

**October 20, 2019**

**God's Plan and Purpose**

**Acts 3**

Intro: What is God's purpose in all of this? Maybe that's a question you have asked recently or at some point when you couldn't make sense of life. It's usually what we ask when things are hard. I imagine the crippled man in Acts 3 asked that. Maybe he was very godly and understood God had a purpose in his suffering. Or maybe he wondered why God had not given him legs that worked. What is God's purpose in being a crippled beggar?

As we work through this text, we will not only see God's purpose in his life, but what God has for us through his mercy.

**1. God's plan for his praise (1-10)**

- First, although healings and miracles were frequent among the apostles, this is the only detailed healing account given. The stress in Acts is on the preached Word.
- The rhythm of Jewish life had two sacrifices each day in the temple (morning & evening). In preparation of the evening sacrifice was a prayer time at 3pm.
- It's often in the context of worship that God works his grace.

This is why it's important, I would say *critical*, to show up every Sunday. And if you have a family, be sure they all show up with you. We never know what God has planned. A faithful church attender used to be defined as one who attended every Sunday. Now it's 3 out of 4. That's not a good trend. A lot of grace and blessing is being missed.

- (v2) The routine of this man every day was to beg. He was so dependent he had to be carried. He was asking for alms, what we call here "benevolence", helping the desperate poor.
- (3-6) Instead of giving him what he wants—money—Peter and John knew he needed something greater, healing in Jesus's name.
- God's plan for this man was his restoration.
- The healing is "in the name of Jesus" (v6). This is not a magic formula. It means by *his* authority and power.

- It's important for us to see what this is all about. It's not just that Peter and John are doing an act of compassion on this poor man. When the lame man leaps for joy, it is a *salvation promise fulfillment* of Is 35:6 that describes the Messianic age:

“then shall the lame man leap like a deer”.

Biblical salvation is not merely escaping hell. That is a true but narrow definition. Biblical salvation is restoration and wholeness. Interestingly, the reference to the healing in 4:9 uses the Gk. verb that can be translated “to save.”

*It's a picture of a Broken and suffering creation being restored and set right by Jesus! It's a foretaste of the full restoration that God has planned for the future.*

- This miracle of healing prefigures the renewal of all creation at the return of Christ.

There are a few things God shows us.

1. From the mission side: Peter and John were just living with *ordinary faithfulness*. Going to the temple to pray. In the rhythm of life they put God first, and he had a divine appointment for them.

They did several things we can follow: 1. Slow down enough to notice a broken man. 2) They got close enough to touch—they extend the presence of Christ. 3) Empowered enough to *proclaim*

Mission is not about being nice people who do good deeds. The goal of mission is faithfully proclaiming truth about Jesus Christ. Don't shy away from proclaiming his name!

2. From the miracle side:

Question: Should we expect miracles today in the NT sense?

When I was 18, I left home, and worked with a ministry that had some pretty charismatic roots. I was in New Orleans and another guy in the ministry had pretty bad eyesight and wore glasses. He was convinced one evening that God healed him. So, he did not wear his glasses, but I noticed him really squinting badly. This went on a day or two. Finally, the glasses came back on. I was not going to press him on it.

So, it led me to ask, what type of miracles should we ask for and expect?

First. Every conversion is a miracle. This room is filled with hundreds of “miracles births.” The fact that we don’t love sin, and love Christ, is miraculous. So, there are more miracles numerically today than in Acts. Millions are converted.

Yes, God does heal. The worldview of scripture *does not limit* what we should pray for. But we need to be wise—most healings today are not what we would call “book of Acts” NT types.

Bill Larkin has wisdom:

“Should we expect such miracles today? True, the apostles are no longer with us, and miracles seemed to cluster around them; even in the first century, miraculous signs were not everyday occurrences. But Jesus still is present by his Spirit in the church. So, we should not be surprised if we hear reports of miracles, especially where an atmosphere of pervasive unbelief or false religion calls for a power encounter. But a healing miracle in the New Testament sense must have the following marks: It must be an instantaneous and complete deliverance from a grave organic condition. It must occur in response to a direct command in the name of Jesus, and it must be publicly acknowledged as indisputable (Stott 1990:103).

Larkin, W. J., Jr. (1995). [Acts](#) (Vol. 5, Ac 3:7). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.

(Jas 5:13-15) seems to set what should be *normative* in the church. Not apostles commanding healing, but elders praying.

“<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”

Finally, the plan is for praise (8&9). Whether a conversion story, or a physical healing or deliverance of some sort, it’s all for the praise of his glory.

