

WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO GIVE!

Today's Text: Acts 3: 1-26

Extracts:

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them-leaping, and praising God [Acts 3: 1-8]

Delta Airlines operates a daily flight [DL 55] between Lagos (Nigeria) and Atlanta, Georgia (USA). It is a long non-stop flight of almost thirteen hours. It leaves Lagos at night and arrives Atlanta in the morning. Usually, when the plane touches the tarmac on landing, passengers clap- presumably for the safe arrival and perhaps to acknowledge the flight crew's expertise. My wife and I were on that flight on Thursday, 29 December 2011. It was a full plane and there was some turbulence on the way. At about 5.30 in the morning, the plane landed at Atlanta. As usual, passengers clapped. Then, from the middle section, came the strong shrill voice of a young child, "Alleluia!" As I looked back, he could not be more than four years old. Surprisingly, everyone on that plane seemed to have heard him. We all responded, "Alleluia!" followed by a longer applause.

That child could not presumably have paid for his ticket nor travelled alone. Yet he had something to give beyond silver and gold. He reminded the rest of us that the glory of our safe arrival should go to God who is worthy to be praised. He demonstrated that, out of the mouth of babes, God has perfected praise [Matt. 21: 16]. He had something to give and he gave it enthusiastically. We all have something to give but do we?

In this week's Bible story, Peter and John came to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon for prayers. They came across a lame man who asked them for alms. Peter had no money but he gave the beggar something that he actually needed. It is an eye opener for those of us who think they have nothing to give. Let us find out!

1. Background: Peter gave what he had

I recently watched a *Nollywood* movie, *Sweet Pain*¹ (2008) on the *Africa Magic* TV channel. It tells the story of a girl (Josephine) whose mother died while she was about ten years old and her widowed father was dating her best friend. She was the CEO of her father's business. She took out her anger and frustration on everyone in sight. For example, she broke up with her boyfriend that questioned her nasty attitude to others; she could not stand her father kissing her best friend; she was a tyrant to her employees. One day, one of her best managers (Jake) whose father had just died came to request for two weeks' leave to plan for his father's burial, being the late man's firstborn. Her response was most insensitive and uncaring. She denied him his request. There and then, Jake and some other employees hatched a plan to kidnap her so as to teach her a lesson. They locked her up in a dungeon where she would have access only to the barest necessities of life. The kidnappers did not ask for any ransom and police could not trace her. Soon, Jake was able to crack the hard shell of her insensitivity and she broke down and wept bitterly. Thereafter, Jake allowed her to walk away- free.

The following day, Jake went to the office to pack his personal effects, expecting a sack and police arrest. But to his surprise, Josephine walked into his office to inform him that she was not going to press charges and that she was not even going to sack him. She thanked him for opening her eyes to the realities of life. When her father proposed marriage to her best friend, she hugged and congratulated them. She began to pay attention to her staff, both at home and in the office, and thanked them for their contributions to her success. In fact, she and Jake fell in love and ultimately got married!

What happened? Josephine was a spoilt brat who had thought that money was everything. She did not need anything or anybody. Jake could have resigned because she had denied him his request to take time off to go and bury his late father. But he had something to offer his distressed boss. He gambled with his job and freedom. In the end, he got more than he had bargained for. He married a thoughtful and considerate wife through whom he came into wealth and fame.

That story teaches us that Josephine's problem, like for most of us, was ***more of thoughtlessness than selfishness***. Look around you and you will see so many examples. There are some friends that are quite close to you. When they visit you, you are their host. When you visit them, you also play the host! Is it that they have nothing to give or they perceive that you do not need anything from them? How many beggars do you know that give something back to their benefactors? Is it that they have nothing to give? Jesus healed ten lepers but only one came back to thank Him [**Lk 17: 17**]. Was that merely a case of ingratitude or they believed that they had nothing to give back to Jesus? One can never have all the answers. That is why this week's Bible story will serve an important purpose for all of us.

¹ "Sweet Pain" Reviews, March 5, 2009; <http://nollywoodforever.com/sweet-pain/>

The story began at three o' clock in the afternoon [the ninth hour by Jewish time]. It was within the period soon after the Holy Spirit had descended on the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem. Peter and John, two of such disciples, came to the temple to pray. At the gate of the temple, which was called Beautiful, they met a lame man and the disciples' prayer visit turned into something else. Let us develop the story as follows:

a) *A lame man had a problem*

We are told, “[A] certain man *lame from his mother’s womb* was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple...to ask alms from those who entered the temple” [Acts 3: 2]. The man had a congenital problem—he was born lame; he never ever walked. We do not know his relationship with the people who carried him each day and “dumped” him at the entrance of the temple. At any rate, we can infer that the man came from the underprivileged class that used their physical disability to beg for alms. Certainly, the place of worship would be the right place to go because there, you would find those preaching charity and love for neighbours!

If you want to act sanctimonious and believe that you are not like that lame beggar, think again! Most of us are born lame in one thing or the other. For example, you could be crippled by your accident of birth; you could have come as a prince in royal opulence instead of as an abandoned child of an insane mother that lives under a bridge in a busy city slum. You could have been born without enough intelligence to even learn anything, even when you are the heir-apparent of a billionaire’s empire. The question is not what you are or have but what you do with it. The lame man in our story decided to use his disability to beg for alms from those who had legs! Did it matter that some of us with beautiful legs cannot even afford to buy shoes for them? Therefore, we all are poor or have a problem in some aspects of our lives.

b) *Peter gave what he could afford*

When Peter and John were going into the temple, the lame man saw them as potential big givers. They exuded an uncanny kind of joy on their faces. They took confident strides like people of authority. How did I know that? They had just received the Holy Spirit and we know that God did not give them the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind [2 Tim. 1: 7]. So, when he saw them about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. But, Peter, fixing his eyes on him, said, “Look at us.”[Acts 3: 3-4].

