

SUFFERING FOR DOING RIGHT

Acts 3

Dr. George O. Wood

We're in the first seven chapters in the Book of Acts. The first of six subsections within the Book of Acts as a whole. Within that, in the first seven chapters, we see the birth of the church, the church at Jerusalem. Thus far, we've looked at chapter 1, which deals with the events of Resurrection to Pentecost, and Acts 2, which deals with Pentecost and the immediate consequence thereafter, the necessity of the incorporation of the new believers, three thousand, into the life of the church. There will not be a solid revival unless there is an incorporation of people coming in. Then chapter 3 and 4 focus upon the third major emphasis within the early part of Acts. That is, the healing and its results.

We know, from reading the description at the end of Acts 2, that already there had been many healings that had been performed. Yet we had not had a single one of them described for us. In fact, in the first seven chapters in the Book of Acts, there is only one healing that is described, only one specific miracle. That's so characteristic of both Acts and the Gospels, to not tell us everything that is happening but to give us the one event through which we best have a window to see into the heart of God and into God's purposes and His dealings with other people.

Actually, the event of Acts 3, the healing and its results, is given specifically because it's what we might call a "hinge event." It leads somewhere. There was a connection made that took a trail within human experience; and it is "hinge" because of the healing of the lame man, the gospel was publicly proclaimed again in the temple courts resulting in a massive new infusion of converts. That healing and massive infusion of converts brought the gospel, for the first time after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, to a hearing by the Sanhedrin. As a result of that hearing,

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we find a temporary imprisonment and, in preparation of that hearing, we find the imprisonment temporarily for the first time of someone in the Christian company. It's the first time in the New Testament era that people suffer. Unlike in the Old Testament, the suffering here will not be something that was wrong. But the suffering will be for that which was right. It is out of that context of suffering and concourse with the Sanhedrin that some events are released which ultimately bring about the terrible tragedy which happens in the New Testament, later in Acts, regarding the death of Stephen.

I talked last Sunday evening about the beggars in our midst that we don't see. I want to just sit on the floor a little bit and be a beggar. We don't look at this text too much from the vantage point of a beggar, do we? We kind of talk about it, but we don't realize what it's like to lay there all day.

Do you realize it's three o'clock in the afternoon and I've been here all day and nobody's taken me to the bathroom? I haven't come in a wheelchair because they haven't been invented yet. And there weren't any ramps, if they had been invented. I'm just laying here. I've been down here, crippled. Look at my feet. I have to show these off because, the more I show off my feet, the more sympathetic people might get and they might give me something as they pass by. I have to let my handicap out for everybody to see it. It's hard being on my own here. Did you know there are animals coming by? There are people bringing sheep and goats that pass me all day long. Do you know what the smells are like down here? They're bad. It's dirty down here, too. There's a lot of dust in the air. They don't keep this place watered with a hose because hoses haven't been invented yet. It's just dirty all day long. People come by and look at me. I have my hand out and I'm asking for something. They're looking at me, but half the time, they don't even see me. You wouldn't believe how many people come by here everyday, because I'm at the

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Beautiful Gate. It is interesting that people never think that I'm down here at the Beautiful Gate. I'm such a contrast to the scenery of this place. They've come with their minds on God and their hearts filled with joy. Some of them are from far places. It's the first time they've ever been to the temple. They come from Rome and Athens. I hear the languages of the earth down here. I don't know them, but I hear them. I'm down here and I'm listening to all this. They're gaping in awe at the Beautiful Gate. People never see me. They're too busy looking at that gate. They're coming by, thousands a day come. I've got some regular customers, some people that come by. I've got some regular antagonists, too, who look at me everyday and say, "Why don't you go get a job, you lazy no-good bum? Why don't you get rehabilitation? Why are you down here begging?" It's kind of tough down here. But I don't really have any options. Thank God, I have some good friends who come and lay me down here everyday and come and get me every night. But I have to stay here. No books to read. I get home at night. I just live in a hovel where there are no lights. It's kind of a dull existence. I really wish it didn't have to be that way, but sometimes people will come by and they don't give me anything. In fact, I've been spit on because the religious people come by and say, "You're there because of sin. Somebody sinned in your family and you're paying the consequences." So I have to sit here all day long and put up with this dirt. I've never been up there in the temple. I'd like to know what goes on there. But I don't worship God. I'm just trying to get through life, a day at a time, and it's kind of boring. It's a long shift out here in the morning. People think that beggars make a lot of money. I'll trade with any one of them. I'll go to work in the shop. They can sit here and beg. There's lousy money in this job. And I don't like being passed over and I don't like being treated like dirt. But I guess that's my fate in life. That's the way it's going to be with me. Nobody's ever going to see me here. And if they did, what could they do? What could anybody do for me? My mom and dad

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are gone. I just have some friends who carry me here. What's going to happen to me when they're gone? I don't know.

