**Life Begins at Forty!**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man and his wife hadn’t been getting along for many years, so for her 40th birthday he decided to buy her *a cemetery plot.* As you can imagine, she was less than thrilled with this gift. So for her 41st birthday the following year, he decided to give her *nothing at all.* When she asked him, “How come you didn’t give me anything for my birthday?” he replied, “You didn’t use the gift I gave you last year!”

Well as you know if you’ve been following along with this study of Acts, Peter and John have just given a gift to a lame man—the gift of *healing.* And as we closed our message last week, we learned that the man was also 40:

**“For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed” (Acts 4:22).**

Now as you may know, numbers in Scripture often have *spiritual* significance. The number 40 is the number of *testing.* When Moses went up into the mountain to receive the law from God, we read,

**“Moses was in the mount *forty days and forty nights”* (Exodus 24:18).**

During that time, God was *testing* the people of Israel to see how they’d do without their leader. And as you remember, they *failed* that test miserably. By the time he got back down from the mountain, they were dancing like heathen around a golden calf that they had made to worship.

Then God tested them *again* when Moses sent spies into the Promised Land to spy out the land for 40 days, and they returned saying that the nation of Israel wasn’t powerful enough to conquer the giants that Satan had filled the land with, even with God on their side. And after they failed that test too, God said,

**“…your children shall wander in the wilderness *forty years…*After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, *even forty days*, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even forty years…”* (Numbers 14:33,34).**

Now the ironic thing about that is that if they hadn’t failed that 40 day test, that 40 year journey would only have taken *11 days,* as we learn in Deuteronomy 1:2:

**“There are *eleven days' journey* from Horeb…unto Kadeshbarnea”**

So when God takes *a whole verse* here in Acts 4:22 to tell us that the lame man was 40 years old, that’s His way of telling us that Israel was being tested *again.*

Now they’d just failed one of God’s earlier tests when they rejected God the Son and crucified Him. Now they were were being tested to see if they’d reject God the Holy Spirit. Remember, “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4). And if the people of Israel rejected the preaching of those Spirit-filled apostles, they would fail yet *another* of God’s tests—a test they wouldn’t even have had to take if they had just received the Lord!

And that’s something we see symbolized when we compare this lame man that the apostles healed here in early Acts with an impotent man the Lord healed in the early stage of His ministry.

Do you remember what we read about this lame man in Acts 3:2?

**“…a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple…to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.”**

This man’s inability to walk rendered him unable to work in those days, so they laid him by the gate of the temple every day to beg from people going into the temple to worship. So there he lay, just outside the temple, but without the strength he needed to go *into* the temple.

When we studied that passage, we saw that he was a type of the spiritual state of the nation Israel. Once they rejected the Lord, the nation was laying right outside *the kingdom of heaven* that the temple symbolized, but she didn’t have the strength to *enter* the kingdom. But when Peter and John *healed* the lame man, he walked with them into the temple—just like the Jews could have walked into the kingdom with the apostles if they could just pass this latest test and *not* reject the Spirit.

But the only reason God was testing them with the Spirit here in Acts is that they *failed* to pass the test He gave them just three years earlier when the Lord showed up. If they had just accepted Him right off, God wouldn’t have had to test them *again.* And we see this illustrated when we compare the lame man the apostles healed with one the Lord healed three years earlier:

**“…there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

**“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool…called…Bethesda, having five porches.**

**“In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt...waiting for the moving of the water**

**“For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.**

**“And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity *thirty and eight years.***

**“When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?**

**“The impotent man answered…I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool...**

**“Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:1-8).**

Now this man was *also* a type of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. He lay right outside the pool of healing, which was a symbol of the kingdom where men like him will *get* healing (Isa. 35:6). But he didn’t have the strength to enter the pool, just like the nation of Israel didn’t have the spiritual strength to enter the kingdom in the Lord’s day either.

