

Acts 3:1-21
The Church's Action
ACTS: HTCWP

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Acts 3. Pray.**

“Preach the gospel, and if necessary use words.”

If you've been around church or grown up in church perhaps you've heard this quote before. It is often wrongly attributed to a 13th-century monk by the name of St. Francis of Assisi.

The quote is often used to help spur Christians on towards love and good works. To serve others and by serving others, put the gospel on display, so much so that you won't even have to open your mouth to tell people about Jesus unless absolutely necessary, because people will just get it.

Sounds good at face value, but flawed at its core.

On the flip side, particularly in evangelical Christian circles, you might hear some amount of the opposite. That good deeds, acts of caring for the poor, all of that are at best something necessary to do so that you can then tell them the good news of the gospel, and at worst something to be avoided so that you don't water down the gospel.

Sounds good at face value, but flawed at its core.

So church, let me ask us a question this morning - ***which is it?***

- Good deeds or good news?
- Do we care for the poor and marginalized in our city, or do we tell them the gospel?
- Do we love and serve our neighbor, or do we speak the truth of Jesus Christ to them?

What I want to argue today from the Scriptures is that rather than an either/or, **it's a both/and.**

As we think about what it means to be rooted in Charlotte as a church for the good of our city - we need a view of mission that is **both gospel in action and gospel in proclamation. A gospel that is both good deeds and good news.**

That's what we're called to be about as a church, as we think about what it means to take the gospel to our city, to proclaim God's Kingdom to our city, we must be a church of → **Good Deeds + Good News.**

This is what we'll see today in the ministry of Peter and John in Acts 3. As Luke takes us back into the story of the early church. Let's look at it together and see what we can learn and apply.

Good Deeds

Let's start by looking at Acts 3:1-10 and talking about **the good deeds done here in this story:**

Acts 3:1-10

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 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 alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.

So at about 3pm in the afternoon, Peter and John are headed up to the temple to pray. And there's a man there sitting at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate. It would have been this main thoroughfare for people going in and out of the temple. So the hope is that he would catch these religious folks going to or from worship, asking for gifts to help him.

This man has been lame from birth. We find out later in the story that he is about 40 years old. This is 40 years of this man totally relying on the kindness of others to get by. In this largely agrarian society he would not have had a job or a means of providing for himself. But he did have some friends who would take him to the gate so he could beg for money. Years and years of begging. Can you imagine what that does to a person? Day in and day out for a vast majority of your life, begging from strangers at the temple gate.

He sees Peter and John coming and asks them for help.

4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

I love Peter's heart here. He doesn't skirt by, he stops, and makes eye contact. Because of his physical disabilities, this man would have been looked down upon or thought of as less than in this society, but Peter affirms his dignity and worth as a human made in the image of God.

5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But 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!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

40 years - his whole life he hasn't been able to walk. Now walking isn't going to cut it. He's leaping, jumping, praising.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 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.

Peter and John, on the way to the temple to pray, stop what they're doing, care for this man, and in the power of Christ he is healed and can walk. Now, I'm not going to get into the specifics of the healing, we actually wrote an article, it'll be on our website tomorrow talking about miraculous healings - do they still happen today, should we pray for them? It'll be up on our series page (citizenscharlotte.com/acts) tomorrow morning. Would encourage you to check that out.

Big Picture

But for our purposes tonight - I want to talk more big picture about the significance of what takes place here.

If you read the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - one of the defining aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus is that he spends his 3 years of ministry basically doing 3 things - (1) preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God and displaying that kingdom through (2) eating with outcasts and (3) miraculous works of care, healing, and restoration.

Now what you have here in Acts 3 is the first recorded miracle and act of healing post-resurrection of Jesus. Physical healing appears about 14 times in the book of Acts. And scholars say if you understand the what and why behind this healing in Acts 3, you understand them all.

