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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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### **Feel the Relief as God Gets You to Open Up**

Acts 3:11-21

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Grace and peace to you from our crucified and risen Lord, in whose name we have complete redemption. Amen.

#### **Acts 3:11–21**

<sup>11</sup> Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. <sup>12</sup> So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: "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? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

<sup>17</sup> "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers. <sup>18</sup> But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

#### **Feel the Relief as God Gets You to Open Up**

1. Feel the relief as he opens your mind to the Scriptures
2. Feel the relief as he opens your heart to Christ
3. Feel the relief as he opens your whole self to the restoration of Christ's return

Some people wear their emotions on their sleeve. They tell you what's on their mind and let you know their feelings, without you even having to ask. Sometimes to the point where you wish they wouldn't. Others don't. Other people don't let you know what's going on inside. It's as if they live inside of a plaster-mold of themselves, painted with shades of grey and black. They just won't let you see their true colors.

And for this particular man, it didn't seem to matter what you did, nothing would get him to open up. He was a tough guy. The type of guy that had built up a layer of skin so thick that it would take a chainsaw to even make a scratch. He had it all together; he had all the answers; nothing could hurt him. It wasn't until he was locked up that he finally opened up. It wasn't until he found himself separated from the outside world by plexiglass that the mold was finally broken and he opened up. It was as if the relief was pouring out of him in a multi-colored mix of tears, sorrow, and God's restorative work.

In today's sermon we join that man in prison as we feel the relief. Today, as in every day where we hear the preaching of repentance and forgiveness, God gets us to open up. And he does so (1) by opening our mind to the Scriptures, (2) opening our heart to Christ, and (3) opening our whole self to the final restoration of Christ's return. May the Spirit break through to our heart so that we might feel the relief.

### **1. Feel the relief as he opens your mind to the Scriptures**

They seem to think paralysis is normal. So when this disability is reversed by Peter's miracle, they marvel. They marvel because they do not understand the Scriptures. They are stuck in a shell of false hopes. And God offers no relief for such a mindset.

Such a mindset imagines that somehow the goal that God has for us in this life is to make things better for us. No matter how bad it might seem, God has something better in store. A better job. A better spouse. A better health. A better life. And when those things never seem to come your way, you become despondent; disappointed; doubtful; angry even. Or if things do change and those things you imagine to be better do come your way, you marvel. You get these ideas that this had something to do with you; as if by your own power or godliness this has happened.

And so, they marvel. This man who once was lame is now walking, leaping, and shouting praises throughout the temple. They have seen him carried there – day after day, week after week, year after year – this poor beggar, once unable to even get himself to the temple on his own, was a common fixture there at the gate of the temple. But now look at him!

They marveled because they did not know the Scriptures. And Peter is well aware of what this is like. Peter was among the eleven who were stuck in that upper room, thinking all was lost. They, too, were stuck in a shell of false hope. For things didn't turn out as they had imagined. Jesus did not bring them something better; he brought them only sorrow. He brought them loneliness. He brought them death. They are stuck in a shell of false hope, until Jesus shatters it in a multi-colored mix of promises, prophecies, and preaching.

And he appears to them in flesh and blood, saying, "Why are you troubled?" As if to say, why are you so surprised? And beginning with the Old Testament Scriptures, from Genesis to the Psalms to the Prophets, He opens their minds. For this is what is written. The Christ must suffer and rise from the death – in order that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations.

So why do you marvel? Or why are you troubled? When things go well, when you get that new job, or when your health improves, why do you marvel as if it was according to something we do at all? When things do not go well, when marriage doesn't turn out the way you'd imagined, when your life does not turn out the way you'd imagined, why are you troubled as if God has let you down? Yes, we have shelled ourselves in a mold of false hope. False hope that only God can break through.

Feel the relief as God opens your minds to the Scriptures.

So Peter says, "Why do you marvel? It is not about you. It is not about me. It is all about Jesus. Jesus who was sinless, and righteous. Jesus, whom you delivered to Pilate. Jesus whom you killed in exchange for a murder. Jesus the Prince of life, whom you killed but God raised from the dead. It is about Him. And it is through Him that this man was made whole. But not because God's goal for you is to improve your state of living in this world, but because Jesus is risen, and we are testifying to it. It is all about Him. All the Scriptures are about Him. From Moses, to Elijah, to the psalms, to the prophet like Isaiah and Jeremiah – they all testify of Him – His coming, His suffering, and this is what I preach to you. Jesus."

The Scriptures are not a path to improve your life in this world. Don't marvel at Peter and John or the church or God as if they might do the same for you; and don't be troubled when they don't. The Scriptures are not the path to a better life. They are the path to salvation. Feel the relief as God gets you to open up.

**2. Feel the relief as he opens your heart to Christ**

And once God opens your mind to the Scriptures; your heart will soon follow. For in that understanding that it was because of our sins that Jesus was crucified; and that God purposed this to save us; in this opening of the mind, God also opens our heart.

