

“Change”
Sunday March 22, 2009
By Pastor Edward J. Thomas Jr.

Pastor Thomas started the sermon with a story about a man who was trapped in a box. He wanted to get out, and started to pound on the edge until he broke through and was free. There was a slight problem though. The man found himself in another box. He decided again that he would have to get out of the box and repeated the process. Again, he found himself inside another box. Soon he realized that he would never be completely free. Instead he was forced to change his perspective.

The same is true of our spiritual lives. We are sometimes trapped by circumstances that are beyond our control. When stuck in a tough situation where we can't control the outcome, we can change our perspective.

Pastor Thomas challenged the congregation to ask ourselves “Have I changed enough? Am I enough like Christ?” Being a Christian means to be Christ-like, so if we have not changed enough to be like Christ in our day to day lives, we need to start making changes to get there. In Revelations we learn that God will not accept us if we are lukewarm about our life with him.

Revelations 3:14-16

- 14. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;
- 15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.
- 16. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

As the early church took root throughout the book of Acts, we see that even though the disciples were preaching the very same gospel they learned while walking with Jesus, they had to mature both in character and ministry. They had to change and start to grow up in the way they did things even though they were being true to their roots.

The story of the lame man at the gate of the temple in Acts 3 was the main text from this sermon.

Acts 3:1-10

- 1. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, [being] the ninth [hour].
- 2. 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 of them that entered into the temple;
- 3. Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.
- 4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
- 5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.
- 6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted [him] up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
8. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.
9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God:
10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

As we read this passage, it's striking to see the severity of the lame man's illness that had been with him his entire life. He may have felt like his healing would *never* come (much like many of us may feel like our healings and spiritual blessings might never arrive) But in the same handful of scriptures we see the immediacy of his healing. All the hurt and pain of his lifetime was gone in an instant, and God can change the path of our lives in an instant too if we will allow him to.

In Verse 4, Peter and John told the lame man to "Look on us". If they were not living a righteous life, they never would have been able to start the conversation there. Both Peter and John knew the transformation they went through when they started to follow Christ. No wonder they had no hesitation when they encountered a man who needed a miracle. God had done miracles for them, and through them!

Acts 2:43

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

Pastor Thomas pointed out that the only difference between a rut and a grave are the dimensions. Sometimes it is easy to overlook how dangerous being in a rut actually is. To be safe, we have to climb out and start to change. It is our only chance for survival. It won't be hard to notice the difference once change starts. True change will affect every aspect of our lives. We will think differently, worship and connect with God in different ways, and behave differently.

On one of his many mission trips to Haiti, Pastor Thomas encountered some ruts that were so deep they could actually trap an SUV and keep them from completing the journey. Even if they didn't look very bad, the ruts were lined with mud on the bottom that would suck a tire down to the point that it would be impossible to get the vehicle out. Just like ruts in the roads would trap vehicles in Haiti, ruts in our spiritual lives can keep us from reaching our goal. We know we want to go to Heaven, but we can't get there if we aren't moving forward every day.

Pastor Thomas pointed out that some of us see others around us being blessed, receiving strength from God, and being healed but never experience it for ourselves. He encouraged those of us who find ourselves there to ask God to start to change the way we see him and the way we see worship.

In Verse 6 above, we can see that the power for the miracle didn't come from Peter and John. It didn't even come from their faith. It came from the name of Jesus. The lame man already had everything he needed to walk. We don't read that he was deformed in any way or missing joints in his legs. No, he was just missing the strength that can only come from Jesus, and we have that same strength in our daily lives.

Once the beggar was healed, he was free to go into the temple that had always just been outside his reach. From verse 2 we know that he was at the gate of the temple every day, but he never could go in and worship with the rest of the people. The blessings that people would go in for were just a little too far away for him to get to, but once he accepted the strength from Jesus' Name and accepted the change he needed, he was free to be blessed. Once we accept change in our lives, we will be free to be blessed too.