Holy Spirit comes especially to the Jews.

Second, the *Interpreter's Bible* speaks of "The Believer's Prayer," (reported in vs. 23 to 31), as the "Theology of Witness." In particular, there is a strong Christological character in this passage. First, the style is very Lukan in that the writing is semitic in tone and poetic in nature. Compare this with the Gospel of Luke chapters 1 and 2. Second, God is the audience, and the context is history long and world-wide: creation is the context, and in the use of Psalm 2:12, Luke's faith-history points back to King David.

An interesting side light can be observed in **vs. 26** where the Psalmist (David) reports that "The kings of the earth take their stand," in which Luke associates the experience of the early church with King Herod, while "the rulers gather together," an obvious Lukan reference to Pilate.

Three, Luke's Christology is revealed in the following two verses: **Vs. 26b**, Luke again tells us about the "anointed" Jesus. Remember, that Jesus received this anointment by John the Baptist at Jesus' baptism. **Vs. 30b**, Luke refers to Jesus as "servant." Indeed, this is new material for Luke in which he has combined two Christological reference (anointed and servant) into one. Jesus comes to us as the anointed "Christ," and also as the "servant."

Fourth, it bears repeating that God always uses every occasion to fulfill God's will. In this instance, the occasion is a man crippled from birth. For me, this

demonstrates that there are no experiences (or occasions) that can not be useful to demonstrate the will of God.

Alright, folks. Talk to me!