

Week 5 | The Meaning of the Miracles

Good morning everyone how we doing?

If you have a Bible, we're going to be in **Acts 3**. And as you're turning there, to give you a brief recap, the book of Acts is giving us a snapshot of what the early church looked like and what they did - and in the process offers us some pretty foundational ideas as to what this means for us as a church - from being on mission, to trusting the power of the Spirit, to be family together.

Today we're looking at something else pretty significant, the first physical healing that occurs in the book of Acts:

Acts 3

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.

Alright so to give us some backstory here - Peter and John - are two apostles who are filled by God's Spirit and telling people about Jesus in the city of Jerusalem. And the temple - in a lot of ways - is one of their main bases of operation to tell people about who Jesus is. So as they're making their way there - they notice a man who is unable to walk, hanging outside the temple asking for money.

Now real quick two observations about this man:

1 - what's interesting about him is this man is not allowed to enter into the temple courts to worship. According to Old Testament law, any person with a physical disability was not allowed to enter into the temple, it was considered taboo. So you have this man - for who knows how long - barred off from worshipping God with his people. And you can imagine, this man was on the fringes socially, and because of his inability to walk, he couldn't work so he was on the fringes economically - he couldn't rely on unemployment or social security - he was fully dependent on people's generosity day to day

2 - zooming out a bit, with that in mind, how beautiful is it that this is one of the first characters mentioned at the start of the early church. This man who's socially and economically and religiously marginalized is one of the first people included in the book of Acts. Which tbh, is kinda God's M.O. - always using the people we least expect to show off his power and his beauty

Ok so all that in mind, this man is about to ask Peter and John for money:

3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. **4** And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

This is just a side-comment, but that's a strange and beautiful detail. Look at us. This man had been begging for who knows how long, ashamed to look people in their eyes. And when Peter and John so "look at us" - it's almost like they're restoring his dignity and humanity a bit. As though they're saying "Hey I know people look over you every single day, but we see you, look at us, we see you."

5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

Love that. Hey sorry I don't have any money on me but I'll do you one better.

7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. **8** And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

Again, some beautiful details in there. Verse 8 says he's healed and mentions twice that he goes about leaping. Where the man couldn't walk no he's straight up parkoring it in the temple.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, **10** and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

I mean, this is one of those scenes that if you were to witness it first hand, I don't know about you but I would ball my eyes out. Like, I don't know if you've ever seen those YouTube videos of people who haven't been able to hear their whole life and then they get hooked up to something and then they hear music for the first time - and I'm just like on the floor weeping but all of it, like a huge mess. This is one of those moments.

And what this scene is showing us is how through Jesus' ministry, by the power of the Spirit, He is undoing the curse of sin that is upon humanity and the world.

And v.9 makes sure to mention that all of this happened very publicly. Everyone saw what had happened and knew exactly who this man was. They're filled with wonder and amazement.

But there's also a wider context for this miracle happening as we read on. Keep reading:

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. **12** And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"

In other words, they're saying "Hey look yall. This isn't by our power or godliness or whatever that we did this. It was something else."

13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. **14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

So basically they're saying, "This man was not healed by us, this man was healed by Christ and Christ alone. Jesus rolled back the effects of the curse in this man's body.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21** whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

In other words, this healing was a signpost of what is to come on a much bigger scale one day. Where one day, according to the Scriptures, sin and all its ramifications will be done away with forever. There will be no more sickness and no more death. Forever. This healing is but a preview of what's to come for those who trust in Jesus.

And so, this chapter ends with a bit of an altar call as Peter and John call the people to repent and believe that Jesus is Lord:

22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. **23** And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' **24** And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. **25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' **26** God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

So there you go, that's the first physical healing we see happen in the early church. And in the book of Acts, you actually see 14 total healings in all take place. And some scholars will say that if you understand this first miracle, you understand all the miracles that take place in the book. **(Which for what it's worth if you want to dive more into all of that, I'd encourage you to check our scripture guide this week on the topic.)**

And here's what we're to understand: this miracle shows us exactly how God feels about all the suffering and pain in the world. It shows us something of the love of God and the power of God who is doing something about the effects of sin and brokenness that plague the world. It shows us how followers of Jesus are to deal with suffering and pain, and it shows us what our mission in this world is all about.

