

Great Big God, Great Big Us

Bible Passage: Acts 3:1-10

Speaking Time: 8-10 minutes

I was asked to speak on Acts 3 & 4. There's *a lot* that happens over those two chapters, including Peter scolding the crowds for rejecting Jesus, getting arrested, then released, getting ordered by the high priests to shut up forever, refusing to back down, and then the whole church praying so hard that the building literally shook!

I was also asked to keep this week's sermon short, as many of us have a busy day ahead. Just as well then. I can leave all the drama on the shelf and focus entirely on just ten verses, the opening story.

You probably know the song, *Our God is a great big God*. Today's sermon is about that bigness—and another kind of bigness too: the bigness of **us**. It's all there, in Acts chapter 3, verses 1 to 10.

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to your greatness today. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts draw us closer to you—and to one another. Amen.

Have you ever felt small? Perhaps diminished, belittled, or disparaged?

It's wonderful when we have people in our lives who encourage us to grow and dream big. But so often, there's another voice in our culture—one that quietly tells children and adults alike to stay small. We hear it in subtle ways: Know your place. Stay under the radar. Don't draw attention to yourself. Fit in, wear what everyone else is wearing, don't be weird, and above all—don't embarrass yourself!

Fear can keep us small, as can appeasement. Even with the best intentions as parents, when we tell our kids to 'just be grateful', there is a whispered undertone of, 'settle for less'.

Asking for more—like Oliver Twist holding out his bowl—takes courage. But you know how it went for Oliver! It's often easier to stay quiet, pacified by a new phone app, a bit of extra money, or just scraping by for one more day.

Before I knew Jesus, I actually thought Christians scraped by. My prejudice told me they were all small-minded, dull people—frightened of the world, limited by rules, and incapable of any kind of greatness. I worshipped at the altar of capital-S Science and Enlightenment thinking. I lived under the dual belief that only Scientists and Artists were capable of greatness, and that such people were, of course, all free-thinking atheists. Religion was for small minds.

It was only when I *actually met* true Christians—and especially when my own life fell apart and I turned to God—that I realised the exact opposite was true.

It was *my* world that was small. I lived a fear-filled life masked by arrogance and disdain. As the seed of my faith grew, my life became bigger, deeper, and freer than I ever imagined. And I found myself being drawn more and more deeply into Christian community, where I began to realise true greatness wasn't characterised by cleverness, hubris and bluster; instead it was humble, mysterious and unfathomable.

When we read about Peter, John, and the man at the Beautiful Gate, we are reminded of the sheer, breathtaking **bigness** of the Christian faith. It is not big gesture though; but big courage, big hope, and astounding kindness which shines through every gesture, every action. Its power comes from the love of Jesus Christ—lived out together in community.

Our man at the Beautiful gate was trapped in a small life. He had been unable to walk from birth. Every day, he sat at the temple gate holding out a little cup, asking for spare change. He thought a few tiny copper coins were the best he could ever hope for. A tiny, making-do life.

Then along came Peter and John. And everything got **BIG**.

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Picture the scene. The temple was bustling, and the man invisible. Most people walked past him, looking down at their shoes or looking away.

Why? Because engaging with someone who is struggling, or different, or living on the margins feels uncomfortable and awkward. It's easy to shrink back, to go along with the crowd, to endorse exclusion through silence. Standing up for the outsider, for what Jesus calls "the least of these" takes **big courage**.

Look at what Peter and John did: "*Peter looked straight at him, as did John.*" And then Peter said, "*Look at us!*"

They didn't hurry by, they didn't look away. They locked eyes with him in a bold, fearless gaze. Before they said another word, they gave him a big gift: dignity. Their eyes declared, *"I see you. You matter."*

We don't need money to give someone dignity. We need something far more precious. We need love—we need the kind of love the Greeks called *agapē*: unconditional, divine love. It takes big courage to look the lonely classmate, the awkward co-worker or the homeless one, gently, but directly in the eyes and say, *"I see you."* That bold look costs nothing, but it changes everything.