Peter, of all people, should know the relief. It was Peter who had hid inside the plaster mold painted with shades of dark and grey. There, in the very moments when his Lord and Master was being handed over unjustly to the authorities, Peter's mouth was filled with lies. It wasn't just the people that denied Jesus; it was Peter too.

Peter had thought himself too tough; too resilient. Nothing could get to him. And in his pride, his heart had become closed off. When it came down to that moment when he would be made vulnerable; when the truth about his relationship with Jesus threatened his welfare, he would protect himself behind lies.

The truth hurts. And Peter was trying to protect himself.

The truth hurts because it opens us up. It makes us vulnerable. It reveals what we are inside. We have all denied Jesus at one point or another. We have all been unwilling to step up in the face of threats, to confess his name when it counted, to do what is right for someone else when it means losing something for myself. And when the truth comes out, it hurts.

The pastor came to visit him just before his court sentencing. He was the type of guy that thought nothing could hurt him; but now found himself behind the plexiglass, facing the possibility of losing his wife, his children. And as the pastor began having a devotion, something cracked. He realized the truth. That his own sins had put him here. That his own guilt was something he could not handle. As he confessed his sins and asked for forgiveness, it was as if the relief was pouring out of him in a multi-colored mix of tears, blood, and God's restorative work. The truth hurts, but it also heals.

And the words of Peter were able to break through to the deepest part of his heart: "Repent therefore, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

The truth hurts, but it also heals. It doesn't do us any good to keep our guilt bottled up in side or hide behind a plaster-mold painted with shades of grey and black. This only builds tension. Leads to anger and jealousy, even unbelief. This only builds and builds a thicker coat of grey and black hardness, until it may be, that nothing that can break

through. There comes a point where God gives us over to a hardened heart. Where he stops reaching out and leaves us to realize we are alone. It is the last and final effort of God to break us. To bring us to open up and realize how lost we are. And in this truth, which does hurt, we find healing. We find relief.

Feel the relief in repentance. It is no longer yours to bear. Peter, who had denied his own Lord, is now preaching the very relief that he experienced: “that your sins may be blotted out and times of relief may come from the presence of the Lord.”

Feel the relief coming from the presence of the Lord. Wherever we gather around his promises and his sacraments, there we find the presence of the Lord. There in the presence of the Lord, as a pastor pours water over your head, God brings relief. There in the presence of the Lord, as a pastor hands you the bread and wine, God brings relief. There as a pastor preaches repentance and forgiveness of sins, God brings relief. There as you meet with the pastor behind closed doors confessing your sins – not even plexiglass, or thick skin, or a plaster mold of grey and black can separate you from the presence of the Lord, for as the pastor pronounces you absolved, forgiven, free – God is pouring forth a multi-colored washing of tears and blood and the work of His own Son on the cross for You and He blots out your sins forever. Here in the presence of the Lord you find the relief of knowing you are at peace with God for Jesus sake.

### **3. Feel the relief as he opens your whole self to the restoration of Christ’s return**

Feel the relief. Its a relief to your mind, to your heart, and in fact, to your whole self. The relief this man feels as he leaps and shouts for joy is because he has been touched by the final restoration of God’s return.

That is what faith does. It opens us to be touched by the final restoration of Christ’s return. But God does not intend to touch us all like he did this man. Rather the healing of this man, was to touch us in a much greater way. For we cannot rest our hopes and happiness in how our lives are fairing in this world. The much greater restoration is to be touched by God’s promises.

It is by faith in Jesus’ name that this man was made whole; restored; touched by the power of Christ’s resurrection and return. We have to keep that end in mind. Christ’s resurrection is something to touch all of us; but not in a physical way like this man; rather in a way that relieves our heart; through the promises.

The relief that strengthens us throughout our lives is knowing that a better day is coming. But not in terms of a better job, or spouse, or health, or situation; rather a better day is coming and it is the day of Christ's return.

A day when God will (v.20,21) "send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

When you read the Old Testament you hear this. A breaking of the mold. A opening up of the very world we live, to the start of something new. Throughout. All the prophets witness that God's work of salvation is not just to reveal Christ, remove guilt, but to finally restore us to what He first intended.

The promises made to Israel of a new land, flowing with milk and honey; of a victory over all enemies; of prosperity and a place where God would live among them forever – that was about Jesus – and the day when God will open your whole self to the restoration of His final return.

Let me close with a reading from Isaiah. And keep in mind, that what he is talking about is Christ. The resurrection and restoration of all things as accomplished through Jesus. The final restoration that He will bring, whom heaven must receive until the final time has come.

*Isaiah 35:3–10 (NKJV)*

*3 Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. 4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. ... 10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

It is through such promises that he strengthens us. Like the lame man, it is because of this that we can open up; that we can stand up; that we can run and leap and shout praises throughout the temple – it is because of this, that our relief pours out of us in a multicolored mix of the joy that is ours in Christ Jesus: **Feel the relief as God gets you to open up. Amen!**