

What Is Our Greatest Need?

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to take for our text today the words that we have in verse 6. Acts 3 verse 6. You can read from the beginning. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour, and a man lame from birth was being carried whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the beautiful gate to ask Ames of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple he asked to receive Ames and Peter directed his gaze at him as did John and said look at us and he fixed his attention on them expecting to receive something from them especially these words and Peter said I have no silver and gold but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. Well friends here we are on the first Lord's Day of not only another year on life's journey but another decade on life's journey as we find ourselves at the dawn of 2020 and as we do so as we sit here on this Lord's Day morning in this church we might ask ourselves a question what today in our own minds is our greatest need as we look forward to the coming months that lie ahead as we make plans for our lives in 2020 as we ask ourselves that question what is my greatest need what is it I am striving towards what is it I hope to achieve I wonder dear friend how would you answer perhaps you'd say well I I hope to get promoted this year this is the year that in my work I hope to be promoted to a higher position a position of authority a position where perhaps

I'll get a better wage a position that will lead me to be able to provide for myself and my family in a better in a better way or perhaps this is the year that you're hoping to move house you're hoping to move to a house that in your own mind will will make your life somehow better that in your own mind will make your life somehow a lot more comfortable than the life you are leading now in fact as we all have goals we all have targets that we are working towards and and as we reflect upon these targets we might say to ourselves well surely these are very shallow surely when you've just mentioned these are good and proper things in their own place but nonetheless they are things that are are superficial yes we're looking towards these things but they're not the things that are are taking hold if you like of our minds friends I think we need to be honest we need to be honest with the fact Christians and non-Christians that they're all too often at hearts our minds of whole lives can can indeed be governed by that which is superficial we can be so taken up with that which is shallow we we can lose sight of the bigger picture that that we give all our energy that to things that are fine in their own place but nonetheless things that have absolutely no bearing on the very reality of why we are here so friends if that is you today what I'd like us to do together is to go through this passage and and hopefully show you that you have got it so so wrong that as you begin another year in your life that if your priorities are set upon only these things you your priorities are so far from what they need to be see what we see here in Acts chapter 3 is someone who has a need we meet someone who has a specific need and not only do we meet someone here today who has a specific need but we meet someone who thinks that he knows what he needs in order to meet that specific need we're going to look at verses 1 to 10 together and we're going to consider this man and his perceived need under three headings firstly we're going to set the scene we're going to think about the background of exactly what is happening here and then secondly we're going to look at this this wonderful miracle or sign that is here performed and then lastly we'll we'll look at the the sermon that this man then goes on to preach by way of his actions the scene the sign and the sermon firstly then let's look at the scene that is is set here in in Acts chapter 3 we see that often in the gospels as well as here in Acts we we see that Peter and John they're often quite closely associated you often find them together one with another their disciples together that is true but more than that Peter and John they they work together they had a business together a fishing business together we read of that in Luke chapter 5 elsewhere in Luke we read that that Jesus had entrusted these two men with the preparation

