

THE SERMONS, LECTURES AND SONGS OF SIDNEY EDWARD COX

Acts Chapter 3

The First Activity of the Christian Church

Editorial Note: From 1956 - 1960, Sidney and Violet Cox lived in Miami, Florida. Sidney was on the teaching faculty of the Miami Bible Institute, teaching courses on the New Testament.

As always, during this period, Sidney was often invited to preach and teach in surrounding churches and to other groups. This was an occasion where he was asked to fill the Sunday morning pulpit of an unknown local church while their pastor was away. His introduction describes how he took one of his lectures on Acts Chapter 3 and crafted this sermon.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney and Violet Cox. February 2009.

It's nice to see you all again and have the fellowship with you in this building. I was going to say your new church, but it's hardly that, is it? But in your place that is, can be to a certain extent at any rate, called your own. And it's nice.

We've been looking forward to the first chance that we would have to fellowship with you. It's so seldom that we do have a time like this. And I was so glad it could be arranged this way. I'm not glad that your pastor's away. I wish he was here. But, I am glad to be able to just fit in on an occasion when, perhaps, the need is here.

I want you to turn with me, please, to the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. And if any of you are in my class in Acts in the school, I want to offer to you the explanation that what I asked our students to do, I'm going to do it myself this morning. Very frequently, in the course of a Bible lesson that we're taking in the normal movement of things at the school, I so frequently stop and say, "Now, that would make a good sermon. There's a good outline. Now, be sure you not only learn this for the sake of a test that's coming on, or something, but be sure to use that. One of these days you're going to be out and have your own congregation. Here's a good message. You can use it yourself." I said that about the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. And now, I'm going to do for this morning what I've asked our students to do, and to bring it to you as a message in a morning service in church.

Now, one of the wonderful things, we'll read a little bit of it in a moment or two, one of the wonderful things about the Acts of the Apostles is this, that all the way through, you find yourself facing first things. Things we haven't seen before. First things. Right from the very beginning of it you find first things appearing.

For instance, when you get into the second chapter, which of course is the key, the turning point in it all, when you get into the second chapter, there you find yourself facing this – the first appearance of the Christian church. A new baby is born in the beginning of the second chapter of Acts. And what a baby it is. It was a baby for whom the Lord Jesus Christ gave His own precious blood, His church, the body

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of Christ.

We find the first appearance of the Holy Spirit in this remarkable way in this section. Hitherto _____ upon people. Now, He comes to dwell within and to take up His abode within, just as our Lord Jesus said He would up there in the 14th chapter of John. “When He is come He shall be with you and abide within you.”¹ That was something new. Hadn't seen that before. Now, He is abiding within.

We hear the first sermon of the Christian era. And we find the man upon whom the cloven tongue of fire rested, in whose ears he had heard the sound of the mighty rushing wind, and had felt that strange thing that must have happened in that upper room – the blending of 120 people into one body. I sometimes wondered whether John, what they felt like in that moment when this tremendous thing happened. Now it's true that they were of one accord, of one mind, in one place before. But when the Holy Spirit came, they were then of one accord, in one mind, in one place, in an entirely different way. Never to be separated again. Here they were, members of one body. And one of the men upon whom the cloven tongue of fire had rested preached the first sermon of the Christian era.

Now, you see the first ingathering when the Holy Spirit is in charge of things, and three thousand are gathered in. They haven't seen anything like that before. Not at all. You'd find a lot of folks that would gather together to eat loaves and fishes, but this was an entirely different thing, wasn't it? It was something else. Now, we've seen the first gathering together of these disciples, now one. Into one family, so that all they have was in common and they all shared a life, one with the other. This is the first appearance of it. Now, when you get beyond that second chapter into the third chapter, you find what is the subject of our message this morning – the first activity of the Christian church.

What is this new Christian church going to do? Is it going to stay up there in that upper room? Is it going to stay in Jerusalem? Is it going to be together as a body all the way through? What's going to happen now? Where will it really begin its activity? What will be the first task facing the Christian church? We're going to see its hand outstretched. Where? We're going to hear its voice. Where? Under what circumstances will we hear this voice of the Christian church? Where will we see its hand outstretched? Now, that's the story of the third chapter of the Acts.

