

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

ACTS 3

¹Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, an hour of prayer. ²A certain man who was lame from birth was carried there every day and placed at the temple gate, which is called Beautiful, so that he could beg for donations from those entering the temple. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked them for a donation.

Peter looked directly at him, as did John. Peter said, “Look at us.” ⁵So the man paid close attention to them, expecting to receive something from them.

⁶But Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I will give you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” ⁷Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately the man’s feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸Jumping up, he stood and began to walk. He entered the temple courts with them, walking, jumping, and praising God.

⁹All the people saw him walking and praising God. ¹⁰They recognized him as the one who used to sit begging for money at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.



Are you in a reality simulator right now? How do you know you are not? Would you recognize it if you were?

In 1999, the world was stunned by the film *Matrix*, which suggested the disturbing idea that we are all plugged into a shared hyperreality. Our real bodies are stacked in rows and columns like batteries, generating fuel for the machines. In 2003, a serious Oxford philosopher named Nick Bostrom proposed that it is more likely than not that the majority of us are computer simulations. His reasoning was that future civilizations probably have the power to create simulations of their ancestors. Therefore, it is more likely than not that the majority of us are computer simulations rather than actual ancestors of future civilizations. Some

big thinkers, like Neil deGrasse Tyson and Elon Musk, say there is something to this.

This simulation idea is not new. Already in the 500s B.C., Plato talked about being trapped in a damp and dark cave, where we wouldn't know the sunlight unless we were led out of the darkness. In Plato's allegory of the cave, a group of people have lived all their lives chained inside of a cave, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them. They name the shadows and treat them as their reality. Plato explains how the deep thinker is like a prisoner who is freed from the cave and comes to understand that the shadows on the wall are actually not reality at all. A deep thinker aims to understand and perceive the higher levels of reality. However, the other inmates of the cave do not even desire to leave their prison, for they cannot imagine the better life.

So are you in a reality simulator right now? Since Plato, technology has only made it a more interesting question. How would you know if you are or are not?

Of course, I don't believe that I am stuck in a shared computer reality simulator, but I do think I get stuck in a certain worldly way of thinking. Sinners are so used to sin that we may miss opportunities to live life totally anew. Life before or apart from Christ cannot imagine all Christ might do to change it.

Malady: How we have set our hearts on the day-to-day worldly treasures instead of the Christ-exchange!

Telic Note: Jesus turns our heart from the spiritually crippled kingdom of silver and gold to the kingdom of mobility, song and praise.

THE GOSPEL BRINGS SINNERS FROM SILVER AND GOLD TO SONG AND GLORY

What if these disciples never healed the lame beggar at the temple gate? He has never used his legs before—never walked, ran, danced, or jumped. Without their healing, he would still be going day-to-day from meager alms to meager alms.

Means: Yet for the crippled man in today's lesson, everything clicked when he heard the name of Jesus and was healed. He suddenly was invigorated with

faith that the Christ had truly come and his name was Jesus of Nazareth. The rumors were true.

- Now his whole world was changed.
- Now he may live a life of whatever skill he could learn and make a living.
- Now he would not be at the mercy of others for earthly well-being.

But for him now, he would be able to look to Christ with trust that His Name is the ultimate well-being.

Is life in this reality crippling for you? Are there problems that face you and at the same time seem insurmountable from day to day? What do you depend on from day to day that you wish you did not depend upon? If that thing you depend on daily were removed, would it change everything?

What is your reality like? Some of you may depend upon a daily coffee for a job you cannot stand. But if that job were suddenly unnecessary, then you would not depend on those morning coffees. Some may rely on doing all the right things to please your boyfriend or girlfriend, not to recognize that person may not be a person worth pleasing. Some may hopelessly compete for popularity, to be liked by others, ignoring the fact that being liked on a popular level doesn't really matter in life. Some of you may depend on a drink or eight to get through the day, without contesting the reality that brings you to such an addiction. This is the cave. Some depend on sin and unbelief, without the solution that comes with Christ's reality.

Original sin: The indirect consequences of sin include physical ailments like the inability to walk. Our own sin cripples us spiritually before God. There are direct consequences between lame greed and godlessness.

Let me put it this way: What if you came and confessed your sins only for me to give you silver and gold? You may be happy at first, but you wouldn't have anything to bring you into Christ's kingdom. You would still have guilt, you would still wonder if God really loves you, and you would still fear death. "*Silver and gold I do have for you.*" Wouldn't that be bad news at church? Yes, for silver and gold cannot change your reality with God.

No, what we need day-to-day is an unburdened, unloaded conscience. We rest that squarely on our Savior's shoulders in prayers of sorrow and remorse. We have unloaded our consciences since we were baptized in the name of the

Triune God for the forgiveness of sins. We unburden them as we approach His table in the sacrament.

Justification: The name of Jesus amounts to who He is and what He does. He is 100% man and 100% divine. He is perfect and holy and merciful and caring. It is at his name that every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. His blood purifies us from all unrighteousness, for it is more precious than all the silver and all the gold, all the stocks and all the bitcoin and all the GDP. By His holy, precious blood, He gives unlimited strength to our weak and helpless standing before God.

In that name, we find what the crippled man in Acts 3 found: song and glory. He did not just stretch his legs; he “jumped” up, we are told, and he walked around and praised God.

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, do. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, be alive. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, forget your financial fears and woes, the problems that come from a world of silver and gold. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, give your earthly treasures to His coffers. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, love and serve souls.

We don't own them anyway. We use them and we lose them. But when we offer our silver and gold to God, He uses it to expand His kingdom of song and praise. Use worldly wealth to gain friends for Christ. The silver is Yours and the gold is Yours, Lord. Our new reality is to serve Him.

I will tell you the main reason why we cannot be in a reality simulator. Harvard theoretical physicist Sarah Randall says the whole idea is silly. Her reason: “What civilization in the future would want to simulate us?” And that is a pretty good question. Who would want to simulate sinners? Who would want to reanimate this world of sin? Only One would take on life like ours, and that is the Son of God who loved us. In more than a simulation, He became one of us and died for us to wash us clean, for His goal was to change our reality; in His name. **Amen.**

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**