

Acts 3-5: An Unexpected Miracle

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When we think of miracles that Jesus did, we may think of people that approached Jesus with a desperate need, and out of sheer compassion, Jesus healed them. In fact most of the New Testament miracles were done for reasons beyond compassion to teach His disciples, to draw crowds, and to reveal who Jesus is. Some of the miracles, like the healing of the lame man in Acts 3, were done for people who were not even expecting it or asking for it. Jesus just healed a man unexpectedly in a very important place for a very important reason. Imagine the drama at the Temple in Jerusalem when a well known man who had been lame from birth suddenly leaps up from the ground and began dancing around praising God. The man had thought that what he really needed was donations from the people going into the Temple so he could support himself. He strategically placed himself at the Temple gate where everyone had to pass to enter at the daily time of prayer. Naturally people would be at their religious "do-gooder" best at this time and place so this lame guy could reap his reward. Unexpectedly, Peter and John passed by, and when the lame man asked for money, Peter said, "I do not possess silver or gold, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ-walk!" This man, who had exercised no faith or done any good deed was grabbed up by Peter, and immediately his feet, legs, and ankles were strengthened, and he began leaping and walking about. This guy who had never walked before could suddenly dunk a basketball (my interpretation). He thought he needed money, but Peter gave him what he really needed—Jesus.

Another misconception that most of us have is that healings occur when believers exercise their great faith. Amazingly, it appears to me after reviewing the Book of Acts that all the people healed by the Apostles were unbelievers. God sovereignly chose people to be healed for His purposes. In that time of such great transition, God gave His spokespersons in the early church the gift of miracles. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:12 that "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you by signs and wonders and miracles." Imagine those guys walking constantly into hostile and unknown environments, but God was doing great things to draw crowds, and give credibility to their message.

The Scene and Context of Acts 3

Peter and John had been radically transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 so that they were bold witnesses for Christ in the streets of Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter, they continued their routine of going to the Temple at the ninth hour of the day for the daily prayers and sacrifices given there. What was not routine was their new commitment to be witnesses for Christ wherever they went. According to the tradition of the times, there was a time of prayer at 9, 12, and 3, with an animal sacrifice at 3:00 pm. Thousands of people would routinely come to the Temple every day at 3 pm, but that day in Acts 3 they were treated to an incredible sign which pointed them all to Jesus. After the crowd formed up to see what had happened, Peter gave them a Gospel presentation, and that day 5,000 men believed in Jesus as their Savior (Acts 4:4). Theologians differ as to whether this number included those who believed at Pentecost in Acts 2, but either way thousands believed there at the Temple in Acts 3.

The Message

In Acts 3:12-26, Peter, John, the healed guy, and the large crowd assembled outside the Temple gate on the east side of the Temple Mount in the Portico of Solomon. Peter took that opportunity to address the crowd. The first thing Peter made clear was that the miracle was not done by he and John, but by the power of Jesus Christ. In his message, Peter presented five of the many names that express who Jesus is. In verse 13, Jesus is God's servant who Isaiah the prophet spoke of in Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12. The servant was despised and forsaken by men. Our griefs and sorrows He took upon Himself. But he was pierced through for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. He rendered Himself as a guilt offering. The second name is His given name Jesus, which is the Greek form of Joshua in Hebrew. In Greek it means "He who saves", and in Hebrew Joshua means "The Lord is salvation". The angels had told Joseph in Matt.1:21, "you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."

The third title Peter gave for Jesus in Acts 3:14 was "the Holy and Righteous One". Jesus was completely sinless and innocent, yet they disowned Him and asked for a real murderer to be released. Fourthly, Jesus was the Prince of life in verse 15. Jesus is the source of life, the creator, and the sustainer of life. You can only have eternal life if He gives it to you. Lastly, in verse 18,

Peter told them that Jesus is the anointed one of God that the prophets had said would come into the world to suffer and die for our sins. In Greek, "Christ" means the anointed one, and in Hebrew Messiah means anointed one. He is the one that God set apart and appointed to redeem mankind.

What Shall We Do?

Since God had fulfilled His promise of sending the Messiah to save them, there was a necessary course of action they should take. Peter proclaimed that they should "Repent therefore...that your sins may be wiped away". Repent means to change your mind, and rethink who Jesus is. You previously disowned Him and put Him to death, but now receive Him as your Savior. Jesus is in heaven, but in the future He will return to restore all things just as the prophets said. Peter quoted Moses from the famous Messianic passage of Deuteronomy 18:15. All Jews believed that Moses was speaking of the great prophet that God would send into the world to deliver and restore Israel. Moses had made a stunning prophecy of judgment on anyone who "does not heed that prophet". Then in Acts 3:25, Peter confirmed that God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the world through one of his descendants was fulfilled in Christ (see Genesis 22:18). God had sent Jesus to Israel first, and now God had raised Jesus from the dead to turn every one of them away from their wicked ways. In response to Peter's challenge to that crowd on the Temple Mount, Acts 4:4 tells us that the total number of men who believed in Jesus was 5000. If he is including the 3000 from Acts 2:41, then 2,000 additional men believed in Jesus, and the total number of believers could have been over 10,000.

Unbelief is Blinding

In Acts 4:1-3, the temple guard had noticed and reported that a tremendous crowd had gathered, and a follower of Jesus was addressing the crowd. The priests, and the Sadducees were greatly disturbed that Peter was preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The temple guard grabbed up Peter and John, and threw them in jail. The next day Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin to give a defense of what they had been preaching. In Acts 4:7, the rulers, elders, and priests could not deny that a great miracle had occurred, so their only weapon was to try and discredit the source. Can you imagine that they had already questioned the lame man who was healed. The text makes it clear that he had been born lame, and everyone knew him well, so they could not deny it. I imagine that it was very much like the healing of the blind man in John 9. When they questioned him he said, "all I know is that whereas I was blind, now I see." I think the lame guy dunked a few basketballs for them and that ended the discussion. The fact was the unbelief of the religious leaders had made them spiritually blinded so that they could not see the obvious facts that the 5000 men who believed saw.

In Acts 4:8-9, God spoke through Peter in response that they were on trial for doing a good thing for a sick man. The answer to their question about what happened was that the man had been healed by the power of Jesus whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised up from the dead. Then Peter quoted from Psalm 118 written hundreds of years before that the cornerstone of God's building had been rejected by the very people it was given to support. Jesus had been sent to save them, but they rejected Him. Acts 4:12 is a very important passage because it makes it clear that Jesus is the only means and basis of salvation that God has provided. Is there any other sinless person to die for our sin? Peter makes it clear that the answer is no. Peter had said virtually the same thing back in John 6:68-69, except with much less understanding and confidence. During His Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus had said such exclusivistic things that most of the crowd fell away. Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked if they were leaving Him too. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Only you have the words of eternal life."

The Sanhedrin was shocked at the confidence of Peter and John, especially since they were uneducated and untrained men from Galilee. At that point the previously lame man came and stood with them, and the council was dumbfounded about what to do so they held a conference. They could not deny the miracle, and the healed man with a large crowd was on the side of Peter and John, so they had to let them go. The only thing they could do to Peter and John was try to intimidate them by commanding them not to teach or speak any more in the name of Jesus, or else risk a severe penalty. Peter's response should go down in the hall of fame of church history, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." Later in Acts 5:29, Peter would be arrested again and commanded not to preach the gospel. Peter's reply was much the same as before except even simpler, "We must obey God rather than men." I think that is a pretty good rule of life for all of us!

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