

I-Contact  
Acts 3  
2/21/99

...too many in Boston, Massachusetts, downtown, where Eugene Rivers is a pastor of a pentecostal church there, a young man came running into the back of the sanctuary during the worship service. He ran down to the front. He was being chased by rival gang members. He through himself across the altar in the middle of the worship service and began screaming for mercy in front of the congregation. While rival gang members ran down to the altar and without hesitation pumped him full of bullets and left his tender heart there to die on the altar.

That shook the congregation up pretty well. What do you do about it? Better locks on the doors? Maybe give more silver and gold, more money to the offering to fund programs dealing with gang violence?

Last night during the offering in our worship service, I played a song by Eve Six; Max Collins sings it. It's a popular song; it expresses the thoughts of millions. The refrain goes like this: "I would swallow my doubt. Turn it inside out. Find nothing but faith in nothing. Want to put my tender heart in a blender. Want to see it spin round into oblivion. Rendezvous. Then I'm through with you." I didn't sing it exactly right, did I? Want to see it spin round into a beautiful oblivion.

But the song is a song of faithlessness. It is a song of despair and hatred of life. And the song gets pretty raunchy when you listen to the whole thing. So I probably shouldn't have played it in the worship service because (1) people didn't understand it. Some of them also said that they tuned it out. Also, you have to ask the question, maybe a song like that really just doesn't belong in church, like gang violence. That faithlessness . . . songs like that . . . that faithlessness is contagious.

A faithless and adulterous generation is a contamination, contaminant. We are called to be separate and holy. So what should we do? Should we then lock the doors? Give more money to programs that fight faithless words in the media? Should we take off our shoes because we are on holy ground, the presence of "I Am" here in the sanctuary?

If you think like that, you have a pretty good point. Listen to the book of Leviticus. This is God talking to Moses about His sanctuary, the tabernacle, which will become the temple. "No man who has any defect may come near. No man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed. No man with a crippled foot or hand." He goes on like that. Then God says, "because of his defect he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar and so desecrate my sanctuary."

If you have ever studied the temple, you know that the very architecture and geography of the temple is defined by exclusion. There is an outer court for gentiles. Then another for court for Israelite women, better than Gentiles. The next court is for Israelite men. The next court is for Israelite male priests making sacrifices on the altars for the sins of

the people. Then the next court is really the temple building itself, and inside of the temple building itself, an inner sanctuary where the very presence of Yahweh or the glory of Yahweh, "I am that I am" was said to dwell. And only once a year the high priests would go into that inner chamber to make a sacrifice on the day of atonement. Many times he would die there, and they would drag him out with a rope. In all of that, in that picture one thing is exceedingly clear, isn't it? God is holy. And He is just. And He tolerates no iniquity. No stain of iniquity. No contamination, corruption of this world. And that was sacred ground. The temple was a program of purity and exclusion, for God is holy.

An awful lot of Christian ministries, especially those with strong political agendas, will quote those kind of verses a lot, the levitical verses, verses on purity and holiness and righteousness within the temple sanctuary. But whenever a group of people quote those verses too much on Leviticus and purity and cleanliness in the temple, I would get a little worried, because it seems they have forgotten something very significant. And that is that that temple was utterly destroyed. As one very significant person said it would be. Not one stone on top of another. He also said this, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again." And when he died, they were amazed at this: that curtain in the temple in the inner sanctuary, it ripped from the top to the bottom. As Jesus was sacrificed on the altar of the cross and God satisfied His own justice in Him, the perfect sacrifice. And as he died screaming from the cross, "It is finished," that curtain ripped all the way. And something got out.

I mean people could probably go into that room, but it seems that something got out. In Acts 2 we find that something has fallen on this rag-tag group of people called the church and baptized them and filled them. And that is the context, the pretext for Acts 3.

"One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer -- at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts."

