

Healing, Wholeness, and Repentance in Acts 3

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After Luke’s account of the events of Pentecost and the further establishing of Christ’s church in Acts chapter 2, we see Peter and John continuing to live and worship in Jerusalem. They go to the temple to pray “at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1) and encounter a beggar at the gate of the temple that is known as the Beautiful Gate.¹ This would probably have been a commonplace event for the Apostles and for any Jews who worshipped and prayed at the temple. An entry point to sacred space would have been a strategic location for someone like this beggar who, unable to walk from birth, would have contributed to his family finances by begging for alms. We read that he was “laid daily at the gate of the temple” (v. 2).

This ordinary event of being approached by a beggar while going to worship takes on extraordinary layers of meaning as the setting for Peter’s first miracle as the leader of the church in the post-Resurrection era. The subsequent healing, as recorded in Acts 3, contains a deeper spiritual message of Christ’s power than we may recognize. Symbolic action, like all symbols, can have multiple meanings and great depth. After reviewing the events of the healing and different interpretations of the symbolic action of this healing, I will develop the image of healing

and wholeness within the context of intertestamental views about ritual defilement and access to the temple.

One Afternoon at the Temple

The setting for this profound event was commonplace. Lying at the gate of the temple when Peter and John had come for the midafternoon hour of prayer was a man who had not been able to walk since birth. And so, “seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple,” the man “asked an alms” (Acts 3:3). Rather than continuing on and ignoring the man, Peter must have felt prompted to engage with the man and to give a gift beyond what silver and gold could buy. After “fastening his eyes upon [the man]” and asking him to “look on us” (v. 4), Peter caught his attention. Luke explains that the man “gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them” (v. 5). Of course, based on his life experience the only thing that he could have hoped for would have been a generous financial gift.

Instead, Peter spoke directly of the contrast between the resources of this world and the priceless gifts available by the power of Christ. “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (v. 6). Peter then “took him by the right hand and lifted him up” (v. 7). We learn that through this intervention in the name of Christ that “immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (vv. 7–8).

Peter’s response to the man’s request for alms begins with a powerful rhetorical contrast between “silver and gold have I none” and “such as I have give I thee.” This rhetorical contrast alone makes this a memorable statement to this day, but in this historical setting Peter’s focus on Jesus would have been electric. His gift was to say, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” We need to remember that it would have likely still just have been months since the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and so this public witness of the power of Jesus and his living reality manifest through his servant Peter is the central message of this healing miracle. Those who watched it in this very public setting, as well as the man healed, were being taught that Jesus was the Messiah and that his messianic power to make the lame walk was still in effect (see Luke 7:19–22).

It is significant that, as the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke emphasizes Jesus’ healings as evidence that he is the Messiah. In the account in Luke 7 we learn of disciples of John who are going to learn of Jesus. They are witnesses of his healing power and thus are able to “tell John what

things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luke 7:22). These healings echo the passage in Luke 4 where Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth testifies that he is the Messiah, literally the Anointed One: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19).²

The Messiah was coming to heal and to include those who had been excluded. Christ had taught: “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13). Those others who were invited to the feast would not come, making excuses, but the feast of the establishment of the kingdom was designed to be inclusive of those who had hitherto been excluded: “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (Luke 14:21). The healing power that testified of Jesus as the Messiah during his ministry was a symbol of the universal invitation to the kingdom and that witness continues as Peter heals in the name of Jesus.³ Joseph Fitzmyer, a prominent New Testament scholar, notes that “for Luke the ‘name of Jesus’ connotes real and effective representation of Jesus himself.”⁴ By healing in the name of Jesus, Peter was making Jesus and his messianic power present to all who saw the miracle.⁵

Healing as Symbolic Action

Both the way in which Peter lifted up the lame man and the response of the man who was healed functioned as symbolic actions on multiple levels. These layers of symbolism are part of how Peter used this healing to teach and testify to the people gathered at the temple about the power and mission of Jesus Christ. I will briefly discuss insights into the symbolism of this healing and then develop an additional dimension that I think deserves further attention.

