

This is the story of a miracle. In chapter 2, Luke, the human author of the book of Acts, has mentioned miracles twice. In 2:22, Peter had said “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know....” Then in 2:43 we read, “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” And now in 3:1-10 we have an account of one of those wonders and signs done through the apostles. This is the most detailed account of a miracle in Acts. It is an example of what Jesus did through the apostles more often. It’s purpose was to attest that the apostles were the authorized witnesses to Jesus. It was to confirm that the message they were bringing was the message that Jesus was bringing through them. And it was a sign that pointed to the salvation that Jesus had come to bring.

I’d like to begin this evening with a little apologetics. Apologetics is what Christians do to show that it is reasonable to believe the message of the Bible including these stories of miracles. It is about the defense of the faith against those who claim that biblical Christianity is just a myth or superstition and that it is not reasonable for 21 century people to believe in God and the biblical account of creation and in the resurrection of Jesus and in the miracles that the Bible describes. Most Christians have no difficulty believing that the Bible is the word of God and true in all that it teaches, but there may be times when we wonder – how can we be right when so many smart people around us view us as gullible and naïve for believing in the supernatural realm as the Bible describes it.

The Bible does not concern itself much with apologetics. It simply declares the truth and declares that we are responsible to believe it and act upon it. It teaches that God reveals himself to us through the created order and the Bible and that to reject God’s revelation is an act of rebellion for which we are accountable. Furthermore, it teaches that faith is a gift of God and that one of the things that God does in saving us is to open our eyes to see the truth of his Word. For most believers, believing that the Bible is God’s word is not a problem because the Holy Spirit gives us that confidence. But there is still a place for showing that believing the Bible is not irrational – that it is in fact the only truly rational way of understanding reality.

The fact is that everyone’s way of looking at the world is rooted in faith. The conviction that there is no God and that the only way to truth is through science is a belief. It cannot be proven. It cannot be proven that there is nothing more than the physical world and that there is no supernatural realm. It cannot be proven that miracles could never happen. And there are many huge problems with the conviction that the physical world is all that there is and that there is no God who created the world. That worldview does not explain convincingly why there is something rather than nothing. It does not explain convincingly why humans search for meaning and why we have a sense of right and wrong. It does not have good explanations for love and human consciousness. One way of putting this is that the biblical account of reality “better answers life’s universal ultimate questions than its competitors.” (Roger Olson, *The Essentials of Christian Thought*, pl 36).

To say that there is no God is just as much an article of faith than it is to say that there is a God. And the biblical view of reality with the Creator-God at the center gives the best account of reality as we experience it – sin and evil, why we feel responsible for our actions, why we feel guilt, why we search for meaning and many other things. And miracles are part of the biblical account of reality. And as such they do not have to be a problem for belief. If God is who is says he is in the Bible, miracles are not a problem for him. If God can created the world by speaking, he can certainly cause miracles to happen. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, he will have no problem healing a lame man. And if there is no resurrection, then we have no hope – there is no such thing as eternal life and when we die that is it.

There is no good reason to deny that God can do miracles. The world wants us to think that it is childish to believe in the supernatural, but when you probe into what the world believes you find that it is forced to believe things that are a lot harder to believe than the biblical worldview with its miracles.

So we come to the miracle that is described in our text. This is an account of something that actually happened. Peter and John are going to the temple to pray. The first believers continued to worship at the temple although its not likely that they had anything more to do with the sacrifices because they understood that Jesus had fulfilled the OT sacrifices. But they did go there to pray. Pretty soon they would be forced not to worship at the temple because of persecution. Luke is going to tell that story. But at this point they are still taking part in the prayers at the temple.

There was a lame man sitting there who was begging. He had been lame from his birth. He was carried to the temple by family or friends. And he was asking for alms. He was asking for money. There was a reasonable expectation that the people going to the temple to pray would be generous. Helping the poor was an important part of God's calling for his people. The OT has much to say about the need for those who had more than enough to share with those who were poor for whatever reason. In this case of the man in this story the reason for his poverty was obvious. And it was reasonable for him to believe that the faithful going to the temple to pray would express their love for God by showing compassion to him in his sad condition.