Now we know that he couldn't actually go into the temple. Why? Because he was defective. Sounds pretty politically incorrect, doesn't it. He was lame; so they laid him on the steps of the temple courts. In the next chapter, we are going to find out this guy was forty years old. That means he had been on those steps probably an awful long time. That means that probably also, when Jesus was 12 and he went the temple, he passed him by. And when Jesus would do his ministry going in and out of the temple, He probably passed him by. And when the church was filled with the Holy Spirit and met in the courts of the temple, they passed him by. And Peter and John each day would pass him by. Now that is in awful lot of time to wait there on those steps. Maybe it means that God has his own timing, and His own plans for each of His people, uniquely.

You wonder why Jesus didn't choose to do some kind of blanket healing thing. Stand on the steps and say, "Everybody in the territory of Judea, on the count of three you are healed. 1, 2, 3 - Healed!" But he didn't. It also says to me that even in the book of Acts, miracles are miracles because they just don't happen automatically, but individually.

Verse 3, "When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!' So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them." The King James says this, Peter fastened, fixed, his eyes on the man. Now the Greek there is explicit, so Luke thinks that this is very significant, and in fact it is because it is not what we normally do.

I remember sitting in a sha hasta ria restaurant (It is an open air Brazilian steakhouse.) with Andrew. We had done missions and evangelism stuff all day, so now we went to get this steak at this Brazilian steakhouse. We are sitting there, the waiter had just carved off these gorgeous chunks of steaming hot steak, lying on our plates. I'm about to eat. I look up and I see all these eyes, little eyes. Street children. Hungry. On the other side of the dividing wall around the restaurant. They were staring at my steak and me. And I lost my appetite. And I couldn't look at them. I looked away. It was good, the waiter came along and shooed them away so we could eat our steak in peace. I looked away.

What happens when you get off the interstate, I-70 at the Wadsworth exit. You're turning to go over to Red Robin. There is a guy, maybe a couple of them sometimes, standing there with a sign. It says something like, "I'm a vet. I need money. I need a job." or whatever, what do you do? Do you fix your gaze on them. No, probably not. Automatically, you kind of fumble around trying to find a radio station. You look this way or something. Why? Because you know that if you fix your eyes on them, your eyes, if they connect, more than just your eyes connect. Your worlds connect. Your spirits connect. Your souls, they connect. So you look away. Why? Because maybe you don't have anything to give them. Or probably even more, you don't have anything that you want to give them. And, you know, when you think about it, they probably are conning you at some level. And you don't want to get sucked in to all that mess and all that confusion and all that work because you do know this too: gang bangers running down the street, those guys singing faithless songs (Eve-6), street kids, the men standing there with those cardboard signs, well they need far more than what money can buy. Right? More than just your silver and gold, and yet sometimes you will give them silver and gold. Why? So the encounter will just be over with. And they will take it too, and yet they will resent you. Why? Because they know you won't see them. You're hiding your spirit in the temple of your soul to guard it from contamination, which is them. It is hard to see and be seen.

Do you remember when Jesus met blind Bartemaeus? Do you remember the first thing He said to him. He said, "What would you have me do for you?" That's a silly question Jesus. No it isn't. It is not always easy to see and to be seen.

Eye contact is powerful stuff. When my kids get in trouble, especially Coleman who can't hide his emotions as easily as the others who are older, I will say, "You come here. You come here right now and you look at me." They are doing this and everything. Why? Because they are mad. They don't want to look at me. Finally I say, "No, you look at me." I don't even know sometimes what I'm going to say or what's right, but I say it anyway.

"You look at me." Because when our eyes connect for a while, something happens. In them. In me. Walls fall down. Eye contact.

In Luke's first book, the gospel of Luke, this same Peter, Luke records him as denying Jesus three times. A rooster crows and then something very significant happens according to Luke. Jesus looks at Peter, and when he does, walls come down. And Peter runs out into the night weeping bitterly. Legend has it that when the soldiers beat Jesus that night, they put a bag over his head because they couldn't look in His eyes.