Pastor Tim Keller breaks it down like this. He says with this first miracle, it points us in four different directions:

1 - UPWARD (v.15)

This first miracle was to show off the power of God. Check it out again in v.15:

"You killed the author of Life, but God raised him from the dead. To this we are witnesses... and his name has made this man strong." (3:15)

In other words - who healed this man? It wasn't Peter and John. Those guys are real quick to say "Hey this wasn't us. This was Jesus who did this, so if I were you I'd repent and trust in Him."

The point of the miracle was not the miracle in and of itself - rather it was to get the people's attention and force them to respond to Jesus.

2 - FORWARD (v.21)

Like I mentioned earlier, it was to point ahead to the future restoration. Peter says, "Yo you think this is cool, one day Jesus will do away with all sickness, all disease, all suffering and pain. One day Jesus is going to come back and everyone who trusts in Jesus will be doing backflips like this guy."

And let me just say as well - I think in our modern culture, we are somewhat skeptical when it comes to stories like these - when we see miracles happen. They seem unscientific and impossible that they would ever happen. And to that, let me say something and then I'll unpack what I mean:

Miracles are not a suspension of the natural order, but a return to the natural order.

Here's what I mean by that. According to the story of Scripture, God created this world perfect and good and beautiful. Everything in its right place and in its natural order. But because of sin, now everything is broken and shattered.

So all the things that feel normal to us - like decay and breakdown and diseases - is actually a by-product of sin. None of that is natural in the sense of intended from the beginning. Everything sad and tragic about life is the way it is because it is *unnatural.*

So when it comes to the miracle we see in Acts 3, people want to lump that into this category of supernatural, when in reality, miracles when seen in the framework of Scripture, are actually one of the most "natural" things we see. Miracles become little windows of heaven cracking through a broken and dark world.

So - once again the point is not the miracle itself. It's what the miracle represents, it's God saying, "Look - look at what I'm doing and what I'm about. This is how the world works. This is what my kingdom looks like - and I'm here to invite you in on this."

3 - INWARD (v.6)

The miracle is a message about the salvation Jesus can bring to our souls.

This is what we see Peter get at with the healing of this miracle. He doesn't turn to the crowd, in a televangelist sort of way and say, "And you too can be healed in Jesus name!" No he says - repent. He says turn from your sin, turn from your stubborn refusal to trust God. Turn from your way of living. And turn instead to the power and love of Jesus who has overcome death and who will one day wipe away all death and suffering forever.

Because as bad as suffering is - there is something worse that we need healing from - and that's our sin. As great as physical healing is, we need something greater than that and that's the healing of our souls. Sin is the disease that pollutes and sickens our minds and hearts into thinking we are god - and the greatest miracle of all is that Jesus is the only one who can heal us from it.

Now disclaimer, some people will hear this and say if telling people about Jesus is more important then we shouldn't bother with helping people when they're hurting. And to that I'd say, should we care about people's suffering? Absolutely because Jesus did. Should we do something when we see people hurting? Of course, because Jesus did. So as Christians we have **THE BEST** framework to think about social issues and how to restore people's dignity and humanity. And, following the pattern of Jesus, we're also called to tell build relationships with people, and befriend others, with the goal that we can eventually share Jesus with people. It's a both/and.

So even the man who was healed ultimately needed something else, something bigger and better than being able to walk - because the healing of his body for a few decades is a wonderful relief of suffering, but it's no match compared to the span of eternity that a soul endures. Even more than he needed to walk, he needed Jesus.

4 - DOWNWARD (Acts 4)

As I mentioned earlier, the context of this story is incredibly important. Peter and John look like ballers to us, but its important to note in the scope of Acts what their actions actually brought them.

In the next chapter Peter and John, for healing this man, are thrown in prison. No reward, no praise, no interviews. Because here's what tends to happen in the book of Acts: the miracles always get the miracle worker in trouble. It's like the old saying goes: no good deed goes unpunished. And it rings true for the disciples each and every time.

And the truth is, and this is a hard one to wrestle with, in order to relieve this man's suffering, the apostles must suffer themselves. Their obedience came at a cost. And in time, in the story of the early church, their obedience to Jesus would one day cost their very lives so that others may know of the eternal life found in Jesus.

You see this happening in the life of Jesus. In one of the most famous of Jesus' stories, in John 11 he raises Lazarus from the grave. A guy who had been dead for days, Jesus straight up brings him back to life. But in that act of giving someone life, it actually cost Jesus his own life.

It says in **John 11:53** -

So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Again, no rewards. No praise. No accolades. In return, it was suffering and death.

