

June 13, 2010 ACTS 2:1-26

## THE BEAUTIFUL GATE EXPERIENCE

Experiences! We all have them. Some are good, some are bad, and some are so-so. Some we wish to have more of, others we just as soon not have again. Joy is something we love to experience. Sadness is one we just soon skip. We love to be on top of the world but hate to be in the pits of life. We always like the mountain top experiences like Peter, James and John experienced when they wanted to build booths to stay with Jesus, Elijah, Moses and God. But Jesus said that wasn't what life was all about. Joy isn't someplace you go to find, but joy is trusting in Jesus all day long. As Scripture says, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." Our mountain top experiences come daily when we pause to see what God can do in us, through us, and at times, in spite of us.

Well this morning we look at the completely transformed disciples following Pentecost. There was joy in their lives. They were happy campers. We already have seen the difference the Holy Spirit has made as Peter and the others have shared the Good News of Jesus' birth, his death, his resurrection. Thousands have found faith through believing the disciples teachings. There was a new excitement building in the town of Jerusalem those days.

You might ask why I keep going back to that experience and I will tell you this....it changed the disciples and because it changed the disciples these

experiences can change our lives as well. They once were doubters and they were afraid but now they were full of enthusiasm for God's word and not fearful at all. The difference was the Holy Spirit in their lives. And since that day that same Holy Spirit is in every believer of Jesus Christ. The only thing we have to do is turn the key and let him work in our lives. We need to take a backseat and let him drive. Instead of letting God be our co-pilot let him have the wheel. Or as Carrie Underwood sings when the hardships of life hit and you're in the slide of your life skidding on the ice heading for disaster, let go of the wheel and pray "Jesus take the wheel." Or as we might say today, let go and let God.

I want you to notice the experiences following Pentecost. We've heard Peter's preaching and thousands were touched and the church began as thousands came to learn from the disciples, shared their things, broke bread together, and they prayed together. The place was jumping with the joy of this experience. I can see them now praising God for all his goodness and the power and courage to do the things Jesus said they would do. They just waited for the next wonderful experience God was about to do. In many ways they stood back and watched God work through them. They were different. They weren't the afraid disciples cowering in the Upper Room afraid of their own shadows. They are front and center and bold and not afraid to speak the truth of Jesus Christ even if some of the religious leaders heard them.

So daily the disciples experienced new life through Christ. Daily the Holy Spirit was showing them new possibilities and new experiences. So on this particular day around 3 in the afternoon Peter and John were heading for a prayer meeting. Who knows what they were talking about that day, but I'm sure it was about Jesus and about all the things that had been happening in these days. Maybe they were thinking about looking for a place to hold all these people that had made a commitment to Jesus. Maybe they were trying to figure out how they could minister and teach all these new born followers of Jesus Christ. They rejoiced in all that God was doing and how they had the privilege of being part of it. They may have been full of the joy of the Lord as God brought each new person to them to receive God's blessings and forgiveness. Maybe people around them looked at them saying, "There goes those guys who were with Jesus. Look how bold they are. Look how happy they are. Look at the spring in their step. I wish I had their faith." They were overwhelmed with this experience and they believed there wasn't anything they could not do through the power of the wonderful name of Jesus. They had so much confidence, not in themselves, but in God. They had already seen the things God had done. They saw the signs and wonders that happened these days. They watched as people were healed. They watched with awe as God used them to do mighty things. So why shouldn't this day be any different? God was at work. The power of the Holy Spirit had been unleashed and

things were happening daily that no one could explain. God was giving them experience after experience to share his story, to minister to the needs of his people. So a joyful Peter and John come to the temple area for prayer as they often did and as they approached the gate called Beautiful there was a crippled man sitting there begging for money. He had been there for years. Many knew him and his condition. Some became his friends. Some maybe were the ones who brought him there daily. Even the disciples had put a few coins in his basket from time to time when they had gone to prayer meeting. As Peter and John approach he yelled out, “Hey, fellows, can you help me? How about a couple bucks? How about whatever you can give? I got stuff to take care of at home, bills to pay, need money for food.” Well joyous Peter and John stop for a few seconds and a bold Peter says to the crippled man, “My friend, I have no gold or silver to give you, but I have something better to give. TAKE MY HAND. BY THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, GET UP AND WALK!” Bam! Peter grabs the cripple’s hand pulls him to his feet and the next thing you know this guy is jumping with joy, clicking his heels, raising his hands in praise to God, running here and there, skipping, smiling with joy as his ankles have become flexible and he no longer is a cripple. I picture John and Peter standing there with smiles on their faces watching this man taking his first steps of his life. He had watched others do these things. As a child he watched his friends playing hop scotch,

throwing a ball around, climbing hills, riding donkeys, playing tag, but he couldn't do that. Now he was free from his mat, free from laying there. Now he was enjoying running and walking and skipping. It was if he had never been crippled. He went running here and there and telling others, "Look, I can walk. Look I'm not cripple any more. Watch me jump. Watch me leap with joy. Watch me climb the steps." And bewildered people who on many occasion pitied this man were awestruck with amazement wondering how this could be. For all his life he had been crippled. Now he was free as a bird. Now he couldn't stop running, jumping and praising God. And all the while Peter and John are standing in the shadows thanking God and Jesus for touching this man's crippled legs. They were not looking for the glory. They were just God's instruments of His grace.