But it's just another day, though. Kind of a measly day. Haven't gotten a whole lot today. I've heard some rumblings around here that there've been some special things going on. In fact, there was a prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, just over in the temple grounds a few weeks ago. Some lame people and some blind people were healed. I missed it. I'm down here and I was evidently away from the action. I saw some of them, but I missed it. Some of my friends who saw those things actually happened said, "There must be something more wrong with you because, if you'd really been right with God, you'd have been there. You wouldn't have been missed." There were so many people who supposedly got healed. I hear all those stories, but I don't know if they're true or not. I'm just sitting here. With all these people going by. They're just going by. Nobody ever sees me here. Every once in a while, somebody stops and thinks it's their religious duty, so they give me a penny. Nobody ever gets out a twenty dollar bill. You never see anybody give a beggar a twenty dollar bill. No. They give a penny or a nickel. That's all I get, the pennies and the nickels. Worthless stuff. But it keeps body and soul pasted together and gets me back here for another day. I wish there was a better life. It sure does get boring. Nobody ever sees me down here.

I think that's kind of where he was, don't you? I wouldn't want to be there. The problem with a beggar is that people just miss him. People go by. If I were Peter and John going by, I'd probably miss him too. If you look at the text of Acts 2, you'll find that everyday, every single day, the believers were gathering in the temple to worship. That's explicitly stated in the text. Every day they went to the temple. It's also explicitly stated in the text, Acts 3, that everyday, the beggar was laid there. Somehow, he was being missed with all the activity that was going on. Peter and

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John are coming to the temple. It's three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of prayer. They're still going to sacrifice. They haven't matured completely in their theology. But they'll get there.

So don't worry if you're not matured completely in your biblical doctrine. If you follow the Lord, you'll ultimately get there. What do you think they're doing as they're going through the gate? I don't think—as they're going—they're looking for a beggar. I think they're talking.

Then the text of Acts 3 says a marvelous thing. It says Peter fixed his eyes on the beggar. He looked at him and fixed his eyes on him. There will always be people we will not notice within the fabric of our society whom we will miss, unless somewhere along the way, whether it's on the way to worship or whether it's on the way to work, or whether it's on the way to take a walk around the block, unless somewhere, we take time to fix our eyes on an evident need we've missed before. I think the beggar who lay there, day after day, was a person they walked by many times. Maybe they could even say accusingly to him, "You've missed out on all these opportunities. That's your fault."

That's the stance we often take— isn't it?—as a church. "If people aren't saved, it's their fault! If people aren't touched, it's their fault. They have a responsibility to do something about their own problems. We're going to worship. What responsibility do we have to them? Haven't you heard that in our community there are X number of churches. All a person has to do is go to church or turn on the television set or radio and they can get all the gospel they want. What is my personal obligation to all that?"

Peter and John could have had the same kind of rationale going. "What do I owe these beggars?" But the real beginning of change occurred when they looked at him. That's one of the things we did last Sunday night, as we closed the service. We asked God to direct our attention toward

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people we'd been missing. Others of you have fixed your eyes on people who want to hear the Lord and sing His songs and be brought to His place.

I don't know if you'll have the power of Peter and John to say, "Stand up and walk." But I know one thing. When God directs your attention to something and tugs on your heart, He'll give you the power to do something. It was a great act of faith for Peter to reach out and say to him, as he grabbed his hand, "Come! Stand up." He didn't think of the liability insurance. The consequences of what would happen if he dropped the man back. He didn't have to worry about that within his culture and context. We have to do that today. But he grabbed hold of him and faith took over at that point. God will never do anything in an individual life or a church life unless people are getting out on the cutting-edge, where they look at the need that is there and the resources they have and say, "There must be something that strengthens our resources supernaturally, to meet the need that is there." God always supplies that faith if we'll get out on the cutting-edge.

So the beggar's life is changed. An insignificant person is a catalyst for a tremendous work of God. We would have looked for a different source. We would have said, "If the mayor of Jerusalem, if somebody really important, could just get saved, we'd have a crowd in the temple." With all these funds coming in for the welfare plan of the church, "If we could just get someone saved who is a philanthropist to help us fund all the programs, how marvelous that would be." But God works in strange ways.