And how long had *he* been lame? And how much less is 38 years than the lame man healed by the apostles, the one who was lame from his mother’s womb? Before you answer, did you notice that Acts 4:22 doesn’t say the man was 40? It says what we all like to say when asked our age, that he was “above forty.” Now it uses the word “forty” so we know that the Jews were being tested again. But the reason it says that he was *above* 40 is probably that the man was *41.*

And when you compare these two healings, you learn that this test in Acts was only being given because they failed the test that God had given them *3 years earlier* when the Lord began His ministry among them.

If you’re thinking that I am reading too much into this comparison, did you notice that the Lord *didn’t* heal all of the *rest* of those impotent folk that day? Did you notice how He seemed to single out that one man who had been impotent for 38 years? Notice the emphasis I’ll add as we read those verses again:

**“And a *certain* man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.**

**“When Jesus saw *him* lie, and knew that *he* had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto *him*, Wilt *thou* be made whole?” (John 5:5,6).**

Now why would the Lord heal that one man and ignore all the rest of those folks? Back when I was a Calvinist, I used this passage as an illustration of how God chooses who will be saved and ignores others. But the Lord didn’t choose that man at random. He picked him to illustrate how the nation of Israel could have been offered their kingdom *3 years earlier* than the apostles offered it in Acts 3:19.

And speaking of why God picks the people He picks, look what the Bible says about Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness:

**“…He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, *until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed”* (Numbers 32:13).**

God picked that new generation to go into the Promised Land because that *old* generation had refused to believe God when His prophets Joshua and Caleb said He’d help them conquer the giants. But does that remind you of what Peter said to his countrymen in Acts 2:40, where he declared, “Save yourselves *from this untoward generation.”* The believers here in Acts needed to be saved out of that generation of unbelievers, just like we see pictured back in Moses’ day.

I say all that to ask you a question. Is that an Amazing Book you’re holding, or what? Is that a Book you can trust with your eternal destiny? Is that a Book you can trust to lead you in *every detail of your life?*

Now here I should make one thing clear. God is not testing you like He did the people of Israel. And that means He’s not punishing you like He did when Israel failed that 40 day test. But there’s something you need to remember about this. And that is, if you don’t learn the Word of God, and learn to obey it, you’re going to find life *a whole lot harder* than it has to be, just as the people of Israel found that 11 day journey a whole lot harder than it had to be.

Now in our last study, we saw that Israel’s leaders didn’t like it when the apostles healed the lame man in the name of the Lord Jesus, so they told them to knock it off. And they *threatened* them about what would happen if they *didn’t* knock it off. But once Peter and John told them that they had no intention of stopping, the leaders didn’t really know what to do with them, for they feared what the people might do if they harmed them, as we saw. So they just let them go.

And that’s where we pick up the story as we read on in our text:

**“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (Acts 4:23).**

Once they were released from custody, the apostles returned t the fellowship of the rest of the believers, and told them how their leaders had threatened them. So now let’s see how the rest of God’s people took the news, as we read on:

**“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (Acts 4:24).**

Now notice that it doesn’t say they lifted up their *voice* (singular). When it rather says they lifted up their *voices,* this might be because they were all filled with the same Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4). And that might mean that they all prayed *using the same exact words.* Now that would have been something to hear, since this prayer goes on for seven verses!

But notice that instead of moaning, “What are we going to do now that our leaders are threatening us?” they did what God’s people should *always* do when they find themselves in a difficult situation—they *prayed!*

But what would most Christians pray if they found themselves in a dangerous situation like that? “Lord, *protect us!* Save us from our enemies!” But as we are going to see, that is *not* how these disciples prayed. And we’ll also see *why* they didn’t pray like that. But for now, notice how they *start* their prayer.

They start their prayer by addressing God as the God who made heaven and earth. That was their way of letting God know that *they* knew He was all-powerful, and He *could* save them if He wanted to.

And I think this shows they knew their Bibles. I think it shows they knew about the time in the Old Testament when the king of Assyria was going around conquering one nation after another. And when he got to Israel, his general sat outside Jerusalem *taunting* the king of Israel, saying things like: “You know, none of the gods of the other nations have been able to save them from me. What makes you think that the God of Israel can save you?” When King Hezekiah heard that, look how he responded:

**“Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel…Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; *Thou hast made heaven and earth”* (II Kings 19:15).**

Hezekiah showed God that *he too* knew God is all-powerful, and could save him from the king of Syria if He wanted to.