One reflection on the way in which Peter healed the man emphasizes how Peter is becoming more like his master, Jesus Christ, through the echo of the hand reaching out to rescue one who is faltering. Andrew Skinner describes Peter’s healing in Acts 3 as a mirror of the Savior reaching out to him when he was sinking on the Sea of Galilee. He comments, “I also wonder if this episode didn’t come back into sharp remembrance for Peter on a future occasion when he came across another person years later at the entrance to the Jerusalem temple who was struggling—only with a physical infirmity.” Here Skinner emphasizes the healing of the lame man as a physical event. Skinner observes, “The parallel

can hardly be missed. The chief Apostle took the floundering man at the temple by the hand and lifted him out of his distress just as Jesus had lifted Peter out of his distress years earlier on the Sea of Galilee [see Matthew 14:28–31]. This shows us just how much Peter was destined to become like his Master when he became the earthly head of the church.”⁶

Another insight into the spiritual maturity and discipleship that Peter illustrated in reaching out to the man who needed healing is offered by President Harold B. Lee. President Lee emphasizes the way in which Peter’s ministry and awareness of an individual in need mirrored the way the Lord reaches out to each of us and lifts us up. He notes that “Peter just didn’t content himself by commanding the man to walk, but he ‘took him by the right hand, and lifted him up.’ (Acts 3:7).”⁷

President Lee continues, giving us insight into Peter’s imitation of Christ, “Will you see that picture now of that noble soul, that chiefest of the apostles, perhaps with his arms around the shoulders of this man, and saying, ‘Now, my good man, have courage, I will take a few steps with you. Let’s walk together, and I assure you that you can walk, because you have received a blessing by the power and authority that God has given us as men, his servants.’ Then the man leaped with joy.”⁸

President Lee then applies this experience to us in a classic quote: “You cannot lift another soul until you are standing on higher ground than he is. You must be sure, if you would rescue the man, that you yourself are setting the example of what you would have him be. You cannot light a fire in another soul unless it is burning in your own soul. You teachers, the testimony that you bear, the spirit with which you teach and with which you lead, is one of the most important assets that you can have, as you help to strengthen those who need so much, wherein you have so much to give. Who of us, in whatever station we may have been in, have not needed strengthening?”⁹

Elder Marvin J. Ashton drew similar conclusions as he commented on Peter’s noble example of friendship. “And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up. . . .’ (Acts 3:6–7). Peter was a friend. He told the beggar, ‘Rise and walk; I’m going to help you.’ We too must take the friend by the hand until he sees and finds that he has enough strength to go on his own. Is it not appropriate to conclude that Peter was willing to take the friend the way he was but left him improved?”¹⁰

More recently, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has used this story of healing to emphasize not just the Christlike friendship and personal care that Peter illustrated, but also the miraculous blessings that the Lord has for each of us, far exceeding our expectations. He commented: “In this Church, you get a lot more than you bargain for. That man on the steps of the temple that day had no higher hope than that he would get a [coin]. . . . What he got were straightened legs and the chance

to walk and leap and sing and praise God and go into the temple.” Elder Holland then identified with the man who had been healed: “I testify that I count myself one among you, like the lame man on the steps of the temple, who never dreamed what lay in store.”¹¹

Fitzmyer observes how this story teaches of the abundance and restoration of blessings that Jesus came to bring. He emphasizes how Luke’s description of healing is portrayed as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. He notes how “Luke describes the complete cure of the beggar and his consequent reaction in almost the same way that Isaiah once proclaimed the restoration of Zion: ‘Then shall the lame one leap like a deer’ (Isaiah 35:6).”¹² He is referring to the messianic prophecy of divine intervention that we are familiar with from the beautiful oratorio by Handel. Israel is promised: “Your God will come with vengeance; . . . he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:4–6). The day of salvation is made visible with the signs of healing associated with the Messiah.

Fitzmyer argues that by describing the lame man “leaping up,” the language of Isaiah “makes it clear that Luke sees this miracle as a fulfillment of the prophet’s utterance, an event of salvation history. The lame man’s praise of God is duly noted. So he passes from paralysis to joyful activity, from begging to praising God within the Temple.”¹³ The healing of the lame man witnesses that a new day had dawned—that God had come to save.

Richard Pervo connects another symbolic meaning with the Acts 3:8 allusion to the Isaiah 35:6 prophecy of the day in which “the lame man [shall] leap as an hart,” noting that this prophecy of the restoration of Israel would be reinforced by the observation that the man had been disabled for at least forty years (see Acts 4:22). Here forty becomes a symbol of alienation and then restoration. Pervo observes that “this healing represents an opportunity for the restoration (see Acts 3:21) of Israel.”¹⁴

While I believe that all of these observations about these dimensions of symbolic action in the healing of the man at the gate of the temple are very important, I would like to suggest that we consider the possibility that Peter’s healing illustrates and explains the power of Christ not just to heal bodies, but to reconcile fallen and unclean humanity to the presence of God, something that the law was not able to do (see Acts 13:38–39; Hebrews 10:1).