And what we see in Scripture, is the constant downward trajectory of what happens when we sacrifice for the good of the other:

- Jesus saves his friend from death, and in response, he loses his life.
- Jesus loses His life, so that we could be saved.
- In Acts 3, the man walks, and in response, the apostles go to jail

A beautiful thread in Scripture is that they lose so that others can gain. The spread of the church and the spread of Jesus that would heal the world of it's sin sickness would come at the very high cost of men and women giving their lives away.

As beautiful as the book of Acts is, and we will certainly see that as we make our way through it—the reality is that most of the disciples and many early Christians became martyrs for their faith in Jesus because **The healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.**

Sacrifice is the trajectory of the gospel story. Giving your life away. Putting everything out there and holding nothing back. And that's what we are called to as well.

Healing for the world will come as life and power and money and opportunity—go out from us. We enter into someone else's pain, bearing it, and they are healed through it. They hear about Jesus and they by the power of the Spirit repent from sin and become members of the family of God and through your sacrifice, life goes forth,

Application

So what do we do with this story here? I think that as a whole, not overall, but American Christianity for a long time had this mindset that if I obey, I will have the good life. If I do enough good things, if I'm religious enough, if I do enough good things for God - then good things will come back to me in this life.

- God if I do enough spiritual things - then parenting would be a breeze
- God if I do enough good, religious things - then I'd never have any financial problems
- God if I do enough for you - then I will get in this life the life I've always wanted

And when that becomes the dominant way Christians think about the faith, is it any wonder that we then get the extreme examples of this found in TV personalities who say things like you can live your best life now and God will give you health and wealth. Now like I said, those are extreme examples, but they are born out of the American soil of Christianity that assumes things will go well for me in my life so long as I follow Jesus. Just, "Obey God, and everything will work out."

Now hear me - I like comfort. Big fan. I don't prefer suffering, personally I'd rather not.

And yet - what the Scriptures want to show us time and time again is that obedience (might) be the hardest thing you will ever do.

This is true for the life of Jesus, the person we're called to follow and imitate - he healed his best friend and it led to his death. He prayed for the cup of God's wrath to pass over Him, and yet He faced the brutal agony of the cross.

I mean can you imagine the disciples get a proposition like that? "Hey guys, do you want to be able to heal someone and watch them jump around and then you'd tell everyone about Jesus?" Yea that would be awesome." Okay but, it will get you thrown in jail and eventually you're going to die for your faith.

And yet, the healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.

It's possible that God may be asking some of you in this room to forgive someone for something they did that hurt you, badly. And there is nothing in you that wants you to do it. Forgiving that person may be the hardest thing you will ever have to do, and you're not even sure if you can.

And yet, the healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.

It's possible that some of you here have been asked or will be asked to make a significant sacrifice to love someone, or serve someone, or do something huge so that they name of Jesus will go forward and it will be the most difficult thing you will ever do - and you may not get any recognition or any notice.

And yet, the healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.

It's possible that some of you are wrestling with what faithfulness to Jesus will look like for your relational and sexual desires. To think that following and obeying Jesus may mean that your desires will never be met. And there will be days when it will feel like an impossible task, but through the Spirit, you'll be reminded that we follow Jesus - who lived a single life, who was never married - and yet he was the most content person to ever walk the planet. And through your faithfulness others will hear about the goodness and love of God.

Because the healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.

It's possible God is calling you to sacrificial generosity with your resources, or with your finances - and you're thinking about but what does that mean for your standard of living? Or for your future? Or you kids college funds one day?

And yet, the healing of the world comes through the sacrifice of the church.

Conclusion

Sometimes obedience = the hardest thing you've ever done. Sometimes obedience has unforeseen consequences, like it did for Peter and John.

The beautiful thread in Scripture is that, we lose so that others can gain. We die to ourselves so that others may live. We sacrifice so that others may have their needs met. We give ourselves away so that people will experience eternal life in Jesus. **All the while knowing, that when we lose, and when we sacrifice, and when we die, THAT is not the end of the story. Death is not defeat. Death is not the end of the story. If death had no power of Jesus then it has no real power over us.**

So then even if and even when we suffer for being obedient to Jesus, we know that there is life to come.

So during this time, as we close and move into a time of response - I wanna leave that with you - where is God calling you to respond in deeper obedience? Where is He calling you to make the sacrifice? What is God calling you perhaps to loosen your grip on or give up so that by dying to yourself others would be healed by the goodness of Jesus?

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