And when John records that this same Peter came to Jesus, Jesus beheld him. That is He just looked at him a while, and then he said, "You're Simon, but I'm going to call you Peter, the rock." Piercing, creative eyes. Can you imagine his eyes. We say this about people, "Oh, he has a light in his eyes." Can you imagine the light in those eyes.

Luke records Jesus as saying this, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." In Matthew, Jesus also says this, "Let your light so shine before men."

Now all of that is rather confusing, isn't it? Because is he talking about the light that shines into us through our eyes? Or is he talking about the light that shines out of us through our eyes? Well, I think maybe he is talking about both. And when Jesus talks about light, we know that he is probably talking about more than simply physical light. In fact John says that Jesus is the light that enlightens all man.

And so the light we let in illumines our soul, and the light we let shine before men illumines their soul. But when two eyes connect, oh then there is communication at a level of soul, of spirit. Existential communication beyond what we can control or beyond what we can consciously perceive. Even secular scientists tell us that our eyes are like polygraph tests. They send out signals beyond our control, and they perceive things beyond our conscious perception.

Some years ago, Albert Mehrabian did a landmark study at UCLA. It was on believability and speaking. He found that seven percent of believability in speaking comes from the verbal content. What you actually say. 7%. Thirty-eight percent from the vocal component, the inflection. The way in which you say it. And a full 55% from the visual component of speech. That is what the person's eyes do as he speaks. Makes you nervous while your preach a sermon, I'll let you know. Believability.

Paul wrote this: "How can they believe in the One of whom they haven't heard. And how can they hear without someone preaching to them. And how can they preach unless they are sent." I always wanted to answer Paul, "Well, gosh, Paul. Write a book." He would

say, I am writing a book" "Well, make a tape. Make a movie. Send it to him." I think he would say, "No. I'm talking about believability." That is faith.

You see, at the end of the 20th century, we have come to believe that faith is basically intellectually consenting to some logical arguments. Well, you know, demons can do that. It is much more than that. In scripture, faith is personal trust. Personal trust comes through personal contact, doesn't it? And the very presence of Jesus, personally, you know where it resides? In his temple, which is you. What got out is in you. (Peter whistles).

How do people meet Jesus? Because you memorize and recite the four spiritual laws so well, or is it something more to do with the way you look at him. Touch him. Your presence. And so now, listen closely. If you are blind, and I don't see anybody blind. We have some in our church who are blind, or if they are listening to this tape. Don't worry. God has given you ears to hear. He has given you hands to touch. He has given you a voice with inflections. And he has also given you eyes that still communicate whether you see out of them or not. But more than that, He has given you presence. And it is your sincere presence, your spirit, His spirit. For this is what I think we are really getting at, like the psalmist says, "Deep calls to deep. Spirit calls to spirit." And now His spirit.

I mean, Peter just said this, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." He said this in chapter 2, "and you will receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit." His Spirit dwells in you. His church. His people. His temple. Spirit of the Living God. Which God? "I am that I am."

God said to Moses, "Tell them 'I am' has sent you to them." The Bible also says God is spirit. Now think with me for a minute. That means "I Am" is spirit. So how could we know "I Am"? Scientific experiments, movies, books, the Bible, Jesus. Well, who is Jesus? Palestinian, 5' 11" maybe, 165 lbs. We don't know that for sure. Better yet, who is Jesus? Well, He is the mediator and the testator of the eternal covenant, the preincarnate word. Well demons know that. You can know all about Jesus and not know Jesus.

Now that may be stressing some of you out unnecessarily. Peter says this, too: "Whoever calls on the name of Jesus will be saved." Then the Bible says, "If you've called on the name of Jesus, if you call on the Jesus . . .," well, I got news for you. That wasn't simply you. That was the very Spirit of Jesus prompting you to cry out. "Abba Father!" For you see, you have had an encounter of the very best kind.

