

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

A Picture Of Salvation

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Acts 4:1-22

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 4:1-22. Last week Pastor Matt walked us through the story of the HEALING of the lame man in Acts 3. That healing went off like a bomb in the city of Jerusalem because everyone knew that man. He had been parked out front of the temple for YEARS! In fact the last verse in the part of the story we are going to read today says:

“For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.” (Acts 4:22 ESV)

So think about that. How long had this brother been sitting there? Probably since he was 15 or 16 years old. That would have been the time when he would normally have gone to work – but because he was lame, his only source of income would have been the alms given by worshippers on their way to the temple. So for 25 years the people of Jerusalem had been walking by this guy. They had gotten use to putting a few coins in their pocket to drop in his cup but now, all of the sudden, he’s not sitting there anymore. In fact the text says he was:

“walking and leaping and praising God.” (Acts 3:8 ESV)

He had gone from sitting on a matt with a cup to break dancing in the court of temple – this was no hidden miracle! Everyone knew what was going on – and everyone wanted to find out how this incredible thing had happened, and so Peter preached an impromptu sermon about Jesus. Peter very wisely said: Don't look at me – look at Jesus! He's the one who did it.

“Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” (Acts 3:16 ESV)

So JESUS is still doing signs and wonders – he's just doing them now through the Apostles. He is still lighting up road flares to attract people to the Gospel – to attract people to himself! That's what is going on in this story.

Now here in chapter 4, because of the uproar that had been created, Peter and John are arrested and are given the opportunity to explain this miracle to the Jewish authorities – and that's exactly what they did. So let's listen in. We are picking up the story at chapter 4 and I'll begin reading at verse 1. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them,² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem,⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders,⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they

had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. (Acts 4:1–22 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I feel like we have permission this morning to take a ZOOMED IN APPROACH with this passage. Last week Pastor Matt did a fabulous job of talking about THE INCIDENT ITSELF – the HEALING that created this entire kerfuffle. I don’t intend to cover all that same ground again this week – and I don’t think we are intended to. One of the amazing things about this passage is how quickly and how naturally Peter moves from a question about HEALING to a declaration about SALVATION. Did you notice that?

The Jewish authorities asked Peter a very specific question:

“By what power or by what name did you do this?” (Acts 4:7 ESV)

They asked him about the healing!! But Peter moved from the healing – from the SIGN – to the thing it SIGNIFIED. He said:

“let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead— by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is

salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:10–12 ESV)

John Stott says here:

“We notice the ease with which Peter moves from healing to salvation, and from the particular to the general. He sees one man’s physical cure as a picture of the salvation which is offered to all in Christ.”¹

That’s exactly right! Peter understood that it wasn’t ABOUT the healing! It wasn’t about the SIGN – it was about the THING SIGNIFIED! The healing was a PICTURE of the salvation that is available to us in Jesus Christ! And so I want to park here – we’ll get to the emerging conflict between the civil authorities and the mandate of the church when we meet it again in chapter 5. Today I just want to park out on this picture and I want to ask the question: what is it suggesting to us about the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ?

A Picture Of Salvation

The first and foundational thing we need to say is that it is of course a salvation from sin.

1. A salvation from sin

That would have been intuitive to the minds of those who first saw this sign, in a way that it probably isn’t for us reading about it in this culture today. But in that culture, there was an assumed connection between sin and disease. Disease was in the world because sin was in the world – so if you wanted to do something about disease you had to do something about sin – they understood that. And Jesus knew that they understood that – he knew what questions they were asking every time he did a healing; you can see that very clearly in Mark 2. When Jesus healed the paralytic he said:

¹John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 97.

“Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Folks were freaking out a little bit about that, because who forgive sins but God? And yet, Jesus had undeniably healed this brother – so what in the world was going on? Jesus knows that they are wrestling with this, so he says:

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” —he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” (Mark 2:9–11 ESV)

You see its all a piece. Jesus says, I can heal people because I have the authority to forgive sins.

