

The Miracle and the Message

- Acts 3:1-16
- I appreciate the excellent words we have heard from several men in the church either in the book of Acts or related to the message of the book. Vic, Scott, Kevin, and Dan have served us well. And Kevin will come back to the pulpit next Sunday to examine Peter's sermon in Acts 2. Today we will look at Peter's second sermon, which follows on the heels of Peter's first recorded miracle. It's not the first miracle done by the apostles: look at Acts 2:43. Luke has already told us that signs and wonders were being done through the apostles, and now he is going to tell us about a specific sign, a specific wonder. And then Peter will stand up and preach to the crowd that's gathered. We will see this pattern throughout the book of Acts, where there is a wonder and then there is a word. A miracle followed by a message. A demonstration followed by a proclamation. That's what we see here in Acts 3, and I want to look at the occurrence with that division: first, we will study the miracle itself. Then we will begin our study in the message, the sermon that Peter preached in response to the gathering that took place when the lame man was healed. And if you look ahead to Acts 4:4, you see that as a result of the word that the crowd heard, after the wonder they had seen gathered them for a sermon, 2,000 men were saved.
- The miracle
- The location: It is stated by Luke about as "matter-of-factly" as he could have done. Peter and John are going up to the temple to pray, at the ninth hour. The verb there indicates that this was a regular occurrence. They were continuing in their pattern, in other words, to go to prayer in the temple. They were entering by the Beautiful Gate at the same time a lame man was being carried there, presumably by his friends. This was also a pattern of behavior. We are told this man was put there daily so he could beg for alms. The shrewdness of the lame man should be noted. He was at one of the gates of the temple at the hour when the devout would be passing through on their way to worship. What better place to be in order to be seen by people who desired to please God and giving alms was one way to do that! It was prime real estate. I thought about all the beggars that Cindy and I passed in Europe, and many of them were in the underground walkways, where businessmen would pass by them on their way to catch a subway train. Now, more about the gate. It is supposed by many scholars that the beautiful gate was the main eastern entrance to the temple that boasted a double door that was 75 feet high. Get a picture in your mind of the magnificence of these doors. They stood seven and a half stories high. It took twenty men to open the gate. And it was made of Corinthian brass. Josephus said it "greatly excelled those that were only covered with silver and gold." So, the man lame from birth was shrewd as he would have understood the contrast. Here was a man who was born lame, and we find out in chapter 4 that he is more than 40 years old. Never walked. Legs are useless. Jewish law required that he make his living by begging. Jewish law also prevented him from entering the temple. But as the devout enter in and see this huge, powerful, beautiful gate in all its splendor, their hearts would have been touched by the contrast of a broken man on the ground in front of it, a broken man whose livelihood depended on their generosity.
- The request and the commands: the lame man asked for alms. Without looking at Peter and John. Looking was not required in asking, and maybe it made the beggar look more humble or more pitiful to look without asking. We saw this repeatedly in Europe. **(PICTURE)** But Peter looked at him! Intently. Now, something to consider, and that is that Peter has probably walked by this man countless times. He has seen him there. Remember, the lame man was carried daily to this spot. And it has been Peter's custom to go to prayer in the temple. In fact, we know from John 10 that Jesus taught in Solomon's portico, the very place that Peter preached after he healed the lame man. It is clearly conceivable that Jesus Himself walked past this lame man many times! **But none of those times were the time chosen by God for this man to be healed. This** was. I

believe the Spirit of God came upon Peter when he heard the lame man ask for alms, and Peter looked at him intently for the first time. As did John. Maybe it was at that moment that God gave Peter the gift of faith to ask for this man's healing. The man had requested money. Let's look at Peter's response: it includes two very clear commands.