Martin Buber, the existentialist theologian, wrote a book called *I Am Thou*. We have talked about it at times, but in it he talks about the fact that there are two kinds of relationships we can have: "I-it" relationships and "I-thou" relationships. In "I-it" relationships we relate to things objectively as things out there, scientific facts and procedures, and objects. And many times we relate to people as "its" or as things. But he would say when you relate to them as "its," that means you don't know them. "I-thou" means that you know something through subjective encounter. It is one "I" encountering another "I" in the eternally present moment.

All of that is just incredible theology and philosophy if you time for it. We don't have time for it this morning, but you can reference Martin Buber, Kierkegaard, and some of those guys. This is amazing stuff. But I want you to think about this: if "I am that I am," He says that is his name. If "I Am" breaks out on the world, how would we know him. Spirit, the very Spirit of Christ. How would we know him, not just about him? Well, perhaps he would look at us, speak to us, touch us. How would he do that? I mean if Jesus' body is ascended at the right hand of the Father, how might He do that when we meet him or when we encounter him. Well, maybe he would use his other body. His church. His temple. His people. His Spirit in us.

It is really quite incredible and something to think about. But in the book of Acts, think about this. The Spirit of Jesus falls on and baptizes, fills people that saw Jesus the man in His physical body. Then where the gospel is spread, people come to meet Jesus through meeting those people. And they are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are baptized with the Holy Spirit, but God uses those people. It really is kind of weird. Think about this: the Ethiopian eunuch in Philip's story. He is traveling along through the desert. He is reading scripture. He is reading the book of Isaiah. Is that good enough? No. God miraculously transports a guy named Philip to sit next to him and look at him and say, "Hey, would you like to meet the guy you are reading about?"

It gets even weirder than that. Remember the story of Saul, who became Paul. He is riding along the road to Damascus. The Spirit of Jesus Himself in a vision shows up, knocks him on his can, makes him go blind. You would think this is a pretty good time to become a Christian. No, He says, "You must go and meet a guy named Annanias. We find out Annanias is a rather confused believer, but God reveals to him, "No, I want you to pray for Paul and all this stuff." And Paul meets Jesus through Annanias, and Annanias baptizes him. He receives the Holy Spirit. His blindness leaves him. The first eyes he sees are those eyes of Annanias. Cornelius, same deal. Has a vision and in the vision it says, "Well you want to meet Jesus. Meet this guy Peter."

You know, you study missionary stories. So many times they are similar. These lost tribes having these visions and experiences of the great God telling them. "Someone is going to come to you and tell you about someone." Or scripture washes up on shore in Albania and people get dreams. "Well, someone is going to come and explain it to you." I mean, those stories, they still happen like that today.

Jesus said this, "As the Father sent me, even so send I you. And lo I am with you always."

So Paul asks this question. "How can they believe unless some *one* is sent?" I mean, as if we really are the new priesthood. As if we really are his body. And granted, a disobedient, uncoordinated body, unlike the one that He had while He walked on this earth. But nonetheless, somehow His eyes, His hands, His touch, His presence, His temple. As if he wants people to not only know about Him through books and visions, but

He wants them to know Him through you. And your eyes. And your touch. And your presence.

I-contact. The gospel spreads through I-contact. Not eyeball contact. Not e-y-e, but I. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me." "I Am"

Now all of that is incredibly amazing and kind of freaky, you know. But think about it. How did you meet Jesus? I mean maybe there was a book that helped, a movie that helped, a program that helped. Maybe you had a vision. Maybe there was a miracle that you saw. Maybe you were a part of a crusade. But you know what? I bet you that there was also someone *one*. Some *one* through whom He looked at you. Spoke to you. Smiled at you. In whose eyes you saw Him. I mean if only for a moment, and you saw him imperfectly. But it was what you saw in that person that sent you on a quest, and you began to believe.