of the Passover meal they were together in that as well as this they alone of the 12 disciples they followed Jesus to the high priest's house following the arrest of Christ Peter and John they were the first disciples were they not to visit the tomb after the resurrection and while here in these early chapters of Acts we often see these two men traveling and ministering the word of God together they they were truly brothers in the Lord they were those who loved one another in the Lord they were close they were close to get to each other but they were also close to their Savior and we see this do we not in the chapter that we have before us here they are Peter and John going together at that hour of prayer the the ninth hour to the temple they're going to worship according to the Jewish clock which started counting the hours of the day from sunrise at 6am this would have been around three in the afternoon Sam 55 verse 17 mentions these three hours of prayer these three points in the day when folk would would come together to worship God just as we are here today although under the the old covenant does it where these would have been in the morning at 9am which was the first hour and then the third which was rather the third hour then at noon midday which was the sixth hour and then the afternoon which was the ninth hour now the ninth hour was interesting because it was also the time of the evening sacrifice this was the busiest time of the day if you like this is the time when the crowds would would gather together in order to to offer that evening sacrifice so it's at this point that Peter and John they're on their way they're on their way to the temple to and as they're on their way to the temple they meet with this man let's look at verse one together now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the the hour of prayer the ninth hour and a man lame from birth was being carried whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called the beautiful gate to ask arms of those entering the temple seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple he asked to receive arms here we have a man who is crippled here we have a man who who cannot walk here we have a man who is unable in many ways to contribute to society and and because of this in this culture in the culture of the day men such as this those who were crippled they would have been thought upon as outcasts in society they would have been cast aside they would have been those who were shunned those who who folk took absolutely no notice of and so here we have a man who has an obvious need he needed to earn a living he needed to live he needed to find food to eat and and so in order to be able to do this he resorted to begging that's why we find him here at the gate that's why we find him here at this gate of the temple which is called beautiful why was it called beautiful well this was a huge ornate structure it was a gate that was built out of Corinthian brass a gate that was so large and so heavy that that apparently it took about 20 men to close this gate and here we have this beggar this poor man sitting at this gate waiting to get some money now at this time in Palestine they were three different locations that beggars favored for for begging firstly they were there was the houses of the rich they would sit outside the houses of the rich and they would hope that as the rich people left and came home that they would feel sorry for them and that they would indeed give them some money it was also the highways the main highways those those roads that would have had would have had so many people passing to and throw them they would sit there the beggars hoping that folk would indeed give and then here the temple which was the most favored site this was the best site for begging and of course there was a reason for this there were huge crowds to be found at the temple every single day but in amongst these huge crowds there were a certain type of portion you see here we had all these these pious people making their way to worship god and what they sought to do was to carry favor with god they sought to impress god they wanted to get right with god if you like in and through their own actions and so one way of impressing god was for them to give alms to the poor for them to give money to the poor and of course the beggars knew this they knew that these men and would be making their way to to that place of worship they knew that their conscience would be pricked as they saw these these poor beggars at the side of the road and they knew that they would be forced to give and so that's why this was the favored place to beg so here we have a man who's doing just that a man who thinks he knows what he needs a man who thinks that his greatest need in life at that very point would be to get money from those passing by in order for him to survive this is a picture of you here today of course instinctively you will say no you will say well i'm not a cripple i'm not a beggar and so no this is not a picture of me i cannot see myself in this man but yet friends it's not like so much of what we have in scripture we we see this as a mirror and as we look in this mirror of this the experience of this man we see ourselves we see that reflection of ourselves as those who are crippled by sin those who have that that disability that that means that we are unable to make any real progress in this world as i spoke to the children because we are we have got such a tight grip of

sin it's leading us it's directing us it's it's controlling us it's it's impacting all of our lives and because of this it has made us outcasts not from society but from god our sin has led us to be just like this man beggars outside the perimeter of the kingdom of god i wonder is this a picture of you today that you're a beggar outside the perimeter

of the kingdom of god you do not know what it is to identify as a child of god and so there you are daily reaching out your empty hand to an empty world desperate for that hand and heart to be filled and yet day after day year after year decade after decade you're still empty is that you do nothing in this world can give us what we need that is a spiritual picture that we have here and because of this we are just like beggars and we are forced to return year after year to that the gate of the the palace beautiful if you like and and we are there begging year after year we think we get what we need in order to give us a measure of satisfaction but as soon as that wears off we go back for more and more and more and more i wonder am i speaking to you today is it so that just like the beggar you don't really know what your greatest need in life is he didn't know which brings us to our second point the the wonder sign that is performed he thought what he needed was money and of course in a in a in a way he did need money he needed money to survive without money he wouldn't be able to eat yet is it not so that this man had a far greater need this man had a root problem that if it were to be dealt with this problem if it were dealt with would help him far more than any money could help him with we have a root problem today and you know friends i fear that as we go into a new year we are so blindly unaware of that problem what is it that's filling your mind this morning what is it that you're pondering on what is it you're thinking about as being so important to who you are and and your position in this world what is it is that your greatest need is that what is going to stand the test of not only time but the endless ages of eternity really is it it our greatest problem is that if we are living a life without christ you're living a life without hope and this problem is only heightened if we have absolutely no intention of doing anything about it yes you're in church this morning and that is good but it's all that you have a consciousness and real knowledge of that need you come to church as i said in prayer perhaps you come out of tradition perhaps you come out of formality perhaps you come to take that box because you know it's expected of you you know that your your parents perhaps who are no longer with us here uh commended church to you and so you do this out of respect and that is good you keep on coming but do you know what your greatest need today is are you sitting here aware of the fact that that what i need is to be found here before me in the word of god or is it so that your consciousness of the sinfulness of your own heart is so totally