This miracle shows us two things:

(1) The Holy Spirit has come, and so followers of Jesus have power as God dwells within them empowering them for the spread of the gospel.

(2) The Kingdom of God is going to continue to go forth not just in Word - preaching like Peter does in Acts 2, and here in just a minute, - **but also through good and gracious works of God done through His people.**

Biblical Theology of God's Heart for the Needy

Having this healing take place so early in the beginning of the church shows us a continuation of this reality about God that has been true from the very beginning - **God's heart has always been to care for the poor, the outcast, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the needy.**

That was magnified in Jesus' ministry, but was true all throughout the Old Testament, and here in Acts 3 we see this is going to continue to be true now in the age of the Church.

Throughout the whole Bible, there's this theme of God stepping into what is broken, stepping into the lives of those in need, with love and grace - and calling His people to reflect Him through their stepping into what is broken with healing and love and grace through His power. God's heart for who the Bible calls "the needy" is all over the place.

Let me give you just a few places, write down the reference and take some time to read through these later:

Summary:

- **In the law** - these early books in the OT, when God is instructing His people, the Israelites, how to live as His set apart people, he tells them in **Deuteronomy 15:10-11** to give to the poor freely. To open wide their hand to their brother, to the needy and to the poor.

- **In the wisdom literature** - the book of Proverbs, this guidebook for a flourishing life with God - God says in **Proverbs 14:31** - **Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.**

- **In the prophets** - the book of Isaiah. **Isaiah 1:16-17** - God tells His people to learn to do good and seek justice for the fatherless and the widow.

- **In the gospels, Jesus** - **Luke 4:18** - **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.**

- **Now here, in the NT church** - Acts 3 but also **James 1:27** which tells us that religion that is pure before God is to care for the orphan and the widow, and to live a godly life.

That doesn't even begin to scratch the surface. We could take the whole sermon just quoting verses from the Scriptures about God's heart for the poor, the needy, the sojourner and stranger, the outcast, the widow, the orphan. All the ones who society pushes to the side, who are in need. **God's heart is for them!**

This is why this matters for us → We don't step in as the church and care for the poor or the marginalized or the oppressed in our city because it's hip or cool or en vogue. We don't do it as part of some trend. **We do it because it is the heart of God.**

God's heart is for the poor and needy, and we as God's people are called to have our hearts shaped and changed and broken for what breaks God's heart. To hate what he hates and love what he loves. So if He cares deeply for the poor and needy, so should we!

It's always been the heart of God and it always will be the heart of God because the Bible says He does not change or shift like shadows. **That's why Christians for centuries have been stepping in and caring for those in need in the place or city God has put them.**

The Roman Emperor Julian, around 300 AD, a time of great persecution for the Church, said this about Christians:

"Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of these Christians as their charity to strangers, the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor but for ours as well."

- You can read stories throughout the first 300 or so years of the church of Christians through wars, and plagues, and persecution, selflessly loving and caring for those around them.
- In the 1800s, it was followers of Jesus who fought so hard for the abolition of slavery in both Great Britain and America.
- Throughout the 1900s, it has been Christian organizations on the front lines in the fight against aids and genocide throughout Africa.
- So many of our hospitals around our state and our country are called "something something Baptist" or "something something Presbyterian", because they were started by churches and Christians to care for the sick.

Now, is there much to lament and grieve about what Christians have done wrongly in the name of Jesus in the past 2000+ years. Absolutely. The picture of our history is not all rosy and clean. And, you also must see that there is so much good in our history as well. Christians for centuries have been entering the brokenness around us with love and care and good works.

We are called to be a people of good deeds. This is part of how we put the gospel on display. We don't just say: yeah we love you, Jesus loves you, good luck. We step in. We sacrifice at great cost to ourselves to step in and take care of those in our city in need.

We step in with healing. Maybe not physical miraculous healing like Peter and John. But following God's heart in bringing restoration to a broken world.

