

How real is Jesus for you? Acts 3:1-26

Intro:

Read Text: Acts 3:1-26

Is Jesus real?

There's a church answer that is very absolute.

There's a gradient for the rest of us, regardless of where we come from. There are times he feels very real to us- we sense his love or guidance. But then we start thinking about the claim of Christianity, that he actually walked this planet, died and rose again, and we may be unsure. There are days we feel 80% confident, other days where we are at 20% perhaps. At least that's my take. How would you answer the question?

How would you answer the question?

I'd like for us to think about this today as we continue our series through the life of the early Jesus followers... We're going through this book for the sake of identity and guidance for ourselves- individually, and as a church. And there is no more important question that about Jesus. How real is Jesus- His Life, His death and resurrection, His presence today?

This is a huge question, also because of the last 100 years. Various scholars have tried to drive a wedge between a historical understanding of Jesus, and a spiritual one. Known as the Searches for the Historical Jesus, the idea is essentially that since Jesus left his followers have been adding on stuff about Jesus that is not true, and we need to discover the original Jesus, apart from how the church defines Him.

It's a complex yet simple discussion in many ways. We won't get into all the details here. If you want more, a blogging scholar at jesuscreed.org has recently done some good summary work on it all. Our point here, in this passage, is straightforward. I would like for us to focus on two things this passage asserts, assumes, about the realness- both historical and spiritual- of Jesus and his life, and meditate on the implications from there.

Now, before we get there, I just want to say that I am focusing on this because I think it falls in line with our author's intent. This story is the first after the dramatic events of Jesus' commission as he left and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and so I think it's purpose is to illustrate to us in a vivid manner the implications of a life touched by Jesus.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are historical facts.

Now the story doesn't exactly start here, of course. It starts with a healing. Peter and John, two of the apostles of Jesus- there were 12 with this status- were going to the Jewish temple to pray. As mentioned last week, the Christianity when it first started was very tied in with Jewish practice, because Jesus was a Jew and many of the first believers were Jews as well. And so they're arriving to the temple, specifically at the gate called Beautiful. This was probably the gate closest to the Gentile area of the temple, and it was called Beautiful because it was the only gate made of solid brass- the rest were simply overlaid with gold. It stood 75 feet according to historians- so picture it- it was quite a gate.

In any case, this lame and cripple man had just arrived. Strange, it may seem, given that it's 3pm. But it's the time of day when more people tended to gather at the temple to pray, because of a daily sacrifice performed at 3pm, and so there they are.

The man asks for a gift, but Peter and John give him something better. Peter directs his gaze at him- probably to show that he is intently looking at him and not all the other people there- and heals him. Note specifically that it is done "in the name of Jesus"- emphasized here in v.6, and really in v.16. Doing something or saying something in the name of someone, in this culture and throughout the biblical understanding, refers not to some incantation idea, that attaching someone's name to a prayer or action is magical. It refers to doing something with faith in the authority and character of the person evoked (note how v.16 draws this out).

And so he is healed, and people are astonished.

Seeing this, Peter responds, and we come to our point here about the assumption of Jesus' historical realness. Notice how Peter is a bit astonished that the people are amazed, and he's astonished because they all witnessed Jesus "historically," specifically his death. And then Peter assumes that they should understand the historicity of his resurrection, based on his and other's witness to that event. And so Peter, bases his astonishment on this- if you saw and were involved in the historical Jesus in this way, then this should not surprise you.

But there's more:

Jesus' life and identity have theological meaning.

What I mean by this is there are wonderful spiritual truths to be gleaned from the historicity of the person and life of Jesus. Peter gets into this, specifically noting a few things that can be helpful for all of us in getting to know this Jesus. Two things to note:

- First, the various names Peter calls Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth, the Servant (Is. 53), the Holy and Righteous one, the Author of life, Prophet (Deut. 18:15)
- Second, the tie in to the many prophesies about Jesus, made hundreds of years before his coming. Consider...

Descended from David (2:30= Ps. 132:11)

Suffered and died as God's servant (2:23, 3:18= Is. 53)

Rejected stone but capstone (4:11= Ps. 118:22)

Raised up by God (2:25ff= Is. 52:13)

God would not abandon Him (2:24, 27, 31= Ps. 16:8)

God exalted Him to the right hand to wait for final triumph (2:34-35 = Ps. 110:1)

Spirit has been poured out (2:16ff= Joel 2:28ff)

Gospel is to be preached to world (2:39=Is. 57:19)

Opposition to Jesus has been foretold (4:25-26=Ps. 2:1)

People must listen or pay the penalty (3:22-23=Dt. 18:18-19/Lev. 23:29)

Those who listen inherit the blessing to Abraham (3:25-26=Gen. 12:3, 22:18)

- Third, to note: this theological significance is not just for those of Judeo-Christian backgrounds. Important to note: it's not just good truth for those of us who are from this background; it's necessary truth for all of us, regardless of background. Acts 17: 31

This should drastically change us:

- Our actions

Peter and John's faith in healing. I don't think the application is for us to go for miracles like this persay. This was a unique time, and remember signs and wonders done at the Apostles hand's was a very unique ministry (Acts 2:43, Hebrews 4). So I don't necessary mean we have to have more faith to have miracles going...

But there are actions we fail to take with a proper belief in the name- in the authority and character- of Jesus...

- Our speech

Will we share the gospel?

- Our life

Is it truly driven by a real Jesus?

The most basic level: v. 17ff- listen, repent (face a different direction in life)

How real is he?