One detail of the account that has not been fully developed is the description that the man then “entered with them into the temple.” The ability of this man to enter with Peter and John into the temple might not just be an additional witness of his physical healing through the power of Christ. It also corresponds with some historians’ understanding of the intertestamental attitudes towards

disability and defilement and how this healing would have made him whole and thus able to enter sacred space. So Peter's healing of this man through the power of Christ might not have just been about Peter becoming more like Christ by taking him "by the right hand, and lift[ing] him up" or his "leaping up" (v. 8), a witness that a new era in salvation history had been reached. The fact that this man was able to enter the temple may very well take on a spiritual as well as a physical dimension. Being whole through the power of Christ, he was no longer excluded from the sacred space. By associating Christ's ability to heal with access to the temple, this healing symbolically testifies of the spiritually healing power of the Atonement to give us access to the presence of God.

There is not a conclusive answer to the historical question about the status of the lame in this era, but there is strong evidence that this man was at the gate of the temple not merely because it was a strategic location for begging, but because his physical condition would have been seen as excluding him as unclean, having the potential to profane or pollute the sacred space.¹⁵

This interpretation gives additional insight into Peter's subsequent teaching about repentance after the healing. It is not that the lack of physical wholeness is a sin, but that physical healing can be a symbolic action to teach about Christ's power to heal spiritually, and thus invites us to trust him and to repent. A similar parallel can be found in Luke 5:17–26 with the story of the man with the palsy. The man asks Christ to heal him, who then says to him, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." This is not intended to mean that having a physical ailment was something to be repented of, but to show how spiritual and physical healing parallel each other and that Christ has the power to do both. Those listening to Christ tell him that his sins were forgiven thought that proclamation was blasphemous, "but when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God" (Luke 5:22–25). Christ's ability to heal physical afflictions testifies of the power that is less visible, but of greater eternal worth: his ability to heal our souls.

Peter's Witness of Christ's Power: Wholeness, Holiness, and "Entering In"

In Acts 3, Peter not only heals "in the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 6) but also explains that "his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong" (v. 16). Peter's

actions are a powerful symbolic witness of the gospel message that through Jesus Christ, the separation between unclean, polluted, and profane humanity (represented here by the lame man) and the holiness of God's presence can be overcome.

After the healing, the people at the temple were astonished at what they had seen. Peter had used the symbolic action of this healing as a very public teaching moment. Luke explains that "all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple" (vv. 9–10), emphasizing again that he would have very likely asked alms of all of them. He was a very public figure, and this was a very public healing. As such the healing got people's attention: "they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him" (v. 10). It seems as though Peter and John accompanied the lame man as he walked in the temple, perhaps helping him make his way. We read that "as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering" (v. 11). Just as he had after the events at Pentecost, Peter is about to skillfully use this miraculous event as an opportunity to teach people at a moment when their hearts and minds are open to receive the gospel.

The story here shifts to Peter using the healing as a way to teach of Christ's power to heal and cleanse and thereby invite people to repent. "When Peter saw [the people gathered and wondering], he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (v. 12). Peter then testifies that Jesus was the Son of God and that he was rejected by his listeners, "whom *ye* delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But *ye* denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto *you*; and killed the Prince of life, whom God has raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (vv. 13–15, emphasis added).¹⁶ Peter's audience will have thought that Jesus died because he was a blasphemous man who posed a threat to the Jewish people (see John 11:48–50; Mark 14:64). In addition, his death on the cross would have been seen as an additional witness that he died cursed of God (see Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Peter needs to help them reframe their worldview and help them understand that Jesus died as a sinless sacrifice and that he has been raised up by God to provide healing to us all.

Peter is not talking to this audience to condemn them, but to let them know that they are unclean and in need of healing. He begins his explanation by reiterating that the power of Christ performed the miracle: "And his name by faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him [Christ] hath given him [the lame man] this perfect soundness

in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:16). Peter compassionately acknowledges that the audience and the leaders of the Jews acted in ignorance, but emphasizes that Christ’s death came as the fulfillment of the words of all the prophets (see vv. 17–18). It is important that his listeners understand that the death of Jesus Christ was foreseen and was part of God’s plan of redemption.

