

"Jesus: Listen to the Author of Life"

Acts 3

This morning we have a miracle story, the instantaneous healing in Acts 3 of the man who was lame since birth. We like miracle stories. Some of us have probably experienced a miracle of some kind or know someone who has. We're not sure what to do with miracle stories in the Bible. Are we to expect them, pray for them or do them? Is there a special 'prayer' to say to make one happen? What are we supposed to do with these miracle stories in the Bible? The answer of course will always lie in the text itself. Peter and John are the agents through whom this miracle happens and in Peter's explanation of the miracle he actually helps us know what to do with miracles. Spoiler alert: a miracle is not the goal but the means to a goal. And Peter explains the goal.

We're not told when but probably not a lot of time has passed since Pentecost. Weeks, maybe months at the most. Peter and John were heading to the temple at the 9th hour (Jewish time begins at 6:00 am) which is 3:00 in the afternoon, the final of 3 set times for prayer at the temple. The early church was predominantly Jewish and they continued to engage in the disciplines which they grew up with only through the eyes of Jesus and Scripture now.

The 'Beautiful Gate' is another Name for the Eastern Gate. Beautiful no doubt because it leads directly to the temple entrance. It is this gate that the Messiah will one day return to as we read in Ezek. 43. Many years ago the Muslims walled in the gate and made the outside their cemetery. Thinking that, the Messiah will defile Himself by walking through a graveyard thus making Him unclean and unable to enter the temple. But I hardly think the sinless Messiah who has power over the grave will be hindered by a cemetery and a bricked up wall.

So it's a busy spot back then of lots of passersby going to the temple. It's a prime location for a lame man who relies on begging for a living. His friends bring him there every day and bring him home. Peter and John are coming. No doubt Peter and John have entered this gate many times in the last 3 years and have seen this man (and many other crippled or blind or poor) begging. They may have even given him money on occasion. And as he sees them approach he begins his usual 'Have mercy on me' or 'alms for the poor' or whatever usual appeal he made, but this time it's different. Peter and John led by the Spirit of God stop, fix their gaze intently on the man, command him to "look at us". Now he is forced to look them in the eye thinking he's going to get a gift. And instead he is given more than what he asked for.

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

⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ 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.

Acts 4 (which is still about this miracle) tells us the man was over 40 (v.22). And just like when Jesus healed someone, the crowds gather. Luke uses 3 different Greek words for amaze or surprise or wonder, probably as a way of describing how remarkable this was. So all these people are coming to Peter and John who have never performed a miracle before (that we know of). What's going to happen? Are Peter and John going to heal more people? That's probably what the people were hoping for. But how did Peter and John respond to this? And this helps us know what to do with miracles. Peter, taking the lead responds,

Fellow Israelites, 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? ¹³ 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, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ 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 completely healed him, as you can all see.

V. 16 is the key because it is faith in Jesus on Peter and John's part and faith that comes through Jesus that healed this man completely. And this rare word in the Greek means a state of wellness or health is every part. Which I take it as his faith is whole also. So then Peter tells us through the miracle of a changed life,

Don't be Surprised When Jesus Creates New Life **(3:1-16)**

The miracle becomes the means for a message about Jesus. The focus is on how he got healed and the how is through Jesus. Jesus will become the focus through the miracle. And Peter will present the gospel. Why? Because the healing is an illustration of the new life that Jesus wants to give everyone who truly wants it, especially

Where hopelessness once reigned (vv.1-3)

This man had never walked a day in his life. Over 40 years his life consisted of begging for a living. This was his past, present and future, until Jesus did something through Peter and John. Jesus as the Author of Life sovereignly created this man in his mother's womb 40+years ago and also in His sovereign plan allowed him to be lame for this time. But He had a plan to change his life. To give him new life; complete wholeness. How did He choose to do this?

Through Jesus' followers who speak hope (vv.4-10)

Peter and John arrive. They speak to the man. They have words of hope. "Look at us. "In the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!" He's never heard these life changing words before, probably because no one was able to do what Peter and John did! But notice how his life would change. He heard a message that offered genuine hope and the message was about Jesus. Only Jesus can change your life. Only He can offer hope. And

It is through faith in Jesus (vv.11-12)

When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, 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?"

Peter uses the miracle to speak about the gospel. Peter uses the illustration of a miraculous change of life to a no-less miraculous spiritual change in one's heart. V. 12 is important for us because in it Peter said it's not because of our godliness that this man could walk. A lot of people have been made to feel guilty because they have been told if they had faith or were more godly they would see a miracle in their life. And Peter's goal is to talk about heart change through faith in Jesus. And similarly you can't to be saved and change your life by your own piety. And Peter assures his listeners that this is not something new God is doing. All this

God promised beforehand (vv.13-16)

So Peter then refers to some Old Testament passages like Ex. 3:6 when God met Moses in the burning bush and introduced himself as 'The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. Your God, this same One, who spoke to Moses is the one who sent Jesus to this earth and who has now glorified Him. And Peter rehearses some key events in the crucifixion account. Like his message at Pentecost, Peter was very direct in his challenge to his listeners:

You handed him over to be killed, and **you** disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ **You** disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. **You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.** ¹⁶ *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 completely healed him, as you can all see.*

Peter mixes God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for the death of Jesus. In doing so he also presents some wonderful names of Jesus. His 'servant Jesus'. The 'Holy and Righteous One. The 'Author of Life'. Peter is using terms usually reserved for God for Jesus clearly referring to Jesus as God's Son and fully God. And again, points to the fact that faith in Jesus' Name gave this man new life. So Peter's response to the miracle is to explain to people that everyone needs a miraculous healing that requires faith in Jesus' name. That can give you new life through faith in the spoken words of God. So don't be surprised when God does that. Don't think that a miracle of a changed life is anything less than a miracle of a healed body.