It is already a reminder and a challenge for us to picture this man begging near the entrance of the temple. He came to that place because he hoped that the people who went to worship God would also be compassionate and generous towards the poor and needy. This is part of biblical teaching throughout the Bible. Worshipping God and helping the poor are supposed to go together and the Bible makes it clear that our love for God is not real if it does not lead to helping the needy. The point as already been made in chapter 2 where Luke describes how the members of the church helped one another. John makes this point very clearly when he says in 1 John 3:17, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

If we imagine the people passing by this man on their way to worship God at the temple, we might wonder whether it took very long for him to have his cup running over. And we might also consider whether our

generosity towards the poor shows that our love for God is real or something else. Our way of helping the poor will be different than the way people helped the poor in NT times. Much of the work of helping the poor is done through organizations that we can support. We give money, but we can also be involved through being directly involved in an organization. There are many ways that this can be done, but one thing is sure and that is truly worshipping God and being generous to the poor go together. It made sense for this lame man to beg at the gate of the temple because if the people going to the temple were truly worshipping God, they would also be generous to the poor.

So Peter and John are on their way to the temple to pray and the lame man asked them for money. It's interesting that Luke tells us that "Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." Peter wants to look the man in the eye. He wants to make a personal connection. He is treating the lame man as a person rather than as some generic beggar. He shows the man respect. That is what we must do as well if we interact directly with someone who needs our help. We need to look them in the eye. We need to respect them as unique individuals rather than treat them as a category.

Verses 6-7 describe the miracle, "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!' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God."

Peter does not give him what he asked for, but something much, much better. He asked for money, instead of receiving money he was healed of his lame condition. He had never been able to walk before. Now he was walk and leap. This was an unmistakable miracle. There was nothing ambiguous about it. The man had been lame from birth, but now he was able to walk and jump and dance.

The miracle is done in the name of Jesus. The power that healed the man did not come from Peter. It came from Jesus. Peter makes sure that everyone understands that the miraculous healing did not come from him, but from Jesus. This is a continuation of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus had performed many miracles while he was on earth. He had healed many people. Here he is continuing that same ministry from his exalted place at the right hand of God through his apostles. He is building his church. He is bringing his kingdom. He is bringing the news of salvation in his name through his apostles. This healing miracle is just like the healing miracles that Jesus performed while he was on earth. Only now he is in heaven and he is working through his apostles.

Part of its purpose was to attest to the fact that the apostles were authorized by Jesus to be his witnesses. The miracles that Jesus did through his apostles confirmed that the message that they brought was the message that Jesus had told them to bring. Part of its purpose was to fill the people with wonder and amazement.

Verse 10 says "And they were all filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." Verse 11 says that "all the people [were] utterly astounded."

This is one of the purposes of miracles. In Acts 2:22, Peter had called the miracles of Jesus “mighty works and wonders and signs.” In Acts 2:43, Luke says that “many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” Miracles are intended to fill us with wonder and amazement and astonishment. They are intended to fill us with wonder and amazement and astonishment at the power of God – and in this case Jesus. They are intended to demonstrate to us that nothing is impossible with God.

The Psalms sing of God as the one who does wonders. Psalm 77:11, “I will remember the deeds of the LORD, yes; I will remember your wonders of old.” Psalm 77:14, “You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the people.” In Psalm 78:3-4, the Psalmist speaks of “things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”

This is part of the reason that we teach our children the stories of the Bible – to teach them that the true God who created all things is a God who is almighty. He is a God who is so great and powerful that he is able to send plagues upon Egypt to deliver his people from slavery. He is able to make a dry path in the middle of the Red Sea. He is able to rain mana from heaven and cause streams of water to flow from a rock. We are meant to be amazed at what God is able to do and to celebrate that in our worship.

Part of the appropriate response of the people of God to the true God of heaven and earth and Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God is wonder and amazement. Being amazed at miracles is part of that, but when we meditate on the creation and how Jesus upholds all things by the word of his power, we understand that miracles are not all that different from what God is doing everyday in the creation. We are amazed at the vastness and complexity of the creation. We are amazed at the beauty of mountains and the development of a baby in the womb and the whole complex world of atoms and molecules. When we marvel at these things as believers we are marveling at the God who created and uphold all things.

And our amazement at miracles is not much different. Miracles are just God exercising his power and wisdom in unusual ways. If God can create human beings surely it is not hard for him to heal a lame man if he chooses to do so. The God who creates eyes in human beings is fully capable of restoring sight to the blind if he chooses to do so. Miracles are meant to evoke amazement and awe at what God is able to do, but that is just one way that we are to be amazed and awed at God. God is a God who evokes wonder. And being amazed at his glorious being and wonderful works is a huge part of the richness of human life as it is meant to be lived.