Friends I can get to shouting when something like that happens. Today if we saw a miracle like that happen someone would question it. We have become skeptics. We often think God can't do that these days. We think that only happened back then and God doesn't do such things these days. We are afraid to believe he can do the impossible. Admit it. We doubt it. I'm guilty of that too. Not that I want to but I'm afraid if I ask maybe he won't do it. But then I think I cannot put God in a box and my function is to pray and trust God to do his will, to do on earth that which he does in heaven. We are like Thomas who doubted and wanted to see for himself. We would check this guy's medical record to make sure he was

a cripple from birth. You don't think so? Then remember when Jesus healed a blind man blind from birth by sending this guy to wash in the pool after he placed mud cakes on his eyes? The religious leaders would not believe he was blind from birth when he told him he once was blind but now he could see because Jesus gave him his sight. They checked with his folks...they checked with his friends...they questioned everyone to see if this truly was a miracle not some hoax. In the end of that encounter we find this man that was blind could now see, but those religious leaders who could see were really blind to the miracles God performed through his Son Jesus. He became a believer; they became skeptics and doubted God's mighty power through his son. And guess whom God blessed that day?

This day was a great day. The Beautiful Gate produced a beautiful thing...a man who was crippled was healed. A man who may have prayed daily for a healing was healed. He could hang up his crutches on the wall as a reminder he once needed them but now he was free. They were the symbol of the power of Jesus Christ. It was a beautiful day for this man. It didn't matter if it was cloudy, sprinkling, misty, cool, hot or whatever. For this man at the Beautiful Gate it was a beautiful day, the best day of his life as he walked, jumped, skipped, and clicked his heels in the joy of the Lord for being made well. And those who had known this man for many years were amazed.

My friends it could happen because God is amazing. It could happen because of the boldness of Peter and John. It could happen because of the strong faith of Peter and John to do greater things than what they had ever known. It was a beautiful day in the neighborhood as a man who once was lost was now found; who once was blind could now see. You see, God did it. It wasn't Peter. It wasn't John. It was God. All this led to another sermon by Peter to tell the people all these things happened through God who made all things possible. He preached that these people must change their hearts and believe. Never mind trying to find out the formula but believe through faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, that anything is possible. And you know this was a beautiful day because more people became believers.

For Peter and John this was another piece of the puzzle that helped them grow in their own faith and to trust Jesus to be Jesus and allow him and the Holy Spirit to work through them. This was an exciting time and the faith of the disciples were growing as God did more and more signs and wonders and more and more people began to follow the disciples in order to learn more about this faith walk with Jesus.

You know in that crowd that watched this cripple man walk were folks that were crippled themselves. Oh, maybe they could walk like we do, but other stuff crippled them. You know what I mean because some of you are like that. We

become crippled by things in our lives. We become crippled because of sin in our lives. We become crippled because of our doubting. We become crippled because we have anger burning within. We become crippled because we are unwilling to forgive. We become crippled because....you fill in the blank with whatever is crippling you. Could it be unbelief?

We might even be beggars at our own Beautiful Gate. We beg God to forgive us, or to take away the pain, or even to release us from stuff. But you aren't sure he can do it. He reaches out and you reach back but for some reason just when you think you can do it you pull your hand back. You sit each week in church and ask God to change your life. Or maybe you are afraid to ask him to change you because you're afraid he won't answer you, so you say nothing to God.

I can tell you honestly you have come to the Beautiful Gate this morning. The beautiful gate where God wants to meet your needs. Peter and John had the faith that when they pulled this man to his feet this man would be completely healed. Today I would say that God wants to heal lots of things in our lives. He wants to meet our needs. He wants to make us all whole. He wants us to be full of joy. He wants to transform your lives so that he can mold and make you into mighty vessels that he can use. He wants us to trust in the precious name of Jesus. Just think of the powerful witness this man became because he couldn't stop telling people how he was able to walk through the grace of God.

Just as Peter reached out his hand to take the cripple to his feet, today Jesus reaches out his hand for you to grasp onto as he pulls you to your feet. So may it be today.....just believe....enjoy the beautiful gate experience this morning because the same God who did it back then is the same God who lives today. We just have to let God work. We just have to trust him. So may it be today. Don't be doubters, but be believers and watch our God work. There's lots of pain in this world today. There's lots of heartaches as well. We all could use some Good News from Jesus. For it certainly is a beautiful day in the neighborhood when we believe in Jesus for all things.....are you happy today? If you're happy and you know it clap your hands. Can you jump with joy? Let's celebrate God's goodness. Let's be free from those things that have crippled us. Peter and John said to the crippled man they didn't have any silver or gold to give him, but they had something better. "In the name of Jesus Christ, be free," and the crippled man was pulled to his feet and he danced and danced. That same Jesus is here today to free all who have been crippled from a variety of things. Can I be bold enough to pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ, be made free?