Peter then gets to the central point of his address—he extends an invitation to repent and be converted “that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).¹⁷ His discussion continues and he finally ends with a witness of why Christ came and died, that “God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). The access that the man who was healed now had to the temple through the name of Christ can symbolically represent the access that repentant souls have to the presence of God through “his name through faith in his name.” The physical wholeness of the man through Christ’s power symbolically represented the holiness and spiritual wholeness that is available through faith and repentance.

Wholeness and Holiness in the Torah

The symbolic connection between wholeness and holiness can easily be seen in the regulations about the temple in the law of Moses. This symbolic background from the Old Testament can help us understand Peter’s teaching at the temple more fully. The impairment chapters of Leviticus illustrate spiritual principles symbolically by outlining the strict boundaries about who could officiate and approach the presence of God. The message of the holiness of the temple is reinforced with a focus on wholeness, just as the law required that the sacrificial animals be whole and unblemished (see Leviticus 22:20–25). In Leviticus 21 we read very clear prohibitions against physically impaired priests being able to “come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, . . . to offer the bread of his God, . . . [to] go in unto the veil, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them” (vv. 21–23). Along with excluding the lame and the blind, the disqualifying blemishes include “he that hath a flat nose, or anything superfluous, or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken” (vv. 18–20). Some scholars see in the Levitical regulations about priests needing to be whole the roots of the intertestamental attitudes towards the lame and blind worshippers as also being excluded from the temple. Hector Avalos argues, “By the postexilic period the Priestly code, which may be viewed as an extensive manual on public health that centralizes in the priesthood the power to define illness and health for an entire state,

severely restricted access to the temple for the chronically ill (e.g., ‘lepers’ in Leviticus 13–14; see also 2 Samuel 5:8 on the blind and the lame) because of fear of ‘impurity.’¹⁸

In addition to the limits on the impaired priests to “draw near” to the holiest places of the temple, in the Torah there is another explicit linking of wholeness and holiness for ordinary worshippers. The way in which some physical deformities would certainly have functioned to exclude worshippers as well as priests can be seen in the commentary on genital deformity or damage in Deuteronomy 23:1: “He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord.”¹⁹ Thus eunuchs or others with genital damage would clearly have been excluded from entering into the temple. Isaiah 56:3–5 is a moving passage that looks forward to the day when the eunuch who might say, “Behold, I am a dry tree” shall hear the Lord’s assurance of inheritance and entrance into the temple: “For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give *in mine house and within my walls* a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (emphasis added). This rejoicing that those formerly excluded shall inherit “in mine house and within my walls” is the spirit in which Peter’s healing of the lame man may have been received.

Wholeness and Holiness in the Second Temple Period

The symbolic message of Peter’s healing and the man’s entrance into the temple is informed by both the specific prohibitions in the Old Testament and also by Old Testament passages that later became influential in shaping ideas about ritual defilement and the temple. Along with the exclusion of physically impaired priests from drawing near the altar in Leviticus 21 and the clear prohibition of all men with genital deformity in Deuteronomy 23, there is also a cryptic comment in 2 Samuel 5:8 that “the blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” Some have suggested that this text informed or reflected attitudes towards wholeness and holiness in the Second Temple period. As I mentioned before, the question of the status of the lame in the Second Temple period is a debated issue in the scholarship, and I do not want to definitely claim that they were excluded from the temple during this period. But these insights can help to inform our understanding of the meaning of the events in Acts chapter 3.²⁰ By briefly exploring this text and the influence it had in the Second Temple Period we gain a clearer picture

of how Peter's healing and the entrance of the man who had been healed into the temple would have been understood in its time period.

In its setting in the Old Testament this passage in 2 Samuel 5:8 appears as an authorial aside after a statement by David. "And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." The first part of this passage could also be translated: "David had said on that day, 'Whoever strikes down the Jebusites, let him strike at the windpipe, for David hates the lame and the blind.'"²¹

There has been much discussion of the meaning of this text in the context of the Davidic political scene.²² Clearly the phrase "wherefore they said the blind and the lame shall not come into the house" is a later addition or commentary. It can be seen as an etiological addition, using the past to explain why things are done in a certain way. McCarter argues that this "secondary parenthesis [is] offering an explanation of a practice current in the time of its author on the basis of the events described here."²³

While the phrase "the house" might have had multiple meanings in the historical context of King David, for our purposes it is significant that by the second century BC, when the text was translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the term "the house," which in the original Hebrew might have some ambiguity referring to political dynasty or even David's palace, was explicitly rendered "the house of Yahweh," making it clear it was understood as the temple.²⁴ This evidence from the Septuagint means that this phrase may not have had this meaning during the time when 2 Samuel was written, but by the time it was translated into Greek, "the house" was clearly seen as the temple. This intertestamental understanding of the statement that "the blind and the lame shall not come into the house" is a critical piece in the argument that the lame would have been excluded from the temple during the Second Temple period.

