

Break the Huddle – Part 2
September 20, 2009

Go on the Offensive for Amazing Worship

Acts 3:1-10

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

In Jesus' name, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Why are you here in worship? Perhaps your own body has asked you that a few times when you really felt like sleeping in. Why do I really need to be here in worship? Perhaps your children have asked you that. Why do they need to be here in worship? What is going to be different than last week? "Don't worry mom and dad. I believe. I just don't want to be in worship. It is boring. It is always the same."

When we are confronted by those kinds of questions, both from our own hearts and from family members and friends, it is a good time to think through in our own minds, "Why am I here? What do I expect to happen here that makes this time worth the effort?"

In our lesson for today we see Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest friends coming to worship. Might they be able to help us appreciate our worship? Let's walk up with them into the temple and see how to have amazing worship.

Amazing Worship Remembers the Past

We don't know exactly when our lesson occurred. It must not have been too long after the events of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples. The day of worship begins simply enough:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to be from those going into the temple courts.

As they came into the temple, they saw the bronze altar for burnt offerings. At the time of prayer, they would have heard the priests going into the temple to light the seven-branched candelabra. The priests themselves were gowned and going into the temple with incense to burn on the altar of incense at the time of evening prayer. And looking deep into the holy place they would see that the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple.

All this was as God had told Moses on Mt. Sinai. After the Lord had shown himself to be the Savior of his people by bringing them out of Egypt, he showed them at Mt. Sinai how he wanted them to worship him.

If we have eyes to see it, we can still see these amazing reminders of the past in our worship setting.

Our altar reminds us of sacrifice. The lambs and goats sacrificed on that bronze altar that Peter and John saw were only a shadow of the greater sacrifice of the Son of God himself. The cross above the altar reminds us of that greatest sacrifice.

The seven-branched lampstands remind us of the lampstands in the temple, giving light to the world. In Revelation 4, the Holy Spirit is pictured as a lampstand and there he is called the Seven Spirits of God – the Spirit of God who came down in tongues of fire on Pentecost.

Even the gowns that our pastors wear and the directions that they face in worship remind us of the past. The priests of the Old Testament had their special garments (See Exodus 28). Just as the priests of the Old Testament served as intercessors or intermediaries between the holy God and his people, so pastors do today. When they turn toward the altar, we together with the pastor are offering our prayers and praises to God. When the pastor turns toward us, the people, the Lord is speaking to us through the pastor.

There is one other thing that is most amazing about our worship. There is no veil that separates the people from their God. The way to God is open. You and I can have direct access to the Creator of heaven and earth.

Peter and John saw all this in the temple. But they also saw more. They came up to the temple to worship because they also remembered that Jesus was the fulfillment of what they saw in the temple.

Our own sanctuary is meant to preach this same message to us every time we enter, if only we are willing to hear. The windows walk us through the Church Year – that Jesus, the King, the God and Man, came down to earth to be the perfect sacrifice. Notice in every window, even in the Advent and Christmas windows, the prominence of the cross.

The back window on the west side of the church is the Lent/Good Friday window. It reminds us that this perfect Lamb of God was sacrificed for us. The windows on the east side of the church remind us of Christ's exaltation, that the risen Savior ascended to God's right hand and poured out his Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Finally the green paraments remind us that this long season after Pentecost is our time to respond to God's grace, to be a fruitful green tree as on the cover of our Spiritual Growth Catalogue for this year.

There is so much to remember as we walk into this place of worship. But sometimes worship isn't very amazing to us. We take all this for granted. We go through the motions of singing

praises to the God of grace. We put a pittance into the offering, or we think that by giving a large amount we are bartering with God for a better deal.

You see, God's acts in worship are always amazing. The things of the past we are to remember are always amazing. What is not always amazing is our response. We yawn and grow complacent. We take this goodness for granted. That's the danger in worship. That danger was present in the temple service and it is to this day. God announces this judgment on worship that no longer amazes us, "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! I cannot bear your evil assemblies."

Amazing Worship Celebrates the Present and the Personal

This is where worship gets truly amazing. Peter and John see this beggar at the Beautiful Gate. Something impossible happens. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" A man born lame from birth springs up immediately and starts jumping and walking about it. Luke mentions those words twice. He went walking and jumping with them into the temple. The impossible happened to this man. Something present and personal.

Brothers and sisters, if your worship is a yawner and boring, it is because you are missing this part of worship – you are missing the fact that our God has gotten present and personal with you. What our God has done is not just something in the past for people long ago. He did the impossible to you and to me. The unchanging God just spoke a word of condemnation on those who don't believe. Yet he forgives. It is there in Isaiah chapter 1 as well. "Stop bringing your meaningless offerings." Stop bringing to me worship that is boring to you – because it is boring to God as well.

But in that same chapter God then announces, "Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

The impossible has happened to each of us. The Lord who condemns the lackluster worship of our hearts reaches out and touches us with this good news. Your sins are forgiven! This gift of forgiveness, of life forevermore with your God, is a present possession. The lame man leaping like a deer in our text is just a foretaste of each of us leaping and rejoicing before God's presence forever! This part of worship happens in the present and is very personal!

So why do we come here? Because there are lots of people just like us who have a hard time believing that this is really true. That's why our Old Testament lesson encourages us, "Strength the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way" (Isaiah 34:4).

Amazing Worship Impacts the World

How did the crowds react that day in the temple? "They were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him." The people were amazed at the change that they saw in this lame man.

My question for each of us is, "Are people around us amazed at the change in each of us?"

You see, worship isn't just what happens here. We come here for worship because it reminds us of God's great saving acts in the past. It reminds us of God's amazing grace to us in the present. But the rest of worship is what goes on outside of the worship service.

Do people see us jumping and praising God? I'm not saying that we need to be skipping like this lame man, but the grace of God does change us.

According to Romans 12:1,2, my worship will be a change in my mind and in my actions. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will."

According to 1 Corinthians 10:31, my worship will include everything I do. "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Even the time we spend on-line – is it obvious to those who visit our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter that we are living our lives as worship to our Savior?

According to 1 Peter 3:15, my worship, the hope that I show in my daily life, will provoke questions. "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

It is easy to complain about worship – it is boring – it doesn't move me – I don't like it. Certainly we who are planning worship will want to do everything that we can to make our presentations the best they can be. But what really makes worship amazing is always there – that we remember the great saving acts of God in the past, that we are reminded of God's personal, present saving acts. If worship is boring, look closely in the mirror. Are you unlike that lame man? Do you now need an impossible change? If not, worship will always be boring. But if you are crippled and unfit for God's kingdom, and you see Jesus steps in and forgives you, the hour in worship won't be enough. Worship will become your life – your entire body, everything that you do – so that others ask you what makes you different. Then it will be your pleasure to explain what is so amazing about Christian worship. Amen.

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