[18:37] obscured by your obsession with the things that have absolutely no bearing on eternity you know what i'm talking about you know these many times that we are so obsessed with the here and now i don't know what your particular obsession in life is perhaps it's football perhaps it's sheep perhaps it's it's many other things that are legitimate and good in and of themselves yet those things that are sitting on the throne of your heart those things that motivate you to live your life those things that give you meaning and purpose in this life well they don't they are nothing absolutely nothing friends it's time that you woke up and saw your greatest need it was the 19th century preacher jonathan edwards who said when i look into my own heart and see my own wickedness it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell itself jonathan edwards he could see the root of his problem he wasn't afraid to put his hands up and to humbly say i am a sinner i have that that sin deep within the very fiber of my being friends can you say that today do you call yourself a sinner today or is it so that you self-righteously say well i'm not that bad and i'm certainly not as bad as that person who who professes to be a christian no way am i like them look at what's in their lives look at what they've done can't you see how self-righteous such a thought is looking to other men is never a woman and their downfalls is never going to draw you to christ that's never going to help you to see your own particular need you see the first step in getting help is it not always that we need to first admit we have a problem it's the same with any addiction in life we we need to admit that we have a problem calling out what is wrong with us for what it is not trying to to dress it up with various defense mechanisms not trying to to to blame other people and other circumstances for how we are or to point the finger at other people but never ever at ourselves this is an acknowledgement friend that you're prepared to make that you're a sinner that you need help or is it so that your heart is too proud to to stubborn to even begin to entertain such a thought friends this is solemn stuff this is real this is life this is death here we have this man jonathan edwards he acknowledged what he was but if we don't acknowledge we are on that road to a lost eternity friends were not left there because we come around the gospel of hope a gospel that is not asking us to dwell on the wickedness of our own hearts that's not healthy it's never good when we see

those even who profess to be christ's who all they do is look at themselves whose whole christian walk is one that is characterized by by saying woe is me look how