While it is hard to be certain from the Greek translation of Samuel 5:8 exactly what the state of affairs was like in the first century, we do have additional support because the idea of excluding the physically impaired also exists in the writings of Qumran and in early rabbinic texts.²⁵ Olyan notes the influence of the 2 Samuel 5:8 passage on the Temple Scroll (11QT), arguing that the authors of the scroll, recasting "the restriction of 2 Sam 5:8b and elaborating upon it, proscribe the entry of blind persons into the sanctuary-city and associate the presence of such persons with pollution."²⁶ He argues

that this expansion of the prohibition to include all of Jerusalem rather than just the temple is evidence that “in later times, some Jewish interpreters read 2 Sam 5:8b as a text with reference to worshipers,” in other words, that they understood maimed or disabled worshippers to be excluded, not just priests. Olyan sees the broadening of the Old Testament restrictions in other Qumran documents beyond the Temple Scroll (11QTa 45:12–14).²⁷ He sees in this pattern an overarching movement towards a more extreme position towards that which can pollute.²⁸ So the exclusion of the lame and the blind from the temple in practice in the first century seems more likely when those in the Qumran community are taking this biblical basis and projecting from it the entire city of Jerusalem as off-limits to those who might pollute it. Olyan observes that, in addition to the texts of those associated with the Qumran community, “similarly, several tannaitic texts exclude blind and lame Jewish males from obligations to pilgrimage, probably echoing the concerns of 2 Sam 5:8b.”²⁹ These tannaitic texts were written by Jewish teachers, known as the tannaim, in first and second centuries AD.

Thus I think we can have some confidence that at this time the idea of excluding the lame and the blind from the temple would have been familiar to many people, even if we cannot be certain that it was practiced or enforced. The image of moving from profane lack of wholeness outside the gate of the temple and then, as a whole man, entering into the holy presence of the temple would represent the bridging of a symbolic barrier and would illustrate the message of repentance that Peter was teaching through this symbolic action.

While in our day the idea that people with physical infirmities would be seen as unfit for God’s presence seems extraordinarily prejudiced and hard to understand, it is important to remember that under the law of Moses over and over again spiritual truths were taught in symbolic ways, often through ritual impurity and cleansing. And while this particular exclusion, if it did exist in the Second Temple period, was not explicitly a prohibition on general worshippers found in the law, the spirit of the prohibition does make sense in the symbolic universe of the law. John Pilch explains these ideas in a clear manner: “In the Israelite tradition, no matter how the impairment occurred, limited mobility was not the main concern; impurity was. ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’ (Leviticus 11:45, 19:2, 20:26; 1 Peter 1:16). An impaired person was impure, because he or she was not whole or holy (Leviticus 21:18) and was excluded from the holy community (Leviticus 13:46) and its worship. For collectivistic personalities like the ancient Israelites, this consequence of impairment was catastrophic, a type of sociocultural death.”³⁰

How Can We Become Whole and Clean?

Understanding the lack of wholeness that the lame man may have symbolized can help us appreciate how such a healing in the context of the temple could represent how the spiritual barriers to God that were insurmountable in the law of Moses were able to be overcome through Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that the law of Moses very specifically and consistently reinforced the principles of purity and purification from impurity through the concept of ritual impurity. While these ritually impure states were likely designed as types and shadows to point to how sin makes us unfit for the presence of God, ritual impurity was different than not being worthy to have a temple recommend. It would be inevitable that human beings would become ritually impure through the very processes of mortality. In fact, it was specifically those things tied to the power to procreate and arrival of death that occurred as an ordinary part of human life that would make people ritually impure. Menstrual blood, childbirth, seminal emission, and touching dead bodies all rendered people ritually impure on a temporary basis (see Leviticus 12, 15, 22). But each of these forms of temporary impurity also had a means by which individuals could become clean—often some time needed to elapse, they needed to wash themselves, and perhaps make an offering at the temple. Even leprosy, once healed, had a means appointed within the law by which those formerly afflicted could be brought back to the temple as clean (see Leviticus 13–14). The law had within it the means of reconciling these forms of impurity.