One of the things I like about the Book of Acts is the unpredictability, along with the sovereignty of God. You can't explain what is happening in the living church of Jesus Christ by looking at it from straight-line human reasoning. Because God is always looking around a corner to do something you could never have anticipated or expected. It becomes a trigger for something no

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one could have planned. Peter and John could have gotten up that morning and prayed, “O Lord, give us today the key to turn the afternoon worship time in the temple into a rally in which thousands of people are converted. Help us take this city for You.” They would have, never in a million years, envisioned the way God would do it. That He would draw their attention to somebody they walked past everyday and had never ministered to—but they fixed their eyes on him and said, “Walk.”

A beggar in a public place knows who’s coming and going. These are trained human observers. Anyone who has been in any third world country where there are beggars knows this. This beggar was in the same position everyday, at a major spot, a major thoroughfare from the Outer Court into the Court of Women. That was the Beautiful gate. He was an expert of the human scene. I would suspect that he would at least know a little bit about people who were coming past him. And something of the reputation of Peter and John. Everyday they were there. They were preaching in the temple. Christians were there. The beggar had to hear the stir. Knowing that there were miracles that had been reported, he only asked for money. Yet Peter and John didn’t put him down saying, “You asked for the wrong thing. If you come up with the right question, you get the right answer.”

But Peter’s answer is surprising in light of what was going on in the church. He says, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have...” (Acts 3:6). How many times have we repeated that and not thought seriously about what Peter is saying? Do you realize that Peter and John had access to all kinds of silver and gold? They did. What was happening in Acts 2? The believers were selling their possessions and they were bringing them and they had all things in common. We read later, just a few chapters down the road, that that practice of selling everything involved them laying money at the apostles’ feet. Bags full! They didn’t have a banking society like we do

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today, where we would just write out a check and put it in the offering and it would be counted.

We get, afterwards, an income tax receipt for it. All the cash was in coinage, not paper. So, therefore, if you're going to sell a piece of property, you'll have a bunch of coins. If it's a big piece of property, you have a nice bag of coins and you have to bring it to a collecting agency. So the apostles had an appointed time where they sat or stood and people came in and brought the bags of money and were laying them at their feet. They had gobs of money.

And Peter and John say, "Silver and gold I don't have." I say, "Why don't you just tell them we've got a good welfare program at the church and we can get you on it if we get you saved first."

I think their phrase, "Silver and gold have I none," is a reference to the fact that, with all the money that they were administrating, they kept none for themselves. They were meaning to say, "In our own personal possession we have not appropriated that which is for the welfare of the Body. We don't have it. But we've got something better, however, to offer you. In the name of Christ, stand up and walk."

And the man walks. Sometimes, the only thing we can offer a person is our faith in God. Nothing material will really help them. What we offer them, if you don't have the gift of faith for healing—it appears in the Book of Acts to not always be a common gift, it's especially operated through the agency of the apostles, it can operate through any believer, but it doesn't necessarily operate through everyone. Yet it's important when touching those who have needs that we say within ourselves, "God, give me something to give this person that cannot be measured in material terms. Help me, Lord, to do that. Help me to give something that is more than writing out a check." What I have I give you.

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And the man was healed. He'd been paralyzed all his life and, in a moment, he learns to walk and run. That's quite a feat. Any of you remember how long it took you to learn to walk? He learned all at once. Right away. And he was running.

It drew a crowd. Right away, Peter has occasion to stand up and preach. His sermon should be noted by us because it tells us something about the heart of God. The people who are in the temple grounds are the diehard religious people of Israel. Israel then, as Israel now, was made up of secular Jews and religious Jews. People who believed that religiosity was all a matter of culture. And there were other people who took their faith seriously. And the people who took their faith seriously were in the temple. And the people who took their faith seriously were the people who were the most resistant to Jesus of Nazareth. It was to that group, by and large, which had yelled out the words, "Release unto us Barabbas." Now, to that crowd, Peter is going to stand up and preach with the evidence of a healed lame man, right there, confronting them. He says a marvelous word in his sermon. There are a lot of things he says, but I want to point out one in particular. He indicts them with the death of Christ. There's a whole question that comes in social ethics, the question, "Who killed Jesus of Nazareth?" There has been blood liable on the Jewish people. You ask an average evangelical or church-going person, who killed Jesus? And the answer you get, throughout history, is, "The Jews killed Jesus." The Jews as a race. It is very unfortunate that has been used, because it's turned Christian witness off for a lot of Jewish people. As you read the New Testament, you find that no one is ever indicted with the crucifixion of Christ, except those who were directly involved. Everyone else, Jew or Greek, if they are indicted, they're indicted for unbelief. Not for the crucifixion. But this is the crowd in the temple ground that day who had participated in the decision to crucify Him. And it's before

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these people that Peter stands up to preach. He says a marvelous thing among the many things he says. “I know that you did it in ignorance” (Acts 3:17).