Let me read a verse or two and then we'll go and talk about it. “Now, Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer being the ninth hour.”² Now, let's stop right there, because there is another new thing. Now, we've seen Peter and John, and especially Peter and James and John together many a time before. But we have never seen Peter and John working together before. Remember, that before you walk together, you have to think together. How can people walk together unless their thought is together and their hearts are together?

And we say this with some hesitation, but it's quite true, Peter and John had never walked together before. Oh, they had been together. They've been together in an upper room. They've been together on the Mount of Transfiguration. They've been together nearest to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. They've stood looking in the doorway as Jesus raised a little twelve year old girl. Oh, yes, they'd been

1 John 14:17

2 Acts 3:1

together many and many a time. But listen, there is a difference between being together and walking together. Oh, yes.

Now, if you have any doubt as to whether Peter and John had walked together before, you stop a minute and go right back to just an hour or two before our Lord was received up back into glory again. And the ascension took place and they were standing there by the shores of the Lake of Galilee, and you hear old Peter saying in spite of the fact that our Lord had just said to him, “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.”³ And yet in spite of it, you find Peter saying, “What about this man? What are we going to do about this man? What about this man? Are you going to leave him down here? What about this man?”⁴ And our Lord had to rebuke him and put him on one side and say, “If I will that he tarry til I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.”⁵

And Peter and John, they had been walking in the same direction, but now Pentecost had come. And instead of two men walking in the same direction, this is what had happened. You see? And they walk side by side. Now, that's the first thing. One of the first things that you find in the outward expression of the Christian church following Pentecost is that men who had never walked together before, now walked side by side. Now, that's the first thing.

But you know, it's one thing to walk, it's another thing to walk in a certain direction and with a certain purpose. Where were they going? Here we find the Christian church is moving now in the person of two men walking side by side. This is the Christian church. Pentecost is over. The day had gone. The sound of the mighty rushing wind isn't heard anymore. There are no cloven tongues of fire anymore. Two men walking side by side. This, my dear, is the Christian church. Now, you watch it and see.

Where are they going? Where? They are going in the direction of God's house, which is a house of prayer. And they were going for that purpose. The first outward movement of the Christian church is in the direction of the house of prayer for the purpose of prayer. Now, you see two men going and whenever you can find two men walking side by side going on a purpose like that with the Holy Ghost dwelling within their hearts, you can be quite sure that something miraculous is going to happen. And it did. It did. Now, let's see what did happen.

“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 of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, ‘Look on us.’ And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.”⁶

Now, I want you to notice something. Here is the first activity of the Christian church. Where did it begin? In the temple? – oh, no. It began outside the temple.

The Christian church did not begin its activity in the temple, it began it outside of the temple. Now, what kind of a person do we see, as the first active contact of the Christian church with those who were

3 John 21:15,16

4 John 21:21

5 John 21:22

6 Acts 3:2-5

outside of the temple? What kind of a person is he, this one? He is a man lame from his birth. The Christian church, my dear, began its activity outside the temple and it began it with the representative of lame, impotent humanity. Now, that's where the Christian church began, and would to God it had stayed there. Now, that's where it began. Not with the religious crowd. Not with the _____ of the church. Not with the beauties of old church worship, not at all. It began with an impotent man who sat outside.

Now, the question that faces us is this, what does the Christian church have to say and have to offer and what can the Christian church do to a man like that? Now, we're going to see something here. Because we're going to see the Christian church at work and we're going to see what the Christian church does have to say to a man lame from his birth. Impotent humanity is lying here in the person of this man.

Now, before we stop and ask what does the Christian church have to say, let's stop and ask what Judaism had had to say. This man had been there from his birth. I don't know how old he was. He'd probably be 40, maybe more. And here he'd been there all this time, right there in the usual place by the beautiful gate of the temple. Priest and scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees and the higher brackets and the lower brackets had all passed him by, every last one of them. And the only thing they'd ever had to say to him was to maybe occasionally; and I don't suppose this was very often, because remember they were Jews; I don't suppose this happened very often, they flipped a thin dime into his tin cup and went right on by. And that was all that Judaism had had to say to him for 40 years. Not one single word. There he was, exactly the same. And all the pomp and ceremony of Judaism had gone circling around him and not one word had ever come to him with any hope for his impotence. Not one. Now, we know that.