The kind of pollution represented by the lack of wholeness of the eunuch or, possibly, the lame and blind, was not, however, something that would pass or could be cleansed through the means established in the law of Moses. Some people were permanently excluded from the temple and God's presence. In his preaching to the people of Antioch, Paul taught that the things that could not be cleansed or forgiven through the law of Moses could be overcome through Christ: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus Christ] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38–39).

We read the same principle in Hebrews: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (Hebrews 10:1). The language of the King James Version obscures some of the power of this declaration that the law cannot make people perfect, even if they come with sacrifices. It is only a shadow of the good things to come in Christ. An alternate translation captures the doctrinal beauty of this passage:

“The Law cannot make whole those who draw near.”³¹ Wholeness comes only in and through Christ. Simon Horne notes that the Greek term for “drawing near” in this passage refers to the Greek translation of the verses in Leviticus that explain how some priests are forbidden to draw near the holiest places in the temple because of their physical impairments.³² In other words, the law’s restrictions for those who are physically impaired itself illustrates its own limitations to bring people into the presence of God.

In his first epistle Peter taught a similar principle of how Christ’s sacrifice transcended the redemption made available by the sacrifices of the law of Moses. It is striking how the language he chooses here echoes his statement to the man in Acts 3:6 “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee.” In Peter’s epistle he compares the redemption made possible by the death of Christ to both the lambs under the law of Moses and to redemption from bondage through the payment of a price. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). The blood of Christ provides reconciliation and redemption that are possible in no other way. Through Peter’s symbolic action at the temple he testified that the blood of the Lamb of God was able to offer redemptive cleansing and access to the presence of God.

Peter also tied together the physical and spiritual healing made available through Christ and his atoning sacrifice in the second chapter of his first epistle. He speaks of Christ’s death as the means by which we can be healed from sins. “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). It is significant that Peter connects Christ’s vicarious death with the hope that we have to “live unto righteousness” specifically in the language of Isaiah 53, “by whose stripes ye were healed” (see Isaiah 53:5). Our confidence that we can be healed from spiritual sickness is rooted in our trust in the power of his redeeming blood.

Under the law of Moses permanent impairments kept people from the temple permanently, but in this encounter in Acts 3, Peter taught that through Christ all could be made whole and clean, worthy to enter God’s presence. The physical illustration with the healing of the lame man was accompanied by his teaching that Christ was raised up and sent to bless us, “in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). Christ did not come to bring us into God’s presence just as we are, but to make us whole and fit for his presence. Just as Peter told the people at the temple that they had killed the Holy One, but also opened up hope

of cleansing and having their sins blotted out, we also need to know that Christ is sent to turn “away every one of [us] from [our] iniquities” no matter how seemingly impossible to change.

Like any who were banned from the temple because of their lack of wholeness, we may feel our weakness and sinful nature will permanently keep us from living lives of faithfulness and entering in the presence of the Lord to inherit his glory. But just as “his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong” (v. 16), we too can have confidence that our infirmities can be healed and we can become whole and holy, fit to enter the presence of the Lord. While we might define ourselves by our spiritual infirmities, they are not a barrier if we are willing to have faith on his name and repent. The scope of this healing power is clarified in President Boyd K. Packer’s stirring promise: “I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the Atonement of Christ.”³³

Peter’s healing of the lame man who suffered since birth with this infirmity can give us confidence that even the deepest-seated inclinations and proclivities to sin can be removed. With this symbolic action, he gave his apostolic witness of the infinite power of the Atonement of Christ. As we trust in this witness and in the power of Christ’s name, we too can receive strength and enter “into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (v. 8). Like the man who was no longer lame, our lives of wholeness and happiness then stand as witnesses. “and all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (vv. 9–10). Our lives of wholeness and holiness will lead us to leap with joy and witness to others of the divinity and power in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Notes

1. For an overview of debate over where the “Beautiful Gate” was located, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 277–78. Some argue that it was the Shushan Gate located “in east wall of the Temple precincts, which gave access from the outside to the Court of the Gentiles and was located roughly where the modern Golden Gate is.” Others see it as the Nicanor Gate, “also called the Corinthian or Bronze Gate, which gave access on the east from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women,” or the gate of rabbinic tradition that “gave access from the Court of the Women to the Court of Israel (the Men)” (277).