- Bringing healing to systems and structures set up to separate and divide.
- Bringing healing to marriages, trauma, family relationships, addictions.
- Bringing healing to hopeless circumstances and situations.
- Bringing healing wherever it is needed in our city.

Typcast article. I was reading an article this week talking about how the church has been "typcast". You know what I mean by that? Being typcast is what happens to actors or actresses who continually get cast for specific types of roles in movies. Like you know if Leonardo Dicaprio is in a movie, he's going to play this particular type of character. You have some folks - that person, always a villain. Them? Always a hero.

And the article was talking about how the church in our society has become a “typecast”. We’re often known as Christians for what people feel like we’re against. We’re hypocritical, we’re judgemental, we’re against our city or against the people around us. Some of it unfair, sure. But some of it’s not. Are we hypocritical? Absolutely - that’s why we love the gospel so much!

But what we should be known for is the healing we bring to our city. Will we face opposition even in the midst of doing good? Sure. Will people always accept everything we believe about Jesus and what the Bible tells us? Absolutely not.

But what would it look like for our church to play a role in this city such that people would be forced to say - **“I don’t like what those crazy people at Citizens believe, but thank God they’re here, because we need them and what they bring to our community.”**

Or maybe to put it another way **“If Citizens Church ceased to exist, would our city feel the impact?”**

Bringing healing to what is broken around us should be a marker of our church.

We should be able to say to our community:

- Need community? We’ll help.
- Need counseling? We’ll help.
- Need job training? We’ll help.
- Need a bag of groceries? We’ll help.
- Need parenting insights? We’ll help.
- Need medical care? We’ll help.
- Have questions and doubts about faith? We’ll help.
- Have an addiction? We’ll help.

And just to make it clear - when I say we, I mean “WE. US.” Not Citizens as this organization or thing. Remember last week - **“I am they.”**

This is what it means to be a church that brings the gospel to bear on our city with **good deeds**. But we don’t stop there. We don’t only serve and help. It’s a both/and remember? We also must open our mouths and declare the gospel.

Good News

So, let’s talk about the good news and pick back up with our story in Acts 3:11:

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people:

Verse 12 is clear evidence why “Preach the gospel and if necessary use words” is faulty logic. Peter doesn’t stand off to the side going: “I hope someone comes up and asks me about Jesus.” He doesn’t assume just by seeing this man get healed now suddenly everyone understands they are sinners, Jesus is a Savior and they need Him to forgive them. He’s got a message to proclaim. The good deed paves way for the good news. The proclaimed Gospel message.

And Peter's sermon here in Acts 3 is basically a repeat of his sermon in Acts 2. Which is really encouraging to me as a preacher who likes to repeat himself. Here's what he says:

“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

He heals this man who has been crippled and begging for all 40 years of his life. Rightfully so, everyone who witnessed it is like “What is going on, are you serious?” Freaking out. And Peter doesn't waste the opportunity. He gets up and preaches. Same sermon as Acts 2. Jesus is God's Son. You guys missed that. You killed Him. You asked for a murderer, Barabbas, instead. Even though He was the author of life, you guys took his life. But God raised Him up. He didn't stay dead. He's alive - risen, ruling, and reigning forever.

And I want you to notice what He's going to do. He's going to use this miracle, this good deed, this healing - to lead to a sermon where he points to three specific things:

The healing...

1. Points upward to God.

16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Peter says - this miracle took place, this healing took place - not so that you would look at us and see our holiness and our power, but that you would see the power of God. God worked in healing to show you that He is still present and active and moving in power in this world. To get your attention so that your eyes would be fixed on Him.

Miracles in the Bible were God's way of saying, “This is really me.” It was like a divine signature that could not be forged. This good deed, this act of love and mercy and care for this man was a means by pointing the attention of the watching world to God.