Now in vv.17-26 Peter gives an invitation to accept Christ. The miracle becomes the means for the message. It is the illustration for what he wants to tell them. That Jesus wants to make a miracle of your life, the miracle of salvation where in His Name we are saved and forgiven and receive hope and a future. So the miracle becomes Peter's way of saying 'Don't be surprised when Jesus changes someone's life.' Sadly, even when an apostle gives a gospel invitation not everyone responds.

Don't Be Surprised that Some Won't Let Go Of their Godless Life (3:17-26)

Peter softens his approach and moves from condemnation for their part in Jesus' death to an invitation to hope and life. Both aren't important in presenting the gospel. People need to be aware that they are not naturally okay with God. We all enter life as a sinner in need of salvation. We are separated from God because our sins put Jesus on the cross and we need to hear that Jesus is the only way we can get saved. This is where Peter goes next:

Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

God sent Jesus to be one of us because there needed to be a human sacrifice for human sin. And a sinless one too. Jesus alone is able to pay for our sins, taking our sins upon Himself. The Old Testament principle: 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' is now met and completed. Peter tells the listeners that their role in the suffering and death of Jesus may have been done in ignorance but that doesn't; exclude their guilt. Sadly, many people are

Uncomfortable with a suffering Saviour (vv.17-18)

For some Jesus' suffering is seen as a weakness, that he should have conquered Rome. But in conquering Rome He would have forfeited the cross. This was one of Satan's temptations held out for Jesus; to be world ruler apart from the Cross, but it would mean worshipping Satan. No, Jesus died for us to give us exactly what we need: a Saviour who can empathize with our suffering. Who can see the pain of the lame and cry with the mourners who've lost loved ones and say come to Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest for your souls.

To accept Christ as our Saviour means we must;

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

This is the way to God. We must repent of our sins and change the direction we were going in. Change from serving self to serving Jesus. But again, not many people are

Unwilling to change their hearts (vv.19-21)

'Repent' means to change the direction of your life. To do a U-turn; first in your thinking and then in your acting and speaking. Peter promises that times of refreshing will come for those who repent and turn to Jesus. Peter is reminding his Jewish readers of the promises of God for a millennial rule of Jesus on earth when God will fulfil His promises to Israel, in their land with their Messiah ruling from David's throne. Jesus affirmed this in Acts 1 that God's kingdom was still to be restored.

But is there no refreshing now? Of course there is. The word literally means a state of encouragement after a time of disappointment. The gospel offers us joy and peace with God. Something we did not have before. Forgiveness of sins leads to 'no condemnation'. A self-driven life changes to a Spirit-led life. We who were once far off have been brought near (Eph. 2). Once we were lost but now we've been found. Everything the prophets promised about Jesus had come true and would come true. God is in the restoration process. He wants to change our hearts so he can change our life. Only faith in Jesus can do that. But some people are unwilling to change. Why?

Because they are untrusting of God and His words that bring hope and blessing (vv.22-26)

Peter finishes his message with this:

*For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.'²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'*²⁴ *"Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days."²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'*²⁶ *When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."*

Peter refreshes the memory of His Jewish audience with Moses' words in Deut. 18:15-19 about the future Messiah that they must listen to Him. But Jesus Himself told the Jewish leaders that the reason they didn't listen to Him was because they didn't actually listen to Moses and the prophets. They all told about Him. Instead they twisted God's words into making it sound like you're saved by doing the Commandments and good deeds and tithing. No, that's not what God said. We must listen to Him and His Son.

Often when people are presented with the words of God they question them, they say it's just a religious book like any other, it's contradictory, it's out of date, etc. All of which is untrue. These are things people say who actually haven't read God's Word. They would rather trust in themselves and their efforts to be good rather than take God at His Word. Not realizing as Peter wraps up here that God raised up Jesus in order to bless us by turning us from our self-centered ways.

The ramifications of this miracle continue in Ch. 4. Here Peter and John will face their first test as the religious leaders attempt to thwart their evangelistic efforts. And the result of Peter's preaching in 4:4 says *"many who heard the message believed and the number grew to about 5000."* 2000 more miracles.

The miracle of a healed man is no more amazing than the miracle of a repentant heart followed by a changed life. If you're saved you are a living illustration of a miracle. Because you chose to believe in God's words spoken by a friend or family member or maybe even a stranger and understood you're responsibility in Jesus' death who rose from the dead to reach out to us and offer us hope.

Should we pray for physical miracles? Absolutely. Does God still do miracles? Absolutely. They are unpredictable and can't be manufactured, just like this man's. But they are clearly a work of God which God wants to use an opportunity to share His message. Let's make sure we're praying for spiritual miracles. For your hard-hearted friend or family member who is unwilling to repent, uncomfortable with Jesus as their Saviour and untrusting in God's Words. But faith in Jesus' Name through us in sharing the gospel can result in their placing their faith in Jesus' Name for the first time. That is the Spirit's work not ours. If we want to see more of those kinds of miracles we have to be the voice for God and with His message of blessing and hope found only in Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net