But is Christianity like that? Is the Christian church like that? What does it have to say to a man like that? What will it do with a man like that? This is the first activity of the Christian church. Let's watch it and see what happens.

Now, you will remember that in the words that I read to you that when Peter and John approached this man and Peter spoke to him there, you will remember, who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. And now watch.

“And Peter fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, ‘Look on us.’”⁷ Now, we're going to watch something here. Remember, that the Christian church does not operate on worldly principles and with worldly material. God can get along without worldly values of any kind. God isn't dependent on dirty dollars to do his work, not at all. Now, the reason I say that is this. Because you've got, first of all, to notice that before the Christian church does something, it puts something on one side. You remember that Peter and John said to this man, “Silver and gold have we none.”⁸ Now, here are the values of the world set on one side. That's what the world operates on. That's the standard of value of the world, is silver and gold. Anything that the world does or touches or builds can all be reduced down to silver and gold.

7 Acts 3:4

8 Acts 3:6

The big question of the church and the world, no matter what it is, and especially when the world has got the church is: how much, how many, what's it worth? Now, when the Christian church is going to operate, it's going to set that on one side. The Christian church does not operate on the basis of the world and its principles and its values and its gold and its silver. It works on another basis all together than that. Gold and silver are alright in their place, but their place is paving stones. And I can tell you a place where gold and silver will make fine paving stones someday. But God doesn't use them. God doesn't use them. Now watch.

One of these two men who were there and who said, "Silver and gold have we none," one of those two men wrote a letter. And in the letter he said this, "We are redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold."⁹ What's the matter with silver and gold? It's corruptible. It's got the mark of death upon it. For that's what corruption means. It has the mark of death upon it. It belongs in a different realm all together to where God operates. God doesn't use anything that has the mark of death upon it, not at all. And here it is. And God is going to use something else. Silver and gold has got to go.

Well now, if silver and gold has got to go, what does the Christian church have? What? What does it have in the place of it? Well, now you will find three things, and I want you to see them here. "Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. 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."¹⁰

Now, I want you to back a verse or two and watch this.

"Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, 'Look on us.'"¹¹

Now, I want you to notice that the Christian church has three things to offer. Silver and gold is out. Three things. One is this: it has the blessed old formula, and I say that thoughtfully, the blessed old formula of look and live. Now, you'll find it coming out again all the way through.

Let's go back to the wilderness one day, when the children of Israel disobeyed God, had brought themselves under the condemnation of God and dreadful things were happening all the way through. Moses lifted up a serpent in the wilderness. And all they had to do: listen to it, was to look, and live. And Peter and John said, "Look and live." Look, look. It's the old-fashioned, old time formula of look and live.

Do you know the most difficult thing that God has to do with anybody, with you or anybody else, is to get you looking in the right direction. The most difficult thing he has to do: look, look, look. He's saying it all the way through. All the way through. Behold, behold, behold, behold, behold. Before John the Baptist could get to first base with his methods, he had to say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."¹² Behold, behold, behold. And one of the last words of the scripture:

9 I Peter 1:18

10 Acts 3:6,7

11 Acts 3:3,4

12 John 1:29

“Behold, behold. I stand at the door not.” Look, look, if only you could look, God would get you. And the world knows that and so it reaches out its hands in a thousand different directions in order to capture our eyes. If God can get your eyes, he can get your heart.

Now, that's the first thing and that's the first move along the line of the Christian church in its activity. We've got to capture the eyes of somebody. We've got to present Jesus in such a way that men will not only believe in him theologically, but out of the depths of their hearts they will say, “Isn't He wonderful?” You see? That's the thing that's needed. Now, let's look at it again.

They had something else. They had the power of a name. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” Now, there's the old formula of look and live. They had the power of the name. And you know, you cannot estimate that. You cannot measure that. Into this marvelous golden crystal vessel of the name of God, and God poured all of His power and all of His grace and all of His mercy, and gives it to us and says, “You take this up before sinful humanity. You take this to this man lame by the beautiful gate of the temple. Take this up there. This is what you have, the name, the name.” And all you have to do is to just turn your eyes back over those blessed Old Testament scriptures and you will find like the sound of golden bells this name appearing all the time.