2. Points inward to a deeper spiritual need.

Peter takes it a step further.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord

This is what you have to understand about why a gospel of good deeds without good news is not enough - there's a deeper need here. The man is in need of physical healing and restoration, absolutely. But there's a bigger, eternal problem. Peter and John can heal him at 40 years old - that's awesome! Something to be celebrated, AND at best he would get another 40 or 50 years.

There's a deeper need for this man, and this crowd, than their physical problems being taken care of. They have a spiritual problem. They are stuck and dead in their sin. They are separated from God. They do not have

forgiveness, they do not have spiritual new life in Christ, they are not born again and reconciled to right relationship with God.

But Peter and John don't look at this crowd and go:

- "Well, glad we know Jesus." Stinks for all these guys.
- They don't think "Well I don't have the right to critique their worldview. So if it's good for them then I guess that's fine."
- I hope someone will ask me so I can share why we were so nice to this guy...

They, with boldness, share the gospel of Christ.

Tim Chester, in his book *Total Church*, says it this way, "Social action without proclamation is like a signpost pointing nowhere. Worse still, it is likely to imply either that salvation is synonymous with socioeconomic betterment or that salvation is through good works like those that I am doing."

That's why good deeds are not enough. There must also be good news. There must be a proclamation of the truth of the gospel. Because it's not enough to meet the physical needs and then not point people to their greater spiritual need and the greater healing that is offered - the blotting out of sin, the redemption and salvation offered in Christ Jesus.

You can love people until you're blue in the face. That is good. **But at some point, church, you must open your mouth and share the good news of the gospel for their salvation.** By definition the gospel means "good news" - and good news must be declared, it must be shared, it must be spoken.

Romans 10:14 says it this way, **14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?**

We must preach the gospel!

3. Points forward to a future restoration.

19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Peter says this miracle, this healing, it points upward to God, it points inward to your greater need for spiritual healing - forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation to God. But it also points forward → to a future healing. Where Christ will return at the appointed time and will make all things new. He will restore and redeem all things. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. With no more physical brokenness. No more spiritual brokenness. All who trust in Christ for salvation will dwell forever in the presence of God in peace.

We read this past week in our Men's and Women's Book Studies about how God, throughout all history, from Genesis 1 to now and eternity future is bringing order to chaos. He's not just a God who created once, but is constantly recreating and making new creations out of us, and out of our world. He's in the business of taking what is broken, messed up, in shambles and bringing restoration into those areas of our lives or of our city or of our world that everyone else has written off.

And so we as a church - our invitation as image bearers of God - is to join God in the work He is doing to bring order to chaos. To bring redemption and life and hope as we care for the poor and the needy, as we step in.

We do good deeds as a means of joining God in that restoring work, and we open our mouths proclaiming that ultimate restoration is going to come one day at the return of Christ for all who trust in Him.

Both/And - Good Deeds + Good News

To live out the whole gospel in our city, we need a both/and approach. We need a gospel of good deeds. Caring for the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the needy in our city. And we need a gospel of good news. We need to open our mouths to speak and proclaim the good news of the gospel. We need a both/and.

Child dedication. Tonight we did our very first child dedication as a church. Proud dad moment for me, got to be both pastor and dad as Lindsay and I dedicated our firstborn to the Lord. My primary concern in parenting is that Harper would become a Christian and learn to live for the glory of God. That's it. You ask Lindsay and I - what's our end game as parents? That's what we'd say. We want Harper to trust in Jesus and live for Him. That's our top concern.

BUT, this desire does not mean that we are unconcerned with her temporal "earthly" needs. We don't simply teach her the Bible. We also feed her, clothe her, one day we'll send her off to school so she can learn how to read and write and get an education and a job. Our greatest concern is to teach and model the gospel of salvation, but love demands we also care for her physical needs. Can't neglect either one. Same is true in Word + Deed evangelism and ministry. Both/and.