2. S. John Roth comments on the connection between Luke 4 and Luke 7: “The importance of the echo of 4.18–19 in 7.18–23 can scarcely be overestimated. It places Jesus’ healing and preaching within the context of Isaiah’s announcement of the ‘acceptable year of the Lord.’ The logic of the narrative may now be seen. In 4.18–19, the audience finds a statement in eschatological terms of what to expect of Jesus’ ministry. The Sermon on the Plain, healings, and resuscitation show Jesus in the act of carrying out that ministry. The scene with John’s disciples (7.18–23) recaps Jesus’ ministry to this point and connects it to Jesus’ reading in the synagogue. Of course, this narrative logic is available only to Luke’s audience, not to characters in the story.” *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke–Acts*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplemental Series 144 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 174–75. He observes, “To Luke’s audience, then, Jesus’ words and actions towards the blind, the lame, lepers, the deaf mute, the dead, and the poor confirm him to be God’s unique eschatological agent of salvation” (177).

3. Roth notes that “the function of ‘the dead,’ ‘the lame,’ and ‘the blind’ in Acts is to assist in characterizing the apostles as prophets who announce Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and display the power of God’s Spirit and Jesus’ name through miraculous deeds.” Roth, “The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor,” 211. For an overview of Roth’s analysis on how Luke uses the character types of the blind, the lame, and the poor, see pages 212–21.

4. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 266. He notes here that Luke uses the terms “the name of Jesus/Christ/the Lord” or “his name” or “the name” throughout Acts and that his use of the term “echoes the OT use of *šēm*, ‘name,’ which makes a person present to another: ‘For as is his name, so is he’ (1 Sam 25:25).”

5. Daniel Marguerat also comments on the importance of healing in the name of Jesus as a witness of the ongoing power of Christ and of his Resurrection: “Therefore, it is to the ‘name of the Lord’ that the healing power, which manifested itself at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, is to be traced back. What is this about? The ‘name of the Lord’ is a concept dear to Luke, one which he has inherited from the Hebrew theology of the divine Name; it designates the sphere of power within which Christ acts in the midst of history. One of the Lukan theological originalities is to trace the miracles back to Christology, via the concept of the Name, and not to pneumatology as Paul and the majority of the early Christianity writings do. The speech of Acts 3 is a nice illustration of this Lukan theological structure: the healing of the lame man is not to be taken as the expression of charismatic power or exceptional piety, be it that of the apostles; *its origin lies in the historical action of the Resurrected One*. Once again, Peter witnesses to the resurrection by discerning the trace of the risen Christ in a historical event.” “The Resurrection and Its Witness in the Book of Acts,” in *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander*, ed. Steve Walton et al., Library of New Testament Studies, 427 (London: T&T Clark, 2011): 175–76; emphasis in original.

6. Andrew C. Skinner, “Peter, the Chief Apostle,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 341.

7. Harold B. Lee, “Stand Ye in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, July 1973, 123.

8. Lee, “Stand Ye in Holy Places,” 123.

9. Lee, "Stand Ye in Holy Places," 123.
10. Marvin J. Ashton, "What Is a Friend?," *Ensign*, January 1973, 43.
11. Heather W. Wrigley, "Elder Holland Tells Ghanaian Saints to Be Their Best," *Church News*, February 21, 2012.
12. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 279.
13. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 279.
14. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Heremenia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 101.
15. For a look at the question of whether the lame and the blind are profaning or polluting, see Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 111.
16. Note the role of the chief priests in advocating Christ's death (see Matthew 27:20). It is significant to contextualize Peter's accusation of his audience at the temple. Here the priests would certainly have been part of the audience given the attention the healing caused.
17. Ravens notes: "One further point that the speech makes is that repentance is required before God will send his Messiah 'appointed for you' (Acts 3:20) and, with the coming of the Messiah, the restoration of all that God has promised. No other NT writer combines the themes of repentance and national restoration as Luke does here, giving them an eschatological impetus. The whole passage is given an even richer Jewish perspective by the use of key figures from Israel's past: Moses' promise of a future prophet and the promise to Abraham of the blessing of all nations in his posterity are both fulfilled in Jesus (3:22–25). The result is that every Israelite shall be blessed in turning from his wickedness." David Ravens, *Luke and the Restoration of Israel*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 119 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 152. Another discussion of Luke's understanding of restoration and blessing through repentance can be found in Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series 9 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 308–12.
18. Hector Avalos, "Illness and Health Care," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 630.
19. "If 2 Sam 5:8b refers to blind and lame (and probably other blemished) worshipers, as I believe it does, it marginalizes such persons by prohibiting their entry into the sanctuary sphere. As I have noted, Deut 23:2 (Eng., 1) is similar in its treatment of genitally damaged men. Whether because of their power to pollute the sanctuary or profane it, blind and lame worshipers of 2 Sam 5:8b lose access to what texts represent as the prime context for the slaughter and distribution of meat, the prime locus for the realization and communication of hierarchical social relations, and the prime site for the worship of Yhwh. The genitally damaged men of Deut 23:2 are similarly cut off. As is true of all who are excluded from the sanctuary sphere because of long-term pollution, removal because of physical defects, whether they are conceived as polluting or not, stigmatizes those removed. They are marked off as distinct from the unblemished of the community, as persons whose appearance is presumably displeasing to Yhwh in the same way that the appearance of blemished animals is said to be displeasing to him in various texts. Like the excluded alien of