We shouldn't gloss over that phrase because it's an important Scripture phrase that comes out of the Book of Numbers. It has to do with the two kinds of sins within the Old Testament law. Sins that were defined as A) Sins of the high hand, and B) Sins of ignorance. It was a precise religious word—“sins of ignorance.”

Sins of the high hand were premeditated sins for which the Old Testament sacrificial system had no antidote, no forgiveness. For example, if you committed a first degree, premeditated murder, you thought in your heart, “I'm going to go out and I'm going to kill so and so,” and you went out and did it, even if you fled to one of the cities of refuge, which was a divinely appointed place of sanctuary, and within that city of refuge you grabbed hold of the points of the altar, called the horns of the altar, and pled for mercy, you could be dragged away from that place of refuge and safety, because your sin of first degree, premeditated murder was not covered under the Old Testament sacrificial system. There was no sacrifice that could atone for it.

If, on the other hand, you had carelessly killed somebody, which was not a premeditated thing on your part, you could run to a city of refuge and you could claim the imposition of a sacrifice for you, and you were safe. It was a sin of ignorance. It was not done high-handedly. It was not done premeditatively.

When you look at the circumstances surrounding the death of Christ, to the people who yelled, “Crucify Him!” to the people who betrayed Him and who called for Barabbas, did they know what they were doing? Was it an act of first degree murder against an innocent person, a prophet and worker of miracles? The scriptural answer is very clear on that. It was a deliberate act. It was an indictable act. Yet, in the first sermon that is preached to the group that is most responsible for

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the death of Christ, and this will be carried through to the Sanhedrin as well, Peter is able to get up and say, "You did it in ignorance." What he is really saying is, "God is willing to treat your sin, not as something of the high hand, not as something which cannot be forgiven, but He is willing to treat you with amnesty."

Do you remember the Vietnam War? Remember how ticklish the subject of amnesty was?

Whether or not we were going to grant amnesty to people who had fled to Canada and other places because they were avoiding the draft during the Vietnam War. The conservatives were saying, "Don't grant amnesty." The liberals were saying, "Give amnesty." It was a humongous political issue in this country.

I look at what we see in Jesus and I find in His representatives, Peter on this day, that he's saying that in the cross of Jesus Christ and the grace of God there is amnesty in the air. His forgiveness is free and total and complete. And that amnesty applies to every single person. If God can grant amnesty to someone who is directly responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, think of what God is willing to do for you and me when we have failed or when we've sinned. And not only when we've sinned un-deliberately, but deliberately as well. He grants that amnesty. "I now that you did it in ignorance." God is willing to think the best of us and to forgive us freely.

There's a great response to that message. There should be. That day, coming into the church, the number of men grows to about five thousand. Some hold that in Acts 4:4 there were actually five thousand saved that day. The text could mean that. Or it could simply mean that now the church has grown to five thousand men. It started out with three thousand in Acts 2, after Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. There were added to the church three thousand. Those three thousand included men, women and children. But now, the church has grown to five thousand men. Or

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about maybe 20 percent of the male population of Jerusalem has now become a believer. But with it, Peter and John are facing a crisis. They are arrested and they are put in jail.

That brings me to the other feature of this message that I want to focus on this evening. If we miss beggars in our life, we can walk past the same person, the same problem day after day. May God use this message to open our eyes to the person sitting there that we don't see because they seem to be part of the wallpaper. And when we see them, may God give us some faith to believe that we have an answer for them. And secondly, if we have failed God in our life (and has anybody not failed God?), God offers forgiveness and amnesty. He's willing to treat our sins as sins of ignorance. Then, the third key thing that comes in tonight's Scripture on this healing of this man is that whatever great work is about to be advanced, leadership will be severely tested. Peter and John are number one and number two leaders in the Early Church. We know that Peter is afraid of pressure. He doesn't like soldiers who come out to do things to him. He has denied the Lord under adverse pressure before. Now, the hand of the police grabs him and he is thrust into jail, along with John, and it has to be for him an exceedingly scary moment.