I struggle with so many issues of faith and questions and all that stuff. And I have had some incredible encounters with the Lord, and the thing that has amazed me as I look back on it is that I knew Him. I saw Him in my dad, in Gary, my mom. I had encountered him. I had seen him.

And so the rest of our scripture, "Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!'" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them." And then Peter said this, "Silver and gold I do not have." Now we know he probably had some silver and gold. They were sharing all things in common. They had this common pot. He had access to some stuff. Maybe he didn't have it at the moment. But he also knew looking at this guy that he needed far more than silver and gold. So he said, "'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" And taking him by the right hand, he helped him up and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. And then he went with them into the temple courts walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them, 'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed. And you disowned him before Pilate who was going to let him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that murderer be released to him. You killed the author of life.' He is looking at them. "But God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. (19) Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, the times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

The man had faith. Peter made eye contact with the man. Spirit connected with spirit. Spirit with Spirit. And Jesus, he came personally to that man's knee. Then all the people run in to see this incredible thing. Peter looks at them; he discerns their needy. They killed the author of life. That's pretty big. So he says, "Receive forgiveness in the name of Jesus." And he goes on sharing the gospel with them. Spirit encounters spirit; a few thousand believe and meet Jesus. And get this, it wasn't an evangelism program. I mean it wasn't some policy, some procedure that the church had set up. It wasn't a non-profit organization. It wasn't even planned with slogans and banners. It all started when Peter made eye contact with a beggar.

Why am I just telling you all this? Because I think it's really cool. And I also really believe this, that the growth of this church--and not through transfer membership, but I mean people meeting Jesus--I mean the growth of the kingdom is in some way, somehow dependent on you looking at people. Starting right where you live. Husbands and wives, some of you, you don't need more counseling, you need to look at each other. You don't need another marriage encounter weekend. You need to have a marriage encounter; you need a good date. Dad's, some of you, you don't need another fathering seminar. You need to take your kids fishing and look at them.

I remember when I was a youth pastor, I went to this all weekend retreat down at Mount Hermon. It was one of these no-agenda, you set the agenda once you get there kind of deals. Everybody sat around and they said, "Now what are we going to discuss? What do we need to discuss?" Overwhelmingly, the one thing that everybody felt they really needed to discuss, the business we needed to deal with was how we as youth pastors would spend more quality time with our families. So we started discussing it when all of the sudden it hit me. "Go home!" So I did, and I spent the weekend with my family instead of about my family.

So you see, how is our church to grow? How does the kingdom spread? The body grow? Evangelism programs? Budgets? Church polity? New buildings? Theology? Great preaching? All those things are really important, but how is it--in what way do people meet Jesus?

I-contact. And that I, Christian, is in you.

Let your light so shine. Look at the guy who lives next to you. When you drive up next to a beggar, look at him. You may not even know what is going to happen, but look at him. You say, "Well, well, well, wait a minute. Didn't you remember what you just said? That really makes me insecure somewhere down in here, because really I don't think I have anything to give, well, that I want to give him. But I don't even know if I have anything to give him. I mean, I don't know where the nearest shelter is. I don't know all the ways that I could help him. I don't have any training. I don't know the scriptures very well. I haven't been to seminary. I don't know the arguments. I don't understand all of the logic of the whole thing. And to tell you the truth, I just don't have those evangelical good looks of Andrew Trawick and Billy Graham. I don't have what it takes. I'm sure of that. I don't even have any silver and gold that I could give a beggar. And I tell you what, I



really don't think I have any words of knowledge from God Himself, saying 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

Well, that may be true. So give what you do have. Jesus. Look at him. Smile. Because Jesus Himself has smiled at you.

Recently I told you that when I was in Romania, you could tell the Christians from the non-Christians by their faces, their eyes, their smiles. Richard Wurmbrand spent years and years in a Romanian prison, darkest dungeons of the Romanian prison system. He writes of this account. I want to end with this.