And that’s what the apostles are doing here, telling God they know that the God who made heaven and earth would have no trouble stopping those religious leaders from harming them.

So now we have to ask why they didn’t ask God to protect them, as Hezekiah did? And the answer is, it was because they knew *right where they stood* in the program of God! They knew that the God who made heaven and earth had *also* made some predictions about the time that they were living in, predictions they quote as we read on:

**“Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?**

**“The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ” (Acts 3:25,26).**

Here the apostles quote verses from Psalm 2 that show that they knew they were living in the time when the leaders in Israel would get together with the kings in Rome to kill the Lord Jesus. When verse 25 talks about “the people,” that phrase almost always refers to the people *of Israel* in Scripture. I mean, the Gentiles were people too, but the Bible calls *them* “heathen,” as you can see.

And being a prophet, David knew that someday they’d all get together, Jews and Gentiles, rulers and kings and people, to kill the Lord Jesus. And as we read on in our text, we see the apostles identify the times they were living in as the time spoken of by David in Psalm 2:

**“For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (Acts 4:2).**

Now here you might be wondering why the apostles called the Lord God’s “holy child.” Well, as I’m sure I don’t have to remind you, the Lord entered the world as a child:

**“For unto us *a child is born*…called…The mighty God, The everlasting Father…” (Isaiah 9:6).**

But the Jews didn’t gather together with the Gentiles to kill the Lord when He was still a child. So why did the apostles say they did? Well, it was because the Lord may have grown up to be a man, but throughout His life He remained as harmless as a child. I mean, even as a man He was called “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). How gentle is a lamb? So in saying they got together to kill God’s *child,* they were emphasizing the *enormity* of the crime that was committed when the Lord was crucified. Only a *monster* would kill a child!

They were telling God they knew how He felt about His Son’s death. He felt like any father would feel if his child were murdered. He’d want *justice!* They were telling God they knew why He was about to send the judgments described in the prophecies about the Tribulation, and He was about to send the Lord back to “judge and make war.” All that would have happened if God hadn’t interrupted the prophetic program with the dispensation of the mystery.

Now when the disciples said that Herod and Pilate had conspired to kill the Lord, there’s something you should know about that. On the day of the Lord’s trial, Pilate sent Him to Herod to be judged, and Herod heard Him and sent Him back to Pilate. And when it was all over, we read,

**“...the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends…*for before they were at enmity”* (Luke 23:12).**

Before that, Pilate and Herod couldn’t agree on *anything.* But they *both* agreed that the Lamb of God had to die! What a picture of something my first pastor, Pastor Jeff Farrell, used to say. He’d say, “the only time Jews and Gentiles ever agreed to do anything together it was to crucify the Son of God!”

But now notice that Verse 28 says that *the people* of Israel were *also* in on the crucifixion of Christ. I know we like to think that His death was all on Israel’s rulers, since Mark tells us that “the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37). But if you’ll check the context there, and compare what the other gospels have to say, you’ll see that the Lord had just silenced the Pharisees with His words. And people liked that! You see, the Lord wasn’t the only one who didn’t care for the smug self-righteousness of the Pharisees. The people liked it when the Lord handed them their lunch!

But here we have to remember something that all politicians remember. And that is, the public has a short memory! Actually, politicians not only *remember* that, they count on it! They know that if they do something really stupid, all they have to do is wait awhile and people will forget all about it, and they can get elected again!

Those common people loved the Lord, as long as He was silencing the Pharisees, and healing their diseases. That’s why they cried, “Hosanna in the highest!” the day He rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. But they were the same ones who cried “Crucify Him” *one week later!* They might have been the ones who kept the rulers from killing the Lord earlier, as we saw in our last study, but when Pilate gave them a choice of saving the Lord or saving Barabbas,

**“Then answered all the people, and said, *His blood be on us, and on our children*” (Matthew 27:25).**

But now if you think that all this caught God by surprise, look at the next verse in our text, where the disciples prayed that the people and rulers got together,

**“For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28).**

The Lord had to die one way or another. God wanted the people of Israel to *recognize* their Messiah and sacrifice Him in faith, *not* crucify Him in unbelief. But that doesn’t mean the people and their rulers have an excuse for executing their Messiah. Do you remember what the Lord said about Judas?