It is sin that ultimately blocks us from receiving the blessings and gifts of God. That’s why in James 5, in the passage about calling the elders to pray for you when you are sick it says:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. (James 5:16 ESV)

Unconfessed, unforgiven sin blocks healing! More than that – unconfessed, unforgiven sin attracts WRATH! The Bible is very clear, if you harbour sin in your heart, you will not attract the BLESSINGS of God, you will attract THE CURSE OF GOD.

The prophet Zechariah had a vision once of a giant flying scroll. An angel of the Lord explained the meaning, he said:

“This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side. ⁴ I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. And it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones.” (Zechariah 5:3–4 ESV)

So the angel says that God has basically fired out PROVIDENTIAL POWERS from his throne in heaven – he has basically fired off HEAT SEEKING MISSILES whose job it is to find sin wherever it is given safe harbor and to destroy it. God is a good creator, and he is going to restore

creation, and do that he is going to have to remove from it the stain and corruption of sin – so he was set loose FORCES and POWERS that have been designed to seek out and destroy all sin.

The prophet of course is sharing that vision as an encouragement to GET RID OF SIN. Every time you sin it's like swallowing a bag of iron filings – and now there is a heat seeking, magnetic targeting missile of power and wrath coming right for you fired from the throne room of Almighty God.

So how are we going to deal with that?

Well, according to the New Testament, on the cross, Jesus basically absorbs all of the sin that is placed upon him through confession and faith - he became a sin sponge - the Apostle Paul says, HE BECAME SIN, who knew no sin – in order to attract, absorb and obliterate the curse of God. Galatians 3:13 says:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

Do you understand that?

On the cross – on the tree – Jesus exposed himself to the wrath of Almighty God. He understood that we could never be blessed, we could never be saved, as long as we were covered in the guilt and filth of sin. So he became sin, who knew no sin – so that we might become the righteousness of God.

All true salvation starts here.

There is no further blessing until the curse and stain of sin has been removed.

But once it has been removed – through confession and repentance toward Christ – then the blessings of God can begin to flow, and that's what we are seeing in this picture. We are seeing

new creation blessings beginning to flow from the fountain that was opened at the cross of Jesus Christ.

So our salvation is first and foremost a salvation from sin – but here in this story we also see that is a salvation UNTO STRENGTH.

2. A salvation unto strength

There are a couple of ways this point is made in this story – the obvious one, of course, is the fact that this work of salvation LITERALLY lifted this brother up from his mat and made him able to stand again on his own two feet like a man!

As soon as he came into contact with Jesus through the hands and through the Word of the Apostles, the Bible says:

“immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.” (Acts 3:7 ESV)

So if that is a picture of salvation, then obviously, salvation is about making us strong! It is about lifting us up to our feet again! It is about giving us back our purpose and ability! It is about restoring us to the dignity and calling we had in the beginning.

We get a picture of that in the restoration of the lame man – but I think there is another indicator of that in this story as well. Look at Acts 4:13. It says:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 ESV)

It wasn't just the lame man that was getting strong in this story, it was Peter and John as well. Remember, this is the Peter that denied Jesus 3 times on the night of his arrest and trial. This is that Peter. This is that John! He too was one of those who abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just a couple of weeks ago – these were not strong men. But now they are healing

people, they are teaching the Bible, they are proclaiming Christ and they are defying the power and the authority of the state.

Listen to how Peter is talking now:

“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19–20 ESV)

Who is this guy? Who are these men? What has happened to them to make them the strong men they are now?

And the answer of course is Jesus!

When Jesus saves us, he doesn't just forgive us, he makes us strong! This is salvation in all its fullness! This is the salvation that was prophesied all the way back in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 36 the prophet records God as promising:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” (Ezekiel 36:25 ESV)

Alright – so that's the forgiveness part – that's the washing away sin part; but that's not all that is promised. God goes on to say:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26–27 ESV)

Did you hear that? God says, I will wash your heart, and then I'll put something inside your heart that will make you strong. That is salvation in all its fullness!