The beggar held out his cup expecting a small coin. But Peter said:

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Peter and John in their new way of life, lived hand to mouth, so had no coins to spare. But they possessed something infinitely bigger: the massive, life-changing presence and power of Jesus.

Jesus once said, *"Suffer the little children to come unto me."* Why? Because children naturally understand what adults so easily forget: the wonder of just *being*. Think back to before *stuff* took over your life—before you felt you *must* have a phone, a gadget, or the right clothes. What did you actually need to be happy? Love, warmth, connection, joy.

We pile up stuff thinking it makes us rich. But real wealth isn't in a bank account, a wardrobe full of designer clothes, a dresser full of jewellery or a new car. This is the small life: a life of fear where a downturn in fortune would mean the loss of all our treasures. The more we embrace Jesus, the bigger our lives become, and the more stable. Real wealth is the massive grace of God inside you—and no outside force can take that away.

Peter reached out, took the man by his right hand, and pulled him up. Instantly, his feet and ankles became strong. He didn't just stand up and limp quietly away. The Bible tells us he jumped to his feet, began to walk, and went into the temple courts with them—*leaping, dancing, and praising God!*

In the Bible, there are two wonderful words for salvation that explain this BIG miracle. In the Old Testament we find the Hebrew term **Yeshā**, which means freedom

from whatever restricts or binds you. Interestingly, *Yeshua* is the root of the name Jesus, meaning One who breaks our chains. Jesus came to set us free, quite literally.

The second term for salvation is the New Testament Greek word **Soteria**. More than simple safety or spiritual deliverance, this word refers to whole-person recovery, complete restoration, and holistic health, mind, body and spirit.

God didn't patch this man up so he could stumble and scramble by. He brought to him *Soteria*—a big, holistic regeneration of his entire life.

And here is the secret: when we surrender everything to God—when we give up our small, self-centred lives until it feels like we have nothing left of self—that is the exact moment our true life expands. Nothing is small in God's world. When we give Him our small selves, He gives us back a BIG, authentic, joyful life—no matter what. This is not theory, this is witness.

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When I first received my cancer diagnosis back in May, my world felt very small. My hope felt small. A medical diagnosis can make one feel cornered. It was as if my story had already been written and shrunk down to a few lines on a page.

I decided I would not accept that smallness. I had no reason to let some random doctor write my future. Instead I would hand over my life to God, and the first step in that handoff was to be a **big** step. Share the news with everyone I knew. Be unafraid.

And then something wonderful happened. My friends, my family, and fellow Christians came into community with me. They surrounded me with prayer, asking God for a miracle. And as they gathered around me, my faith didn't stay small—it grew! With every prayer, with every person standing with me, my hope became **BIG**.

Asking for a miracle and trusting God when the odds are stacked against you isn't defiance—it is **BIG hope**. It is looking reality in the eye and declaring that our God is bigger than any diagnosis, bigger than any restriction, and bigger than any fear.

Only God is in charge of the outcome, of course, and the future remains a mystery, but for my own life, I am in charge of the process, and with friends in community I am supported in doing whatever needs to be done. I rise, I do not fold.

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Do you believe in miracles? I do.

Miracles aren't ancient history confined to stories like that in Acts chapter 3. The God of *Yesha* and *Soteria* who brought big healing at the Beautiful Gate is the exact same God holding us today.

When you face big mountains—whether at school, at work, or in your own health—don't shrink back into a small life. Reach out to your community, pray bold prayers, and step into **BIG faith**.

We are not called to be small, quiet, or cowardly. We are called to be the bold and the brave—reflecting the expansive, unstoppable love and hope of Jesus Christ to everyone we meet.

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You may have detected the answers to those four questions while listening this morning, but this is church, not school. You won't be quizzed or graded—and no one wins, except all of us. Instead I'll wrap up with a quiet call to action:

This week, don't shrink back into a small life. Be brave enough to look people in the eye and give them dignity. Remember that real wealth isn't in your purse or your bank account—it's the love of Jesus inside you.

Our God is the God of *Soteria*—of big miracles, total recovery, and expanding hope. Go forth, and share what you have.

Amen.