terrible i am as a christian yes we know we are sinners yes we know that we are not right with god by nature but yet we don't dwell on this why because in knowing the root of the problem we go to that place even today where we get deliverance to that great physician the lord Jesus christ that's what faith is coming to an end of ourselves coming to an end of our own resousious our own wisdom our own abilities as thomas manton who said that faith is the open hand of the soul to receive all the bounteous supplies of god that's what faith is coming openly humbly honestly and receiving isn't that wonderful that even today we are what is an offer to us our spiritual blessings that begin in this world that could be yours in 2020 spiritual blessings that cannot be put into words but spiritual blessings that will last not only for time time is only a speck your life is only a speck but for the endless ages of eternity forever and ever and ever don't you want this don't you long for this how does this measure up to that which motivates you and characterizes you for who you are here we have a man who doesn't deal with his main problem instead he tries to paint over the cracks and so yes he sits at the gate strategically placed he he asks arms and as he asks these two men peter and john they they pass by and he knows that he sees these two men who are on their way to worship he knows that surely they will provide for his need and we read in verse four and peter directed his gaze at him as did john and said look at us look at us in response to this beggar's cry for arms peter and john looked at him and as they asked this beggar to look at him they're doing something quite extraordinary they would never ever ever even think about looking at people in the eye they would always have their heads down they would always have their heads down almost humiliated by what they were doing but here these two men are asking him to look at them look at us look at us in the eye and as these men ask this beggar to look at them you can just imagine the hope that he has as as he thinks that that they're about to give him the money that he so desperately thinks that he needs but friends what happens next for this man left him getting far more than he bargained for what do we read in verse five and he fixed his attention on them expecting to receive something from them and peter said i have no silver and gold but what i have i give to you they had something on offer that day that was far greater than any silver or any gold in the name of jesus christ of nazareth they say rise up and walk and he took him by the right hand and raised him up and immediately his feet and his ankles were made strong rise up and walk supposing these men had given this beggar all the money in the world he would still be lame his greatest need physically speaking would still be there peter wasn't going to give this this man a few pennies so that his his problem might be eased for a moment or two no the the root of his problem was that he couldn't walk and so that his greatest physical need was for him once again to take to his feet and take to his feet he did this wasn't peter's doing this was done in the name of jesus christ of nazareth to do something in the in the name of jesus christ is to to act consistently with his will and friends today it is only in the name of jesus christ of nazareth that you will ever ever be saved it is only in the name of jesus that your greatest need will ever be met i cannot save you your loved ones cannot save you those who pray for you night and day they cannot save you they cannot give you that spiritual life that you desperately need but he can jesus of nazareth can and he is passing by today in the gospel yet again won't you ask him for this life won't you come and plead with him to give you that life to make a lay man or woman to be able to walk won't you cry out to him for mercy won't you cry out to him for that one thing needful you know as you sit here today he's longing for you to do so he's more than willing to give you what you need to be free not only in this world but the world to come to be free from from depending on others for the fulfillment of the deepest longings of your soul to be free from depending on on different things in this world whether it be alcohol or or whatever it is in this world in order to give you what you think that you need well friend if you're doing that today if you're depending on anything other than christ you are in bondage you are enslaved you're trapped you're being held hostage by the evil can you see it perhaps you are even enslaved not to alcohol or to any great outward sin in your own mind but to your own self-righteousness but your heart simply will not be humbled don't you long to be free come to him come to him dear friend come to him and you will know that joy unspeakable and full of glory this man this lame man knew something of this which brings us on to our last point the sermon which is preached from his actions let's look at verse eight and leaping up he stood and began to walk and enter the temple with them walking and leaping and praising god you can just imagine the the sedate stately ritual of the evening sacrifice you you can just imagine it being suddenly shattered by

by one who is leaping and praising god by one who has a story to tell by one whose actions are showing that his life