- First, Peter says, "Look at us." And the man looked up, expecting to receive a miracle, right? NO. The man looked up, expecting to receive a denarius. To whom did God give faith for this miracle? I don't see any evidence that the lame man had faith to receive it. Maybe at the same time Peter commanded him to rise, God gave the man faith. But we cannot say that for sure. What we CAN say for sure is that God gave Peter faith. When is the last time you said to someone, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Probably never. But if you did say it to a lame person, it would either because you had lost your mind, or because you had been given faith to say that. More on that in a moment.
- The second command was this: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Peter is calling on the name. That name. The name that is above every name. The only name given among men by which we must be saved. The name at which every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord. **That** name.
- **The miracle.** Peter spoke the command. Then he reached out his hand to take the lame man by the hand. J. R. Stott says, "It was not a gesture of unbelief but of love." Thomas Walker said, "The power was Christ's but the hand was Peter's." And hadn't Peter seen Jesus heal this way many times? Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, raised her from the dead, in Luke 8:54: "But taking her by the hand He called, saying, 'Child, arise.' And her spirit returned, and she got up at once." Peter reached out his right hand and raised the man up, and an amazing miracle took place. **There was no rehab needed for ankles and calves and hamstrings and quads that had NEVER worked.** How many of you have children who just jumped up one day and started walking, having never pulled up once. Just went from lying on the floor, never even crawled, and then one day you looked up and your one-year old was running past you, chasing the dog. Anybody? No! It takes months for a child to learn to walk. Not this man. Jesus healed him instantly and thoroughly. "And LEAPING up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God." (verse 8) TWO firsts: first time ever in the temple, and first time walking and leaping. And all the people saw it and were amazed. They were "filled with wonder" (verse 10). That's right. God had performed a wonder. Now, it's time for the Word.
- The Message
- I want you to see how Peter does two things in the introduction of this message, after he makes an all important disclaimer. The disclaimer is wonderful: look at verse 12. Don't look at me! It is not by my power that this man stands healed before you. Nor was his healing the result of any particular piety that we may have, John and I. Then in verse 16, Peter says, "And His name—by faith in His name—has made this man strong." The subject of that sentence: "His name." The verb: "has made this man strong." The clarification: "by faith in His name." The spotlight should be on Jesus! It is His name, and it is the faith that He gave us to believe in His name, that has brought about this healing. Now, let's look at the two things Peter does in the introduction to his sermon, in verses 13-15.
- First, Peter preaches Jesus. He exalts the Lord with five truths from Scripture.
- (13) **Jesus is the servant of God.** Isaiah 52:13 says, "Behold, My servant shall act wisely; He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted." This Jesus is the long-awaited servant of God!
- God glorified Him. Jesus prayed this in John 17, remember? "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You." And Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him that name that is above every name... (Phil. 2:9-10)
- (14) **Jesus is the Holy and Righteous One.** Peter says, the One you denied is the Holy and Righteous One, and yet you are here at the temple looking for Holiness and Righteousness!

- (15) **Jesus is the Author of Life.** Or as dear Ruby used to say, Jesus is the Arthur of Life. She's with the Lord now and I can imagine her entering heaven for the first time saying, "I want to see the Arthur of Life." Author of Life. An amazing title. Got life? It came from Jesus. Physical life? It came from Jesus. Spiritual life? It came from Jesus.
- **God raised Him from the dead.** You may have killed the Author of Life, but God has the final word. He did then. He does now. He does for eternity. Jesus is exalted!
- John Piper says, "Preaching is fundamentally the exaltation of Jesus. So is your witnessing." So, learn these five truths that exalt Jesus and use them! He is the long awaited Servant of God. He was glorified by God. He is the Holy and Righteous One. He is the Author of Life. He is risen from the dead!
- Preaching is also, Piper says, "an indictment of the human conscience when it does not exalt Jesus." Peter demonstrates that in this, his second message, just as he did in his first! ("this Jesus...you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" Acts 2:23) Look at the four indictments Peter brings to their consciences here.
- (13) You delivered him over. Remember, Peter says? This was just over 50 days ago. Two months ago. YOU delivered the Author of Life over. You turned your backs on the Servant of God. Not only that:
- You denied Him in the presence of Pilate. Pilate! A pagan governor. He is less culpable in this than you are. Not only that, it gets worse as sin always does:
- (14) You chose a murderer over Jesus. Remember? Many of you were standing here less than two months ago shouting, "Give us Barabbas! Away with Jesus! Give us Barabbas! We have no king but Caesar. Crucify Him! We want a murderer to be free on our streets. We want this man, the Holy and Righteous One, to be murdered." This is what sin does: it perverts men's values. It turns them upside down. It celebrates rebellion and perversion, and it seeks to destroy wholeness and goodness.
- (15) You killed the Author of Life. A striking statement, almost inconceivable that someone could kill Life itself. But God allowed it, no God ordained it, and then He reversed all of these attacks on His Son by raising Him from the dead. Peter says, "To this we are witnesses." That's a consistent pattern we see in the apostles' preaching: You killed Jesus. God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses.
- Do you see how Peter turns the attention away from himself and John, and even away from the lame man who is no longer lame but completely healed, and turns the spotlight completely on Jesus? And though we will not unpack the rest of it today, I want you to see that Peter did not leave the men he was preaching to without hope. There is always much more powerful GOOD news to those who will take to heart the BAD news about their own souls. Look at verse 19-20. Amazing grace. Repent and God will blot out your sins and even give you times of refreshing!