

**SERMON**  
***The Danger of Being at Church and Not In Church***  
**Text: Acts 3:1-8**

**Minister J. Hamilton Collins**  
**Ways Grove Baptist Church, Wrens, GA**  
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My brothers and sisters, after having read this portion of scripture, I don't know how much time had lapsed between the events of Acts chapter two and the occurrences of Acts chapter three. I don't know how wide was the time gap between the closing events of Acts chapter two and the opening events of Acts chapter three. In Acts chapter two, the Holy Ghost has fallen upon the church.

In Acts chapter two, there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire and fell upon each one of them, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. In Acts chapter two, they became loud in their spiritual response and were falsely accused and falsely evaluated, saying, "These men must be drunk with new wine. Is that right?"

But my brothers and my sisters, there was one who had faded into the background. There was one who had denied knowing and being with Jesus who is now filled with the Holy Ghost and speaks out boldly for the LORD. He preaches a sermon and says, no they are not drunk as you suppose. He goes on to preach the prophesy of the Old Testament by saying that in the last days, God will pour out His spirit upon all flesh. And after that sermon was preached, some three thousand souls were added to the church.

And I think I ought to tell you that there are some folk in the crowd who are only there for the excitement. Some folk in the crowd are only there for the fact that it is different. Not everybody in the crowd will last. In Acts chapter three, there are only two men. Oh what a change has now taken place. There's nobody now but Peter and John who are walking through the Market place. And the first thing the text is tailored to teach us is: Don't forget where you come from

Now let me tell you here that before Acts chapter two Peter and John really didn't have any great friendship with each other. But now Peter and John are walking together. Look at them, shoulder to shoulder, walking side by side. And now they are in the market place. They had to get to the temple because it was now the hour of prayer. But in route to the temple, they had to go by way of the market place. I need to stop here and let us take look at the market place. First of all I need to tell you what the market place is all about. The market is anywhere you feel that is beneath you. There were merchants in the market place. There were salesmen in the market place. There were peddlers selling their wares in the market place. There were also thieves in the market place. There were women of the evening strolling in the market place. Peter and John were on their way to the temple, but they journeyed through the market place. I say that to say; my brothers and sisters, on our way to church, there's a job to be done in the market place.

People have a tendency to turn up their noses while going through the market place. You know what I'm talking about. I'm Sister So & So. I'm Brother So & So. I'm Missionary So & So. I'm Reverend, Deacon So & So. And we turn our nose up and don't want to brush up against

anybody in the market place. Don't want to talk to anybody while we are in the market place. But there's a job for the church in the market place.

The church's job is not between these four walls. Our mission is out there in the market place. If you got so much religion, you ought to be talking to somebody, witnessing to somebody, testifying to somebody, not in the church, but in the market place.

Notice here that they were journeying through the market place. They weren't there to stay, but they were going through. They weren't there to take part in what was going on, their destination was the temple (church house), but they had to go through the market place. And my brothers and sisters, so many times we pass the mission of the church on our way to church house. With choir robes on our arms, we pass folk who need to hear a good song in the market place.

Sometimes with Sunday school books and Bibles under our arms, we pass folk who need to hear a Bible lesson in the market place. We want to preach and teach each other. We want to fellowship with folk who already know Christ and by-pass our mission which is in the market place. And church if we are going to go from "Being at church to being in church then we can't forget about the church mission

But then the second thing the text is tailored to teach us is: Come expecting.

And there at the gate was a wretch of a man, who was sitting at the gate. The Bible tells us that while Peter and John was going into the temple, the man sat there and no doubt with my imagination working with me, with a cup in his hand asking for money. He was asking for alms of those who went into the temple.

Now Peter and John had come at the ninth hour on their way to the temple and they found this man sitting there at the side of the gate. What a tragic thing it was. Look at him with his cup rattling asking for a hand out because he was lame and couldn't walk. The record is he was lame from his mother's womb. He was forced to be abandoned and to live on hand outs of those who entered in to the temple.

I think I ought to tell you that it's sad not that this man was cripple, not the fact that he's lame, but what's sad is the fact not [how he is], but [where he is.] Are you going to help me. Look at him Rev. Hunter where is he? He's at the temple. Not in the temple. Maybe yawl are not reading this. He was not in the temple, he was at the temple. That was the worst part of his problem. It was not how he was, but where he was. He was at the temple but not in the temple. He was brought their daily and laid daily at the side of that gate.