## **2. God’s purpose for our faith and repentance (11-19)**

- After the healing and prayer time, Peter and John exit the temple on the east side where a crowd had gathered at Solomon’s Portico.

- This area ran the entire length of the Gentile's court. It became the popular gathering place of Jerusalem Christians (5:12).
- (v11) *Now the miracle by itself does not produce saving faith. The Word must be preached!!*

The sermon shares common themes in Acts:

—Continuity (v13) A direct line can be drawn from how God worked in Israel and his purposes in history.  
 —Centered on Jesus - his death, resurrection and reign; and the main fact "God glorified his servant Jesus (Is 52:13).

"<sup>13</sup> Behold, my servant shall act wisely;  
 he shall be high and lifted up,  
 and shall be exalted."

—Conviction of sin and call to repentance (v19)

- There is an explicit focus on Jesus as the only object of faith (v16)

Repentance: The thing that stands out about the call to repentance (v19) is that the audience is full of Israelites who have the Word, but *they did not have a Christ-centered life*. That context kind of reminds me of Bible-belt culture. Lots of Bible, and churches...but do people *have Christ*? Notice the repentance is not for gross sin immorality.... It is repentance *of cold indifference*.

Denying and disowning the Lord Jesus Christ is the highest act of treason. If you are coldly indifferent to the Lord Jesus, you have another window of opportunity to turn in faith and repentance.

### **3. God's promise of restoration and blessing (20-26)**

- The basic message of scripture from the beginning is this: obey God and you will be blessed, disregard him and things will be a mess (curse).
- From that moment in history when Adam chose disobedience, we've been in a mess. The world is under a curse. Israel, and all of humanity in Adam are *covenant breakers*.
- But God has mercy, that's the lesson from the crippled man.

God's merciful disposition—*conditioned on faith and repentance*

—Season of refreshing (v20)—connected to sins blotted out.

—Time of restoration (v21) — future renewal of creation in Rom 8:20-23.

Two final parts of the sermon show us God’s plan; *both are backed by OT fulfillment.*

1. Listening (v22 quoting Dt 18:15-19). Even Moses, the foundational prophet in Israel looked forward to Jesus. *Prophets make known God’s will. They speak about God’s plan.*
2. Blessing (v25 quoting Gen 12:3)

Moving back down south, I’ve heard the word “blessed” more in one year than the past 15 years. There is the “bless your heart”. But even when I check out at Costco, I’ve been told to “have a blessed day.” We throw the word around the way we do with love. I love my family, and I love a tender, juicy steak dinner. But those are not the same. We are blessed with good health, avoiding the near miss at the intersection or passing the test.

This blessing in Acts 3 is *covenantal* in nature. It’s the blessing of having God and being at peace with him by means of his covenantal grace. It’s the blessing of faith and repentance.

Peter’s point in the sermon: God’s blessing for the Jews is only through Jesus.

Remember, this is a message directed at a Jewish audience.

There is a priority for the gospel going to the Jews first (structure of Acts, Rom 1:16).

But God’s blessing is for *all* who have faith:

(Gal 3:7-9)

“<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- And as the final verse says, the gift of repentance is the starting point of finding the blessings in Jesus (v26).
- In other words, God’s plan to bless the world only comes through Jesus. There is no other way to have a blessed life. *We can have all the comforts of an affluent American life, but if we don’t have Christ, it’s nothing.*

## Conclusion/Application

What the Lord Jesus did for this man physically, is what he does for many spiritually. We are all spiritual cripples. We simply lack the spiritual strength to stand on our two feet and walk. Actually, it's worse than that. The Bible says that from the womb we are dead in our sin (Eph 2:1).

But there is hope - a help for every spiritual cripple.

—The hope is the Sovereign Grace of the Savior who says: Walk!

Think of this picture: Jesus the Merciful, turns his eyes of pity towards us, grabs us by the hand, speaks the healing command...and we not only stand and walk, we leap. Some of you desperately need the mercy of Jesus to lift you up today.

I think the words of the old hymn, *Come Ye Sinners Poor and Needy*, sum up God's plan and purpose:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy*

*Weak and wounded, sick and sore*

*Jesus ready, stands to save you*

*Full of pity, love and power*

*I will arise and go to Jesus*

*He will embrace me in His arms*

*In the arms of my dear Savior*

*Oh, there are ten thousand charms*

*Come, ye thirsty, come and welcome*

*God's free bounty glorify*

*True belief and true repentance*

*Every grace that brings you nigh*