Quickly, the young man paid attention because he was expecting something big from the confident “rich” men. What a lucky day for the lame beggar! God was going to butter his crusty bread. But Peter had other

ideas. Peter said to him, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Then Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up, and “immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” [vv. 5-7].

Peter did not have material things to offer the beggar but he delivered something bigger to him. Peter had the gift of Christ to heal the sick [Mk 16: 17-18]. The beggar was expecting money and he received healing that could take him out of begging from then on! Peter could have been afraid to exercise his faith in Jesus but he was bold and unashamed to show those around him that he was a true disciple of Jesus. For effect, Peter used the name “Jesus of Nazareth.” Do you know how many people these days answer the name Jesus? Go to Spanish-speaking countries in Europe and Latin America and hear millions of people called *Jesús*. In Lagos (Nigeria), there was a church leader who called himself “Jesus of Oyingbo”! Peter wanted the Jewish leaders to know that what he had was not from himself but from the Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified!

c) *But what the man got changed his life forever*

The man that was born lame leapt up, stood and walked- and entered the temple with Peter and John. Then he too began to praise God. All the people saw him walking and praising God and “they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” [Acts 3: 8-10].

This man might never have seen the inside of that temple all those years that they brought him to the gate to beg for alms. Now, he could go inside and praise God like everybody else! His life had changed forever.

Can you imagine how Peter felt that moment? By giving to a needy man what he cherished the most, God opened an avenue for Peter to introduce Jesus the Christ to the die-hard followers of the Law of Moses that worshipped in that temple. Among other things, he told them, “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” After reminding them of the “Servant Jesus” that the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” had glorified through His resurrection, it was “His name, through faith in His name” that made the lame man strong and walk again. Therefore, they needed to repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out and times of refreshing might come to them from the presence of the Lord [vv. 11-26]. *Peter gave what he had and it became more than much. How about you?*

2. Lessons for us

The following lessons should be noted, among many others:

a) *You don't know what you have until you use it!*

Remarkably, this was the first of many miracles that God performed through Peter. We know that he spoke in tongues when the Holy Spirit fell on him and other disciples on Pentecost Sunday. We know that soon after that, he preached Jesus and about three thousand converts were baptized in one day [Acts 2: 4, 41]. But when the opportunity came, he used a gift that he might not have known that he had- the gift of healing. The same thing can happen to you.

For example, as a shepherd in the house of Jethro, his father-in-law, Moses carried a rod. When God appeared to and spoke to him in the burning bush, it was that same rod that God turned into a snake. God said to Moses, "You shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs [before Pharaoh]" [Ex. 4: 1-17]. Many years later, after Moses had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to the banks of the Red Sea, there was pandemonium. The sea was ahead of the people and Egyptian troops were pressing hard on them behind. They cried to Moses but all he could give them was his faith in God that would fight for them. As they cried to God, He said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me?... Lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" [Ex. 14: 13-16]. So it happened.

The Psalmist says of the Lord, "By You I can run against a troop; by my God I can leap over a wall" [Ps. 18: 29]. So, why would you, for example, look for a stick to kill a snake that disrupted your revival service instead of using the sword of the Spirit, the word of God [Eph. 6: 17]? *If you do not use your faith, you have none at all!*

b) *Give only what has value*

Peter gave the beggar something that he could afford and yet, it was of greater value to the beggar than silver and gold. In like manner, do not give others thrash, that is, something inferior or of no value to address their situation. When somebody is in a deep hole is not the time to blame him or her for straying. First get him or her out and admonish them later. That money that you are saving for a raining day may be more useful right now to deal with a needy person's raining day because it is God that gave you the power to get wealth- for His purposes [Deut. 8: 17-18].

You may not have silver and gold because you are unemployed but that may give you more time to stay with a sick and lonely family member or

do domestic chores for your overworked spouse. You may be too poor to contribute financially in your church but your musical talents can raise the praise tempo in that congregation to the throne of God in heaven. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you [**Phil. 4: 13**].

c) *But only God knows what is of value!*

As far as Peter was concerned, he only exercised his faith in Jesus to heal the lame man. How would he have known that it was God's plan to use it as an opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ? In our earlier story from the Nollywood movie, how could Jake have known that the wild girl, Josephine, that he helped to tame, was God's spouse for him? Therefore, do not use the eyes of man to put value on what you have done or given to others.

For example, when the young Jewish slave girl that waited on the wife of Naaman, the Syrian military commander that had leprosy, knew about her master's problem, how would she know that the little advice that she gave to her kind mistress would avail much? She offered what she had when she told her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." Naaman's wife took that word seriously and she told her husband. He went to Elisha in Israel and returned fully recovered [**2 Kgs 5: 1-14**]!

In general, we ALL are poor and in need in one thing or the other. Those with silver and gold may lack joy or peace of mind that you can offer in abundance. The physically challenged person begging for alms may have sharp eyes to detect security lapses in the rich man's home. Therefore, do not worry how what you can offer will be seen by your benefactors. They may not appreciate it or thank you for it. But the more human ingratitude you get, the bigger God's reward will be for you.

3. Conclusion: What do you have for Christ?

God gave you His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, to die for your sins. By Him and through Him, all things were made that were made [**Jn 1: 3**]. Does that then mean that you have nothing to give Him? No, you have so much to give Him. Peter told his listeners in the temple in Jerusalem, "Repent... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" [**Acts 3: 19**]. You should also repent and be saved. There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need no repentance [**Lk 15: 7**]. *When you give your life to Christ, you have given Him your ALL!*