There is so much need in our city. There is so much good in our city, I love this place. I love getting to live here, be the church here. But there is also so much need that we can and need to step into with Word + Deed:

- **There is a significant and growing wealth gap in our city.** Out of the 50 largest US cities, Charlotte ranks dead last in upward economic mobility. Meaning if you're born in any of the largest 50 cities in America, you have the worst chance in Charlotte to work your way out of poverty. **God's heart is for the poor.** That's a place where the church needs to step in: job training, resume help, skills help. Whatever that might mean.
- **33.5% of people who live on the eastside of Charlotte are foreign-born immigrants.** And in the entire city 1 in 7 Charlotte residents are immigrants. God's heart is for the refugee, the sojourner, the stranger. How can we step in and help? ESL classes, tutoring?
- **East Meck - one of the predominant high schools on the eastside of CLT,** the one Lindsay and I are zoned for - is the most diverse high school in our entire state. God's heart is for people of all ethnicities being unified in the gospel, and yet Charlotte is a city with a history of racial and social tension. What does it look like for our church to engage this?
- **14% of students in CMS are failing at least one class.** The pandemic and virtual learning has only exasperated the school disparity and performance in our city. How do we engage?
- **There are more than 550 children in the foster care system in Mecklenburg County.** God's heart is for the orphan. How do we engage?

That's the physical, tangible, earthly needs. What about spiritual?

- **125,000 people within 5 miles of this building that don't know Jesus as Lord.** How are we going to engage?
- **Statistics show that by 2025, there will be more de-churched (meaning were around church and left) in our city than there will be people who attend church.** Charlotte is not getting more Christian, thousands of people are moving here every month. People are leaving the church in droves. How do we engage?
- **Statistically, 20% of people in Charlotte would claim to be Christians.** That means 4 out of every 5 people you meet in your neighborhood, in your workplace, at your gym, at your grocery store, at a coffee shop, statistically 4 out of every 5 people you meet don't know or follow Jesus. They have a real spiritual need - they are dead in their sins and lost without Christ and without hope. How do we engage?

In all of this, I'm trying to get us as a church to lift up our eyes and go → **What does our city need and what are we doing to do about it?** What does it look like for us to be a church that doesn't shy away from but rather walks towards the brokenness? How do we become a church that Charlotte would miss if we were gone?

How do we become a church that carries with us as witnesses for Christ a gospel of good news and good deeds?

And listen, you gotta take some initiative on this. You can certainly wait for myself and Cole Weiner, our deacon of our Serve Charlotte ministry, to put some opportunities in front of you. And we're working hard on it. Don't get me wrong. We're connecting with organizations. We have one opportunity we're about to put in front of you guys at the end of the gathering.

But don't wait on us to step in and engage. You have to learn to step out in faith.

Birmingham. Tutoring Program at Grace Fellowship. "How did you guys get a mercy ministry started?"

Often these things happen **because** you take the initiative. If you want our church to do this, then we need YOU to step out and do this. To look at your own apartment complex, your own neighborhood, what breaks your heart in line with God's in our city, and ask how you can step in and then ask how we as a church can help you. I want those phone calls!

And the needs of our city are way too great for one person, one group, and one church. But don't let the bigness of the problem drive you to inaction. Learn to be faithful. Learn to take one step. Learn to serve in one way.

I'm trying to lay a foundation for us for the next 5, 10, 20 years. **To guide us to be a church that shares the gospel in word and deed.**

Learn to be an eyes up church. Look at the needs around you and step in and engage. Learn what you can do and own that. Look at your sphere of influence and engage and be faithful there and see what God might do. As you serve and love and care for those in need, and as you open your mouth to proclaim the good news of the gospel.

Gospel Conclusion

Here's the good news for us as we close out tonight: We can step into the neediness and brokenness of our city, because Jesus stepped into our neediness and brokenness....We can bring healing to what is broken because Jesus brought healing to us when we were broken...We were dead in our sin. We were lost and without hope. We were broken and scarred and guilty of sin. And yet Jesus came. He entered our brokenness, taking on flesh...

Communion. Pray.