When David wrote that 8th Psalm, he said at the beginning and the ending of it, “Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.”¹³ And in that blessed beautiful little envelope Psalm that begins and ends with exactly the same word, for that's what an envelope Psalm is. It's one that begins and ends with exactly the same word. And here in this thing he says, “Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.” Now, it was David who said that.

And David knew the power of that name, for one day he faced as a boy, he faced an enemy, flesh personified. Nine feet, six tall with a spear like a weaver's beam. He faced him. And when this stripling of a lad with his sling and his stone faced the giant, he said to him, “You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.”¹⁴ You see?

And the Christian church has yet to discover the height and depth and power there is in the name of the Lord Jesus. We have yet to discover it. The Christian church has been fumbling around on the edges of it for 1950 years. It has never gone down into the depths of it, never. We have yet to discover what God poured in to this name of His. Now, the Christian church has that.

Now, the other thing that the Christian church has is a strong right hand. Did you notice it? He put out his right hand and lifted him up. And once more, the Christian church still has a strong right hand to offer to fallen humanity, down in the depths of its impotence and helplessness. Here it lies, a strong right hand. “And he took him by the right hand and lifted him.”¹⁵ That's the Christian church in action.

The Christian church can put aside silver and gold and get along quite well without it. The best work the Christian church has ever done, anytime, anywhere, has been when silver and gold and their value

13 Psalms 8:1,9

14 I Samuel 17:45

15 Acts 3:7

has been left on one side, and when God was trusted to do what God can do, and only God can do. That's the first thing.

We've got the blessed old formula of look and live. And we go everywhere telling men, "Look and look and look." As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so much the Son of Man's been lifted up. Whosoever turned his eyes in that direction will find power beyond measure, flowing into his body, like this man did. I think something happened to him when he took a good look at these two representatives of the Christian church, for they were the Christian church right then. Where were the 120? We don't know. But we know where the two were, and that's the important thing, isn't it? We know where they were. They were sure there. They had the power of the name, with all of its power and all of its authority.

And they had the strong right arm. You remember what it said of the Lord, "He is at my right hand. I shall not be moved."¹⁶ Now, the right hand of God with all the power and its strength, He has bequeathed to the Christian church and says now, you go out and you use, not your own right hand, but you use my right hand. And the Christian church has that. I don't wonder that the man rose and leaped and sang and shouted, and that there was great consternation and that the Devil suddenly stirred up (inaudible) or someplace else to stop this blessed thing, and they got these people to put them into jail immediately. Well, of course. Of course, this has got to be stopped....(inaudible).. that kind of thing....it doesn't fit into it at all. You can't reduce that down to statistics. What kind of a revival would this be? There was only one man saved. (Inaudible)... revival. You couldn't write up about that, could you? You've got to have a crowd, or have you?

But the Christian church didn't begin with a crowd. It began with one man. And it didn't begin in the temple, it began outside of it. And it didn't begin with a top notch man, it began with one that was right at the lowest end of the human scale. It began with an utterly impotent man. And the Christian church had three things to offer to him - the power of a name, the blessed formula of look and live, and then the strong right arm.

It makes you wonder sometimes, what has happened in the meantime? Let me ask you, how much of that kind of thing do you see these days? Where has the might of authority gone to? Where is it? In God's name, where is it? (inaudible) that gives us the right to say to an impotent man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Where's it gone? I wonder. But it was there in the beginning of things.

And the very first touch you have, the very first picture you have, of the Christian church is of two men who knew what to do with the power of the name of God, and whose strong right arms were stretched out, and who despised silver and gold, and who captured the eyes of the man. And out of his darkness, into the light he came. And out of his impotence, into strength he came. Of course he did. That, my dear, was the first activity of the Christian church.

Now, I'm going to stop right there. And I think, perhaps, that's the time and the place where God would have us to stop just at this time, so that without putting anything else around it we can give our thought.

16 Psalms 16:8

Remember, the thought of your heart is much more important than the thought of your head, when you come to that sort of thing. And we can give our thought to this, and perhaps our prayer as well.

Our Father, we pray that thou will take this word and in some way use it for Thy glory. In Jesus name, Amen.