has been changed beyond all recognition yes this man can now walk but surely there's more to this surely there's more to this man than physical healing the very fact that in response to his mobility what is he doing he is praising god and because he is praising god i think it's fair to say that he too was healed spiritually i wonder if you've ever made a deal with god that if he would perhaps deliver you out of a certain situation in your life that you will do x y and z for him something difficult has come into your family something difficult has come into your experience and so you come you're not a christian and you come and you pray to god and you say please help me lord if you help me lord i promise i will go to church more i will read my bible more i will strive to be a child of god and yet as soon as the lord perhaps graciously and lovingly answers your prayer what do you do you carry on that's normal you turn your back on him yes he's answered your prayer he's giving you what you need but you haven't given him anything in response is that you do you know what i'm talking we all know what i'm talking about we've all been here at some point in our lives but not so with this man what does he do he goes and he praises god he praises god and he gives thanks to god what do we read in luke chapter six for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks when god works in our life in a saving way we cannot but speak we must we we simply must share the good news because we want everyone else to have what we have that's why you see new christians often so so eager to share their faith because they have something that has transformed their lives something that they want you to have out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and all the people saw him walking and praising god and recognized him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple asking for alms and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him not only was this man's physical restoration a miracle a sign of god's power but his actions and praising god was a was a sermon to all those around him we read that that they were filled with wonder and amazement with what they saw and you know this is a challenge to us as the lord's people as we go into another year nice journey familiarity can breed content we can become so familiar with our faith we can become so familiar with church coming on a wednesday coming on a sunday and that's all we really are as christians that's the only sermon if you like our lives preach which is in many ways no sermon at all because anyone can come to church on a wednesday or a sunday and so let's challenge ourselves me with you what kind of sermon does our life preach as we reflect upon who we are as the lord's people what sermon are we giving forth each and every day when we do our dealings with those who we come in contact with is it so that people see us as nothing more than than religious fanatics who are obsessed with dotting our eyes and crossing our teeth but at the same time there is no love flowing from us to those around us we're so critical we're so judgmental we're so full of a bitter spirit and we don't treat people the way that jesus treated them you know friends the only people that jesus was critical of were the Pharisees the religious people of the day the people who looked and did certain things but did not know christ that is a challenge for us today so let us strive with the help of the lord as the bride of christ to to have the spirit of this man as those who who by the loving kindness of god are now spiritually speaking no longer cripples those who give praise and thanks to the lord for what he is every day those who show the joy of the lord as their strength is that what we're showing are we showing for something that is worth having let's never lose sight of this let's never lose sight of what christ has done for us let's not make church about buildings and routines and rituals but let's make church about christ let's come back to him day after day after day let's remind ourselves of the wonder of the one who died and gave himself for us the one who died so that we might live because if we lose sight of this the fact is our heart will get cold and the things of the lord will grow strangely dim so friends where are we sitting today with this i'm nearly finished i've gone over my time i apologize but where are we sitting today are we outside the gate are we outside the kingdom of god are we within where are we today is it so that perhaps you think that the gospel is out with the reach of your grasp as you sit at that gate and as you sit at that gate perhaps today you're thinking that you will never ever find yourself on the other side of that gate case you watch others entering through it with that spirit of worship and praise but you are left where you are friends i come as one beggar to another and i cannot give you silver or gold today but i can give you the truths the promises of jesus christ the promises that never fade the promises unlike the promises of this world that will be fulfilled i began by asking you that question what your greatest need is and of course it is christ he's not offering you today fulfillment in terms of worldly things but what he is offering you is something that will last for all eternity something that is

better by far he is offering to you the fullness of his grace that is to be found in him but do you want it do you want it it is only you that can answer that question today do you honestly really truly want it because if you want it you will do all in your power to look for it but you will not give up until you know christ as your savior is that true of you as you call

[39 : 06] yourself a seeker today are you really a seeker let this be the year that not only you seek with every fiber of your being but that you find he's passing by won't you look to him look on to me he says all he ends of the earth and be saved for i am god and there is none other so as you sit at that gate on the outskirts of the kingdom i beg with you today that not only would you look to him but that you would cry out for healing so that you too can find your feet and to be wonderful if you would truly find your feet in life instead of staggering through life from day to day lurching from one experience to the next wouldn't it be wonderful if you would find your feet so that you could enter that gate that narrow gate that leads to salvation let us pray

Lord our god our heavenly father why we long for our dear unconverted friends to know something of that one thing needful that we would come to you that we would cry out to you lord have mercy upon me a sinner that we would descend the lofty mountains of our own self righteousness these mountains that are leading us to believe that we can do life without christ these mountains that are leading us to think that we are the captains of our own destiny and yet how true that is without christ we are captains of our own destiny we are leading ourselves to that lost eternity to hell itself help us o lord by your grace to once again think upon the reality of these things even as your people even as your bride to realign ourselves with the solemnity of the lostness of the lost and in doing so that we would seek to go out and bring that good news of the gospel to those who are dying go with us then we pray bless your word this day apply it to our hearts and forgive us for jesus sake