

# TIMES OF REFRESHING

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*Presented to Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, January 3, 2016*

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It was a bright new day, for those who were awake, whose eyes the Spirit had opened! And yet it was also a day like any other.

Peter and John were on their way to afternoon prayer in the Jerusalem Temple. Their step was lightened by the Spirit of Christ, for they anticipated meeting His presence in prayer.

Then it happened. It was no more significant than a flicker of the eye. Something caught their attention. Something ordinary.

A man sat at the edge of the street, begging for coins. There could be no doubt of his need, for his crippled legs had never been able to carry his weight. He had been lame in this way since his birth, and his parents, and now his friends, carried him to this same spot every day to collect as much as he could from the compassion of those who attended services in the Temple.

They passed him each afternoon, but today there was a flicker, an almost imperceptible nudge from the Holy Spirit.

Peter paused, and then John. "Look at us!" Peter said, while wondering what exactly he was about to do. The beggar stretched out his right hand, expecting a coin.

Then Peter spoke. John was captivated when he heard Peter's words, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!"

And as he spoke he took the man by his right hand and lifted him to his feet, and in that upward motion the man's feet and ankles became normal and strong, so that the man seemed to leap to his feet!

Astonished, he began to walk and jump, praising God for healing him. He accompanied Peter and John as they continued to the prayer meeting. All those who saw him recognized him as the beggar who sat every day in front of the gate—they were amazed and filled with wonder!

Word spread like wildfire and a crowd began to gather around them. Peter was compelled to explain.

## Acts 3:12-26

<sup>12</sup> And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

<sup>17</sup> “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup> But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, <sup>20</sup> that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. <sup>22</sup> Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup> And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ <sup>24</sup> And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. <sup>25</sup> You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ <sup>26</sup> God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

I have shared this story with you today for several reasons.

First, it is easy to fall into a rut of routine, even in good religious behaviors, and become dull and insensitive to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. When our minds are preoccupied, we easily miss the holy flicker, the gentle nudge that suggests that the ordinary is about to become extraordinary. We may need to regain that spiritual sensitivity.

Second, the importance of routine prayer and devotion may have been lost, or may yet be unknown to you, but it is this that forms the backdrop for those holy moments, readying your soul to recognize the Spirit’s promptings. We may need to restore such practices.

And third, we need “times of refreshing” from the presence of the Lord—as individuals, as a community of faith, and as a band of witnesses for Christ.

I predict that 2016 will bring “times of refreshing” to the church—locally and globally.

- Refreshing “first things.”
- Refreshing “sound doctrine.”

- Refreshing “spiritual experience.”
- Refreshing faith.
- Refreshing hope.

This can mean times of refreshing for your personal life, too—your home, your family, your work.

But they will not fall like ripe fruit from a tree. These times of refreshing will be dug from the soil of our lives like wells. Fruit is seasonal, but wells are perpetual! As the songwriter said, “Spring up, oh Well!”

Just look how the first believers did it:

*Acts 2:41* Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all.

<sup>42</sup> They joined with the other believers and **devoted themselves** to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer.

*Acts 2:46* Day by day **continuing with one mind** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,  
<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

It was their continuing devotion that gave the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work so profoundly. It was their diligent loyalty to Christ that spread the Good News and won the lost. Their devotion traveled along four avenues:

- They were a learning church
- They were a together church
- They were a feasting church
- They were a praying church

## 1. Learning Church (Teaching)

They were a learning church, moving forward, progressing in the knowledge of Christ and His purpose.

Translator and commentator, William Barclay opined: “We should count it a wasted day when we do not learn something new and when we have not penetrated more deeply into the wisdom and the grace of God.”

Surely, this was a measure of the devotion of the Early Church. They sought the Lord, and expected to meet with Him and hear from Him and be used by Him.

## **2. Together Church (Fellowship)**

Not in the sense of “having it all together,” for they did not, even as we do not. And this was more than simply “being together.” They were sharing life together (as a “band of brothers”) as they followed Jesus.

Their life was not a form of communism, for it was voluntary, impermanent, and motivated by love. It was not always communal. But it was always shared—hard times, good times, meals, prayers, and worship. They waited together, and they worked together, for the Lord.

## **3. Feasting Church (Breaking Bread)**

They had much to celebrate, and they took it seriously. Their feasts included both the Lord’s Supper and common meals, for in the Jewish sense those were one event, as the Mishna describes:

*Rabbi El’azar ben-’Azaryah said, “... If there is no meal there is no [study of] Torah, and if there is no [study of] Torah there is no meal.” (Avot 3:17)*

They came together frequently, in large groups and small, to “serve one another in love.”

## **4. Praying Church (Prayer)**

They waited in prayer for the Lord’s promise, “Not many days from now you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” They continued the Jewish practice of daily prayers. And in the face of persecution, they met to pray. Doubtless, this included both formal and spontaneous prayers, as they shared their needs and encouraged one another’s hope.

Praying together!

Luke recorded that they “continually devoted themselves” to these things. This phrase translates a single Greek word: *proskartereo* [pronounced pros-kar-ter-EH-o]. It is a two-part word, from *pros* (facing towards) and *kartereo* (strong, enduring), suggesting an enduring (persevering) relationship, as in a godly marriage.

James Strong offered these definitions:

1) to adhere to one, be his adherent, to be devoted or constant to one. 2) to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a person or thing. 3) to continue all the time in a place. 4) to persevere and not to faint. 5) to show one’s self courageous for a person or thing. 6) to be in constant readiness for one, to wait on constantly.

This describes what I have called diligent loyalty.

As I thought further about this word, devote, I considered the Latin etymology of the word.

“Vote,” as you know, is a noun that means: “the right to indicate a choice in an election.” It is also a verb that is used to express a “wish to follow a particular course of action.” It comes from the Latin *votum* (a vow or wish).

“Devote” is derived from two Latin terms: *de-* (formally, completely—as in denude) and *vovere* (to vow). It is a verb that means to “give all or a large part of one's time or resources to (a person, activity, or cause), to consecrate.” To vow completely (this is helpful to our understanding).

But there is yet another way to look at the origin of the word, devote. Again, as a two-part word from the Latin, but this time reading *de-* (off, away—as in degrease) and *votum* (express a choice). In other words, it is putting off or giving up the right to choose. This is full submission.

Indeed, when we choose to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we choose to cease choosing for ourselves, and submit to His choices for us. This is devotion.

I always remember the words of Andrew Murray, which I first read so long ago: “God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life *wholly yielded* to Him.”

And the words of missionary Jim Elliott: “God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with him.”

Such diligent loyalty was first seen in Jesus, as He pursued His Father's will. He said, “I only do those things I see the Father do.” And, “I only speak what the Father command me.” On the brink of His greatest trial He prayed, “Nevertheless, not what I want, but what You want be done.”

It was also the example of the Early Church leaders, even before they were baptized with the Holy Spirit: “*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers*” (Acts 1:14). So it is recorded of them.

I wonder, will it also be said of us?