**“…the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: *but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!”* (Luke 22:22).**

Judas Iscariot didn’t get a free pass just because he provided the world with a Savior, and that goes for his countrymen in Israel and their rulers as well.

And as we read on, we see the apostles get to the point of their prayer:

**“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29).**

Those disciples didn’t ask God for protection from their leaders, they asked Him for *boldness* to keep preaching *despite* the threatenings of their leaders!

But now, when they tell God to “behold” those threatenings, I need to point out that they weren’t insinuating that maybe God hadn’t noticed them! They’d heard the Lord say that God knows when a sparrow falls (Mt. 10:29). No, what they were doing is what Hezekiah did when the king of Syria was taunting him. He prayed,

**“*Incline Thine ear,* O LORD, and hear; *open Thine eyes*, O LORD, *and see:* *and hear all the words of Sennacherib,* which hath sent to reproach the living God…” (Isaiah 37:17).**

Now Hezekiah wasn’t insinuating that God hadn’t noticed the king’s threatenings either. He was just asking God to notice them so He’d do something *about* those threatenings, as we see when he went on to say,

**“Now *therefore*, O LORD our God, *save us from his hand”* (Isaiah 37:20).**

And that’s what the apostles were doing too, asking God to notice the threatenings of their leaders so He would do something about them and give them the boldness they’d need to continue to preach Christ in the face of those threats.

So how come they didn’t ask what Hezekiah asked for, *deliverance* from their enemies, and *protection* from their threatenings? It was because, like Hezekiah, those disciples knew right where they stood in the program of God!

Hezekiah lived under the law, and he knew the law said that if Israel obeyed God that He promised to save them from their enemies. And he knew they’d been good, so he prayed and asked God for the deliverance that He promised them. And you know what God did for Him?

**“Then the angel of the LORD…*smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand:* and when they arose early in the morning...*they were all dead corpses”* (Isaiah 37:36).**

Now I’d call *that* an answer to prayer, wouldn’t you?

But that’s not where the apostles stood in the program of God. Oh, they were still under the law. But they knew that the rest of Psalm 2 said that they were poised on the doorstep of the Tribulation, the time right before the Lord’s Second Coming. And they remembered what the Lord said when they asked Him what signs there would be before His Second Coming:

**“…the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us…*what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?* And Jesus answered…Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, *and shall kill you:* and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake” (Matthew 24:3,4,9).**

From the Lord’s words there, the disciples knew that it wasn’t time to pray for *deliverance* from dying, it was time for them to die!

But now, not *all* believers have to die in the Tribulation. So why wouldn’t the apostles and disciples pray that they might be among the ones who live through that terrible time? It’s because they had something more important on their minds. That’s why instead of asking to be delivered from their rulers, they asked for *boldness* to continue to preach Christ.

Now is there anything you can learn from all this? God hasn’t promised to deliver you from anyone who threatens you either, no matter what you hear preachers say. In fact, you’re in the same situation the apostles were in. They were wrestling with rulers of their nation. Who’s your apostle say *you* wrestle with?

**“…we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, *against the rulers of the darkness of this world*, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).**

As you teach the doctrines of the apostle Paul, the doctrines designed for the present dispensation of grace, you’re wrestling with the unseen rulers of this world, the fallen angels, who use preachers to teach “doctrines of devils” (I Tim. 4:1). So what should *you* pray for? How about what Paul asked people to pray for him a couple of verses later in that letter to the Ephesians:

**“Praying always…for me, that utterance may be given unto me, *that I may open my mouth boldly*, to make known the mystery of the gospel, *For which I am an ambassador in bonds:* that therein I may speak *boldly*, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:18-20).**

*That’s* what you should pray for, if you know where *you* stand in the program of God! For the same boldness that Paul prayed for. And not just boldness to preach Christ in general, but “the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” (Rom. 16:25).