Deut 23:4–9 (Eng., 3–8) and Isa 56:3–7, they do not participate in the rites of the cult and therefore experience social marginalization.” Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 113.

20. For an argument against those like Olyan who see the lame and the blind as excluded in the Second Temple period, see Simon T. Thorne, “Injury and Blessing: A Challenge to Current Readings of Biblical Discourse Concerning Impairment” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1999), 273–75.

21. T. M. Lemos, “Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 231; McCarter argues, “David’s aversion to ‘the lame and the blind’ is not, we may assume, simply a matter of personal sensibility, still less of callous convenience or lack of charity. Instead, the remark is probably intended to reflect religious scruples against the mutilation of living human beings, a violation of the sanctity of the body to which David finds killing preferable. To this extent, therefore, the annotator responsible for the parenthesis that follows was justified in associating David’s remarks with the exclusion of the disfigured from the temple.” P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 135, 140.

22. For an overview of political implications of this statement for the Davidic dynasty, see Anthony R. Ceresko, “The Identity of ‘the Blind and the Lame’ (*iwwēr ūpissēah*) in 2 Samuel 5:8b” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001): 23–30. For a focus on the time of David and what the imagery of disability meant in this political climate, see Jeremy Schipper, “Reconsidering the Imagery of Disability in 2 Samuel 5:8b,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 422–34.

23. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 140.

24. “LXX makes it explicit that ‘the house’ thus referred to is the temple, reading ‘the house of *Yabweh*.’” McCarter, *II Samuel*, 136; emphasis in original.

25. For an interesting discussion of the Qumran community’s concerns, see Eyal Regev, “Abominated Temple and a Holy Community: The Formation of the Notions of Purity and Impurity in Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10, no. 2 (2003): 243–78, and Aharon Shemesh, “‘The Holy Angels and in Their Council’: The Exclusion of Deformed Persons from Holy Places in Qumranic and Rabbinic Literature,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 4, no. 2 (July 1997): 179–206.

26. Saul M. Olyan, “‘Anyone Blind or Lame Shall Not Enter the House’: On the Interpretation of Second Samuel 5:8b,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (April 1998): 223.

27. “According to 1QSa 2:3–9, the blind and the lame, among others with bodily imperfections or impurities, may not present themselves in the congregation of the men of renown. In 1QM 7:4–5, the blind and the lame, along with others having permanent blemishes or polluting conditions, are forbidden from participating in the eschatological war. Each of these proscriptions has its basis in particular biblical texts, yet each reflects exegetical reworking of those texts.” Saul M. Olyan, “The Exegetical Dimensions of Restrictions on the Blind and the Lame in Texts from Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8, no. 1 (2001): 38. Olyan’s article provides an important study of the relationship of the biblical and sectarian texts.

28. He observes that “the relatively severe treatment of the blind and the lame in texts such as 11QTa, 1QSa and 1QM is not unlike the treatment of other individuals who

are to be excluded from community and cult according to these texts and others from Qumran.” Olyan, “Exegetical Dimensions,” 50.

29. Olyan, “Anyone Blind or Lamé Shall Not Enter the House,” 222–23.

30. John J. Pilch, “Lame, Lameness,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 564.

31. Simon Horne, “Injury and Blessing: A Challenge to Current Readings of Biblical Discourse Concerning Impairment” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1999), 283.

32. “The word for drawing near—προσερχομαι—is an allusion to the Septuagint version of the Leviticus impairment chapters.” Horne, “Injury and Blessing,” 283–84.

33. Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 19.