Now one of the ways that we can drift away from God is to lose that sense of wonder. Psalm 78:11 says of the people of Israel, “They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.” What this shows us is that we are meant to keep alive the memory of the wonders that God has performed in the past. God is not always doing miracles. The miracles in the Bible are mostly done to mark specific turning points in the unfolding of God’s plan. But we are to remember the miracles that God has done in the past. They are to function for us the same way that they functioned for the people who witnessed them. God expects us to remember the

wonders that he has done and to continue to be amazed at his power and glory displayed in them. But we tend to forget. We tend to lose the sense of amazement and wonder. We tend to be so preoccupied with this earthly life that our hearts become dull towards God. In some people that continues all the way to turning away from God.

This is why we need worship services, mid-week meetings, family worship and personal devotion to help us to remember – to help us to reflect on how amazing God is – to nurture our relationship with God so that we do not become hardhearted and dull towards God. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will so bless his word to us that we will not forget how amazing God is in his power and his glory.

So one of the purposes of miracles is to evoke amazement and wonder at the power of God – here the power of Jesus. But there is another important reason for miracles. The miracles of Jesus and the apostles, are also signs of the salvation that Jesus came to bring. One of the terms that Peter uses when he speaks of the miracles of Jesus is the term “signs.” And the description of the lame man walking and leaping and praising God is intended to remind us of the OT promise that when God comes to bring his salvation those who are lame will be healed. In Isaiah 35:5-6 we read, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

In Luke 4:16-21 Jesus speaks of himself as the one who would bring that salvation. He quoted from a number of verses from Isaiah. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And then Jesus said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus’ miracles were signs that through him the day of salvation had begun. His miracles were signs of the healing that his people would experience as a result of the victory he would win over sin and death. Sin is the ultimate cause of all sickness and pain and death and Jesus’ miracles were firstfruits pointing to a renewed creation where all the results of sin are gone and life in God’s creation becomes what God had always intended it to be.

Here is how David Peterson describes this in his commentary on Acts. The signs and wonders in Acts, “herald the nearness of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and point to the salvation he brings. They demonstrate the breaking of the power of Satan, sin and death, and portray the restoration of the relationships between humanity and God that the gospel offers all who repent and believe. In OT prophetic expectation, this salvation ultimately involves the perfection of life in a renewed creation. The miracles in the NT, therefore, anticipate that resurrection wholeness of body, mind, and spirit, though they do so in a piecemeal and temporary fashion.” (p. 85-86).

So the healing of this lame man in the power of Jesus’ name was a sign – an anticipation, a foreshadowing of the full salvation that Jesus came to bring. The salvation that Jesus came to bring is about saving us from our sins – from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin. That means forgiveness for our sins and the renewal

of our lives so that we begin to live the lives of obedience we are created and saved to live. But obtaining forgiveness and renewal for us is part of a much bigger picture in which we and the whole creation are delivered from all the consequences of sin and that includes the healing of our bodies. While we are in this life we experience sickness and injuries. As we get older our bodies begin to break down. The healing of this lame man points us to the comprehensive healing that the followers of Jesus will experience when Jesus returns to bring the fulness of salvation. We will be healed body and soul. Think of the people among us who are sick – who live with pain – who are bowed over – whose eyesight is failing. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

What an encouragement as we live with sickness and pain and the breakdown of our bodies and that of our loved ones! When we are young our bodies are mostly healthy and strong. But there are exceptions. And we have loved ones who are weak and fail. As we age we get stiff and sore and we often say to one another – I’m getting older. I can feel it. One day we will be healed. We will walk and leap and praise the Lord. The healing of this man is a little preview of what we can expect.

What a reason for us to praise the Lord! We know nothing about this man’s spiritual condition before his healing. But after his healing he was praising God. And we can praise God with him because his healing is a sign of the comprehensive healing that Jesus brings. We experience the beginning of that now if we are trusting in Jesus and repenting of our sins. We know that in Christ our sins are forgiven and we are right with God. We know that in Christ we are being renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we are gradually being made more and more like Jesus. Our relationship with God is healed. Our souls are being healed. We experience many blessings of salvation in the here and now in a living relationship with God. And we live in the hope of the perfection of all of that in the new creation along with the healing of our bodies as are raised from the dead.

But think of the opposite of these things. This salvation is offered to all who hear the gospel, but it is not experienced by all. There are those who are not interested. There are those who are living only for this world. If there is anyone like that among us today, you must know that the beautiful sign of salvation in this miracle is not your hope as long as you are not trusting in Jesus. It is for those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord of their lives. It is for those who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. It is for those who are turning from their sins in repentance. And I urge you to think of your life and your future in the light of this passage. It is the way of life that is signified in this miracle. And that way of life is given to all who turn to Jesus and believe in him.