Louis Berkhof, the old Princeton theologian, describes REGENERATION – this new heart, new power salvation as:

“that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. . . . It is a fundamental change in the principle of life and the governing disposition of the soul, and therefore affects the whole man”²

Isn't that amazing? Doesn't that sound good? Two times there he uses the phrase: the governing disposition of the soul. That's what it's really all about it, isn't it? You see, at the end of the day, everybody does what they want. Human beings are weak, we are like dogs that return to our own vomit. We are attracted to stupid stuff. Stuff that makes us sick. Stuff that makes us weak. But thanks be to God, when we come to Jesus, we get a full wash an injection of the principle and Spirit of new life. We start to want to better things. We start to desire what is good. We start to make healthy choices. And slowly but surely, by one degree of glory to the next – we begin to grow.

Our feet and our ankles become strong. We walk like men and women again. We talk like men and women again. There is a new governing Spirit in us that is making us strong!

The process begins the MOMENT we come to Jesus and it carries on over the course of our lives and is completed finally on the day of our glorious resurrection.

By the way – have you ever noticed that THAT was what Peter and John were talking about with the crowd when they were arrested by the Jewish Council? Look at verse 2, it says:

“they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” (Acts 4:2 ESV)

They weren't talking about healing! They weren't saying: This healing proves that you can be healed! They understood that the healing was a picture of salvation! So they were saying, “This healing proves that you can be resurrected!” That is the great hope and final outcome of our salvation!!! The Apostle Paul says:

²Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), paragraph 894.

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised imperishable**, and we shall be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52 ESV)

That is THE MIRACLE toward which THIS MIRACLE pointed! This guy got new feet and ankles – let me tell you something brothers and sisters – I want more than that! As you can see for yourselves – I need more than that! I need new everything! And according to the Bible, on the last day, I shall have it, along with every other man, woman and child who has put their faith in Jesus. We’ll get new everything:

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:53–54 ESV)

The salvation that is ours in Christ is a salvation FROM SIN and it is a salvation UNTO STRENGTH, LIFE and VICTORY, praise the Lord! And then lastly, it is also a salvation FOR worship and joy.

3. A salvation for worship and joy

I’m sure you noticed that as well; that’s an obvious feature of the story. As soon as the brother felt the strength come back into his body, the Bible says:

“And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.” (Acts 3:8 ESV)

That is a picture of salvation!

Salvation is not just FROM a BAD OUTCOME it is TO A GOOD PURPOSE. Salvation is about making us again who we were originally created and intended to be. And this healing provides a very good picture of that.

We get another good picture of that at the very end of the Bible; it's found in Revelation 21:23-26. John is talking about the new creation – he speaks of it as a new Jerusalem – and he says:

“the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.” (Revelation 21:23–27 ESV)

I'm not sure if you know this, but this vision in Revelation is actually a “re-release” you might say, of a prophetic oracle found at the end of the Book of Isaiah. Listen carefully and you will spot the similarities. Isaiah records God as saying:

²² “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain.

²³ From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.

²⁴ “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Isaiah 66:22–24 ESV)

Isn't that interesting. In both depictions eternity – the new heavens and the new earth that last forever – is a place where people are worshipping. But it isn't just singing – in fact neither picture even mentions singing – the worship that is mentioned involves going in and going out. We go out into creation and we MAKE THINGS. We cultivate. We produce wonderful, marvelous things with which to serve one another and glorify God!

That's what healed people are going to do – that's what resurrected people are going to do – that's what strong people are going to do - for all eternity. We are going in and out, bringing to God the honour and the glory of the nations.

But the text also says that not every human being is going to be a part of that. Both the Old Testament and New Testament versions of this vision contain a warning:

Nothing unclean is going to enter in. Nothing that remains soaked in sin. Nothing unwashed. But only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Only those who have put their trust in the person and work of Jesus. For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

There is only Jesus.

So COME – come unto THIS JESUS – and be saved. Saved from sin. Saved unto strength and saved for worship and joy for all eternity – thanks be to God!

Let me pray for us.