There was among us a Jewish believer named Millan haimovici. This man had been beaten for what he was considered to have done. However, as often as another prisoner had to be beaten, he would step forward and take his place. He was a model of a Christian.

Once there was a discussion between him and a great scientist who was in jail with us. He was a member of the Academy of Science--a godless man. Milan was not of the same intellectual and cultural level as this professor. he had not read as many books, but he tried to tell the professor about Jesus the Messiah.

The professor laughed and scorned him, asking, "Why do you come with such stupidities? Why do you believe in Jesus? How do you know He exists?"

Milan answered, "Well, I know by the fact that I walk with Him and talk with Him." The professor said, "You are such a liar. Jesus lived, 2,000 years ago, somewhere in Israel. Then He died. How can you walk and talk with Him.?"

Milan replied, "Yes, sir, it is true that He died, 2,000 years ago, but He also resurrected and is living even now."

"Well, let's say I agree with you. Where is He now? In heaven? Where is heaven--thousands of miles away beyond the sun, the moon, beyond all the stars? In another world? Can He walk and talk with you? Don't you see that you speak stupid things?"

Milan replied, "I have no explanation. I, too, wonder, but the fact is that He walks and talks with me."

The professor was indignant and said, "Well, I will ask you one more question. You say that He talks with you. How does He talk with you? What is the expression of His face? Does He look angry? Wrathful? Does He look lovingly at you? Does He perhaps smile at you?" He was mocking with these questions.

Milan answered, "Sometimes He smiles at me."

"Ha, ha, ha, such a lie, such a lie. I never met such a liar. Jesus smiles at you. When you say Jesus smiles at you, show me how He smiles," the professor replied.

The most beautiful moment of my life of 89 years was when Milan said, "I will show you how Jesus smiles."

Now, you must know how he looked. Like all of us, Milan was shorn. He was only skin and bones with dark circles around his eyes. He was missing teeth and was wearing a prisoner's uniform.

Such a beautiful smile appeared on his lips. His dirty face shone. The glory of God can shine from behind a thick crust of dirt. There was so much peace, so much contentment, and so much joy on his face reflected in a smile that was not from this earth.

This godless professor bowed his head and admitted, "Sir, you have seen Jesus."

So what do we need? More legislation? Higher walls of defense against gang violence and corrupt songs and faithless secularism in the universities? Maybe. And maybe not. But I tell you what the kingdom of God needs. You. To go out onto the streets and look for gang bangers running down dark alleys, and faithless boys humming faithless songs to themselves and secular scientists teaching in universities. The kingdom of God needs you to go find them and to look them in the eye and smile. Because you see, Jesus Himself is now contagious.

Let's stand and pray a song we have sung many times, but let's sing it better now.

Lord the light of your love is shining.  
In the midst of the darkness shining.  
Jesus light of the world shine upon us.  
Set us free by the truth you now bring us.  
Shine on me. Shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, Shine.  
Fill this land with the Father's glory.  
Blaze, Spirit, Blaze.  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, River, Flow.  
Flood the nations with grace and mercy  
Send forth your Word,  
Lord, and let there be light.

Lord, I come to your awesome presence.  
From the shadow into your radiance.  
By the blood I may enter your brightness.  
Search me try me, consume all my darkness  
Shine on me. Shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, Shine.  
Fill this land with the Father's glory.  
Blaze, Spirit, Blaze.  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, River, Flow.  
Flood the nations with grace and mercy  
Send forth your Word,  
Lord, and let there be light.

As we gaze on your kingly brightness,  
So our faces display your likeness  
Ever changing from glory to glory  
Mirrored here, may our lives tell your story.  
Shine on me. Shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, Shine.  
Fill this land with the Father's glory.  
Blaze, Spirit, Blaze.  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, River, Flow.  
Flood the nations with grace and mercy  
Send forth your Word,  
Lord, and let there be light.

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