I think maybe he has some legitimate reason to wonder, "What is going on here? Lord, we just did a wonderful thing today in Your name! This man who was lame from birth was healed and this is the kind of reward we get for doing something right?" One of the things we have to face when we get ready to be involved in the Lord's work, when we give ourselves freely to the Lord and go about doing our thing and really being sincere about it and really ministering to someone, we wind up getting kicked for it. We look at that lay ministry that we're involved in and we say, "I didn't bargain for that. I went out to do something good. There were warm fuzzies in my heart. God was calling me. The Holy Spirit was filling me. I did the work of God with power. And would you believe that the pastor walked down the hall and didn't even see me! Or would

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you believe that the mother of that little kid that I'm teaching in first grade came to me and said that the story I told last week was so scary he couldn't sleep that night and I must not have an accurate view of God! Here I showed up to do visitation and I knocked on the first five homes and there was nobody home. That's how valuable God thought my night was, that He should send me to five places where there was no one home!"

Ministry is like that. It has those aspects to it. We have such wonderful expectations God's going to use us in what we're going to do, and then *Bam!* An event or someone kicks us right in the teeth. We say, "Forget that! I'm going to church and I'm going to hear Pastor Wood teach and I'm going to smile to two or three people, but I'm not going to get too close to any one of them, and I'm going to pay my tithes and I'm going to get out of there. Don't ask me to do anything or be involved. Because you know if you're around a group of Christians, sooner or later, somebody's going to hurt you and do something awful to you." How many times have I heard people say, "A bunch of Christians!" They've gotten wounded in the Body.

Peter and John had to face this kind of thing. They'd done a wonderful thing and the end result of their wonderful thing is sitting in a prison cell wondering about what the future is going to be like and if they're ever going to "have a ministry" again. I would have excused Peter and John for saying, "Lord, if this is how we're going to be treated, forget it. We'll check out now. Glad You let us know early on, Lord, what it was going to be like."

I think people who get in that kind of situation can feel a lot of self-pity. "Lord, it's not fair. We're trying to do something for you." And a lot of worry, "Lord, what's going to happen to all of these people we brought into the kingdom? The church is growing so rapidly and we're so necessary. Who's going to take care of all of these people?" I've looked across these years and

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there have been times I've had imponderables. I've looked back to events that have happened in this sanctuary.

A lot of strange things happen in the kingdom of God. Yet the church is greater than any particular individual personality. Peter and John are going to find out that the church is greater and God's got a tighter grip on it than they think He does. What's happened with them is not going to fall away and dissipate. God's used them to do a great work, but if they're going to go to prison, God's going to take care of the people that He's gathered. He's going to take care of His church.

What's the enemy trying to do with Peter and John? He is trying to destroy the leadership. He's trying to discourage the leadership. He is trying to say to them, "It's useless, and you might as well feel sorry for yourself." He's also trying to get the leadership to look at the future with a great deal of fear. "Tomorrow we face the Sanhedrin. What in the world are they going to do to us?" Fear looks at the future with negativity. Faith looks at the future with hope. The days I find myself getting in trouble as a Christian leader are the days when I look ahead and I see what all could go wrong. And the days I feel best are when I look ahead and see what all God can do that is going to go right.

If the leadership, beginning with Peter and John, can be picked off, then maybe all the leadership can be picked off. There's a special call, I think, that always rests upon the church to pray for those in places of leadership. Whether it's the body of Christ internationally or nationally, or whether it's the local church or whether it's a ministry. Because leadership is constantly on the vulnerable edge.

Peter and John find themselves in such a position. They're called before the Sanhedrin, that group of seventy led by the high priest who sat around in horseshoe fashion, heard their case,

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knew they couldn't touch them because a mighty work had been done, so they threatened them, and let them go. Acts 4 wraps up this sequence of events with a fourth thing I simply want to point out tonight. Peter and John get back to the believers and they are praying. Luke takes the time to give us the content of their prayer, which means that the early believers' prayers were not all free-form. There was some very thought out praying that they did. This was their prayer. Acts 4:24, "Sovereign Lord." That word in the Greek language is a very interesting word. It's a word that doesn't come across well in the English language. The words "Sovereign Lord" is one word in the Greek language. It's the word we translate "despot." A despot, in our vernacular, is someone who is a tyrant, but a tyrant who has absolute control. Autocratic control. The word here is used of God to describe someone who is in total control. Their situation has just been out of control. But they say to God, at the beginning of their prayer, "No matter what it looks like, You are our sovereign Lord." There are simply times in our life we've got to get a hold of those same truths. We've got to say, when everything else around us is chaos and things aren't making sense, we've got to come, somehow, to God and bring ourselves to Him and confess our faith in Him. "Sovereign Lord."