Now as we read on, we see that the disciples *did* ask God for some *help* in being bold. They asked Him to help them be bold,

**“By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30).**

Now here we have to ask why the apostles are *still* calling the Lord God’s “holy child.” I mean, it wasn’t the *child* Jesus who was healing people, so why were they still emphasizing His childhood?

Well, don’t forget that they weren’t just preaching Christ, they were preaching the *resurrected* Christ. And do you know what Paul said about the Lord’s resurrection?

**“God hath…raised up Jesus…as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I *begotten* Thee” (Acts 13:33).**

Now you know that word “begotten” is the word that the Bible uses when a man fathers a child, as we see when we read,

**“…the days of Adam after he had *begotten* Seth were eight hundred years: and he *begat* sons and daughters” (Genesis 5:4).**

But resurrection is like a *new* birth! And after the Lord rose from the dead, the apostles began to preach the *resurrected* Christ. And *that’s* why they call Him God’s holy *child.* That’s how clean the slate had been wiped clean for the people of Israel. They were being given a fresh start, a whole new chance to receive God’s child. In the mind of God, the slate was as clean as when the Lord had been first born in Bethlehem, in the nativity of His favored nation.

Now if you’ve been with us for this study of Acts, or if you know your Bible, you probably know why they asked for more healings. Think about it! When they healed the lame man, a huge crowd gathered, and Peter preached a message to them, *and 5,000 people believed the gospel.* I’d be asking for more healings too!

But as all grace believers know, you can ask God to help give you boldness by doing miracles like that all you want, but if you do you’ll be sorely disappointed, for He’s not in the business of providing miracles and wonders and signs in the dispensation of grace. Do you see how *crucial* it is to pray knowing where you stand in the program of God?

If you don’t, look at what the Lord did when the leaders in Israel began to think that they’d be better off without Him. Speaking of those leaders, we read,

**“…they were filled with madness; *and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.* And it came to pass in those days, *that He went out into a mountain to pray,* and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:11,12).**

Now we’re not told what He prayed that night, but I don’t think He prayed to be saved from His rulers. He knew He had to die. So instead, I think He prayed something else, something we get a hint of as we read what He did when He *finished* praying:

**“And when it was day, He called...His disciples: *and...chose twelve*…named *apostles*” (Luke 6:13).**

After He knew those religious leaders would probably kill Him, and after He talked it over with His Father, the Lord immediately chose 12 apostles from among His disciples. That tells me that He wasn’t worried about dying, He was concerned about dying without leaving some men behind to carry on His ministry in His absence. And *that’s* what I think He prayed for. For help in selecting those apostles.

You say, “Why would you think that?” Well, it is because *He too* knew right where He stood in the program of God. And He knew what Isaiah had said about Him in Isaiah 8:14,15:

**“…He shall be for a sanctuary; *but for a stone of stumbling…to both the houses of Israel…*And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.”**

As you can see, Isaiah predicted that both houses of Israel would stumble on the stone of the Lord Jesus instead of using Him as the foundation stone to build the kingdom church on, as we’ve been talking about in these studies. But Isaiah didn’t just tell the Lord that this would happen, he went on to tell Him what to do about it, saying in the very next verse,

**“Bind up the testimony, *seal the law among My disciples”* (Isaiah 8:16).**

Once the Lord knew Israel’s leaders would stumble on Him and try to kill Him, He did what Isaiah said He should do when that happened. He picked 12 apostles to seal the Word among so they could carry on in His absence. And that’s what I believe He prayed about. In other words, He prayed in accord with the written Word of God.

And that’s what the apostles were doing too! God had promised to do miracles to help them with their boldness:

**“…these signs shall follow them that believe…they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover…And they went forth, and preached every where, *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”* (Mark 16:17-20).**

God promised to work the miracles they’d need to keep preaching Christ boldly, so the apostles *prayed* that He would.

And that’s what you should do as well, pray according to what God promised *you.* If you do, God will answer you, just like He answered the apostles in the last verse of our text:

**“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).**

Now God won’t shake the room, or give you the power to heal lame men, or anyone else for that matter, no matter how often you ask for those things. But He will give you *boldness* if you ask Him. But you gotta ask Him. Have you asked?