Surely, the folk who laid him at the temple, it would have been just as easy to put him on the front pew in the temple. But he's not in, but at. And oh brothers and sisters, that seems to represent so many modern day church folk who are always at church, but never in church. At choir rehearsal, but never in the rehearsal. At Sunday school, but never in Sunday school.

At Bible Study, but never in Bible Study. And some of you this morning are at morning worship. That's why some folk look and act so dead, because they are not in morning worship. You understand what I'm talking about. And if by chance I make you mad, I hope it makes you mad enough to do something about it. Always at church, but never in church never in terms of interest; never in terms of caring, never in, in being a part of what's going on inside the church. Sitting on pews, but never in the worship. Dressed to kill, but never in the worship service.

Singing in the choir, but never in the worship. Working on the Usher Board, but never really in the service.

Let me tell you how you can tell when you are at church and not in church. When you can leave church the same old way that you came, you were only at church. When you can leave church doing the same old thing, acting the same old way, going to the same old places, you were at church and not in church. When you leave church never any stronger than when you come to church and never feel the Holy Spirit, nothing ever moves you, nothing ever gets next to you, nothing ever stirs you up, you keep that same old prim and proper look, then you are at church and not in church. When your habits never change, when your ways never get any better, when

Your lifestyle never gets any better, when you can leave and keep on peeping and hiding, slipping and tipping, hugging and bugging, you are at church. The tragedy of this man was not how he was, but where he was. He was at church when he ought to have been in church. Oh brothers and sisters what a tragedy. How tragic it was to be so close, but yet so far. How tragic it was to be so close to the reading of the scripture, but never hear them read. What a tragedy it was to be so close, but yet so far away. He was at, but not in.

Now Peter and John walked up to him on their way into the temple. And the Bible says that the man lifted up his cup and asked them for a donation. You know the story. Peter and John looked upon him. And the Bible said that Peter fastened his eyes upon him. Peter fastened his eyes upon him. And John said unto him, Look on us. They told the lame man to look on us.

Everybody can't tell the spiritual lame, look on us. Some of us can't tell them, because we are afraid of what they might see in us. Can we say as church members to a little girl or a little boy, look on us? Are we living in such a way before society that we can say to men and women, girls and boys, if you want to know what a child of God looks like, look on us. And let me tell you something. Let me get this monkey off my back. Because there are some folk who are always looking at the preacher.

But you ought to know that you are responsible for the life you live in order that folk can see something worthwhile in you. This is a mirror type sermon. There is a looking glass in front of each one of us so that we can ask ourselves an important question. Am I living in such a way that the world can see Christ in me? Peter and John said to the man "look on us", and the man who was lame looked to them expecting to receive some money from them.

Peter and John addressed him and said in essence to him, I know what you are expecting. I know what you've been looking for. Down through the years, people have been dropping silver and gold in your cup, but yet your condition is still the same. <> Down through the years, people have been dropping money in your cup, but by ways and action, you're still in the same old situation.

The last thing the text is tailored to teach us is: Now that we have remembered where we come from, come expecting; now we can *shout with the victory!*

So silver and gold haven't done you much good. And they said, in essence to him, we know what you've been asking for, but we want to tell you, that silver and gold have we none. But we want to offer you somebody who can make a difference in your life. "In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk." <> And the Bible said that they extended their right hand to the lame man and they lifted him up. <> And you know the job of every child of God is to lift somebody up. <> They stretched out their right hand and that lame man took hold to their hand. And the Bible said that

straight way, strength came into his ankle bone. <> Down through the years this lame man had seen other folk use their ankles, but he had never used his own. <> But that blessed day when Peter and John called on the name of Jesus, the Bible said straight way strength came into his ankle bone.

The last thing the text is tailored to teach us is: Now that we have remembered where we come from, *come expecting*. Now we can shout the victory!

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### **Minister J. Hamilton Collins**



37 year-old anointed preacher who has been preaching for almost 15 yrs. He was first licensed at The First Baptist Church of Deer Park, NY under the pastorate of Bishop Dr. Winfred J. Pippen. But on Mother's Day 2007, he was blessed to have his dream come true and have his fathers to license by the request of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Bluefield, WV. In 2012 he relocated to Wrens, GA where he married the love of his life the former Tammie Whigham on August 17, 2013. Currently he attends Ways Grove Baptist Church where he serves as the Son of the House under the pastorate of Rev. Jimmy McCullough III.

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