Christians are not accidents waiting to happen. We live in the sovereignty and the divine plan of God. The time when we most need to fall back upon God's sovereignty is the very time when it looks like He isn't sovereign and things are happening that seem hopelessly out of control. It is then that the church prays, "Sovereign Lord."

Then they do an addition in their prayer that never has ceased to strengthen me and amaze me. Because, had I been in the prayer meeting, I would have turned in a different direction. I'd have probably encouraged them to begin praying that the heart of the Sanhedrin would be changed, that things would go a little bit easier. "And Lord, we don't like this imprisonment stuff. And

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things could get a lot worse than just sitting in prison. They could go at us with the real thing, like they went after Jesus of Nazareth. So Lord, next time they go after us and lay that hand upon us, freeze their hand in space! Give them paralysis, Lord. Create a plastic bubble around us so they can't get to us. Send an angel around us to guard us and zap them."

But instead of praying this way, what are they doing? "Grant us, O Lord, boldness to declare Your Word." They're asking God not to change their circumstances but they're asking God to change them. To change them in the circumstances and fill them with new power. Not to change the external reality, but to give them a new power and boldness of proclamation and witness. It's no wonder that when believers pray like that the place is shaken. And a city is shaken. Because, no longer are we letting ourselves wait around idly for something to happen. We're asking God to do something powerful deep within us.

Those seem to me to be the major lessons flowing out of these two chapters. We've covered more ground tonight than we normally do. A healing and its results, a beggar whom we do not notice. Who does that represent to you? The forgiveness of sin that God is willing to treat as a sin of ignorance. What sin does that apply to in your life or mine? Where have we acted deliberately that God is willing to say, "I'm willing to treat that as a non-deliberate sin? I'm willing to forgive that." And how has the enemy been working in the lives of people who have responsibility in the body of Christ? We need to pray for those in leadership. Then when we pray, no matter where we are in life, we need to ask and affirm God's sovereignty—"sovereign Lord." And instead of simply praying for Him to change our circumstances and make life more comfy, we need to pray, "O God, change me and empower me in those circumstances."

Closing Prayer

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Our Lord, we want to focus our prayer again tonight upon the people that are within the tapestry of our life and our community who are basically ignored by spiritual people and by Christians. Their presence has become so commonplace that we do not see them. We pray again, Lord, give us eyes to see and a power to act. Help us to realize, Lord, that we do not always need to go back to the pastor or to a committee to figure out how to do something. But that when we walk with You and see a need, You can also give us the answer and the strength to minister. Forgive us our sins, Lord, in every area where we have failed You or been unfaithful to You. We live in Your grace and in Your amnesty. Protect Your church, Lord. Protect the leaders of Your church, fill them with faith and vision of what You're going to do. Help them, Lord, not to focus on the worst that can happen but on the best of what You're about to do. When the gyroscope of our life is wildly turning and we seemingly have no compass and the events are randomly confusing, at that moment, we pray for grace and strength to call out, "Sovereign Lord!" and to believe in Your power and Your leading and Your guidance in our life. That no good purpose of Yours will fail us. That even though we're confused, You're not confused. You're working deeply within the complexity of life. We thank You for that. Lord, I pray a special prayer for those who find themselves tonight here in great confusion and in difficulty. That You will bless them and cause them to put their trust in You in a new and deeper way. May this moment through which they're passing, rather than being something which paralyzes and stuns them and overcomes them in life, will instead be a stepping stone to a new victory and power in their life. When we've lost our job, You are sovereign. When we've lost our health, You are sovereign. When we've lost on a financial investment, You are sovereign. When we've lost a friend, You are sovereign. When we've lost a child or a marriage, You are sovereign. We believe You for that, Lord. We believe that in all the desperate needs of life You're working on our behalf, and if we'll simply yield

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ourselves to Your mighty hand. Not become people filled with bitterness or blame or self-pity but people who simply become more pliant in Your hands. You'll work out Your sovereign purposes in us. Like Joseph, we'll be able to say, "That which is sent to destroy us instead saved us and made us." Sovereign Lord, we call to You! We pray, not that our circumstances will be made lighter, but that You'll give us the power to live for You in them. In Your name, we lift up this people to You and ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.