

## **Scripture Reading:**

**Acts 3:1** “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; **3** who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. **4** And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." **5** So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. **6** Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." **7** And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. **8** So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God. **9** And all the people saw him walking and praising God. **10** Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. **11** Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.”

# **"A Miracle at the Temple Gate"**

After celebrating Advent, Christmas and Epiphany it is time to return to the Book of Acts. It is good to do so following Epiphany which means manifestation, where we celebrate Jesus being revealed to the world. We saw this in all of its fullness as we studied Luke's orderly account in the Gospel of Luke and now he continues on for his friend Theophilus here in the Book of Acts.

Luke and Acts comprise almost one quarter of all that is given to us in the New Testament and Luke's orderly account is telling God's great story of salvation:

- Jesus has come to save His People from their sins.
- Saints who are referred to as the Church, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Jesus & the New Jerusalem
- The Spirit empowers the Church as it is commissioned to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

The story is the same over and over again:

- God comes in Power
- The Good News is proclaimed
- People respond with repentance or rebellion

-- This is what we saw in the life of Jesus

-- This is what we saw at His resurrection

-- This is what we just saw at the Day of Pentecost

Now Luke is going to show how the commission Jesus gave the Disciples to take the Kingdom to Jerusalem and Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the earth are going to be carried out.

Luke will end the Book of Acts with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance... the work that continues down to our day! Over the next three weeks we will see the Gospel taken to the Jews at the Temple: God's power will be demonstrated, the Gospel will be preached and the sheep and the goats will respond.

In describing the young Church born at Pentecost, Luke said ‘many wonders and signs were being done through the Apostles.’

Here at the beginning of chapter three, we see one of these wonders as a man is dramatically healed

- This morning we want to consider what took place there at the Temple
- We want to consider how we should properly understand miracles today
- And finally we want to consider how this great event should be an example for us today.

First we see Peter and John going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer, about three in the afternoon. We know that the curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died indicating that the great sacrifice for sin had been made and that all Saints now had access to the Holy of Holies in heaven itself. Once again Israel would have about forty years to consider the error of their ways and to repent before God would utterly destroy the Temple and the City of Jerusalem as Jesus promised in AD 70.

- During those final years of the old creation, the regular practices at the Temple continued and we will see Saints often are there.

I doubt that any of them participated in the sacrifices and the writer of the Book of Hebrews would certainly have called any who did to repentance. However, from this visit by Peter and John down to Paul late in the Book of Acts they continued to go to the Temple to participate in prayers and to take vows. I think this was done out of respect for the Old Testament system that had so rightly pointed the way to Jesus and also as a witnessing opportunity because that was where the Jews gathered.

- So Peter and John come to the Temple and in their path is a man who is begging because he has been lame from birth.

This was not an injury that could heal over time, or a mere limp: This man’s legs were damaged from birth and he was unable to walk because he had to be carried to the spot where he was to beg for whatever folks would give. Jesus had criticized the religious leaders for tithing on their spices but forgetting the weightier matters of the Law like mercy & justice...

- Such is the case with this man.

God had made it clear in the Law that there were to be no beggars in Israel and yet here is one right at the gate of the Temple. Listen to how God commands His people in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy and consider how it condemns those leaders and by extension, many of us today: It begins with the release of debt: The object being to prevent what we see with this man at the Temple...

“1 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. 2 And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Jehovah's release. 3 Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother, 4 But there will be no poor among you; for Jehovah will greatly bless you in the land which Jehovah your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance-- 5 only if you carefully obey the voice of Jehovah your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.”

- Obviously the Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century had not obeyed many of God’s commands & had hardened their hearts in many areas.

Luke has shown in chapter 2 how the Church is to care for those in its midst and this miracle will focus attention on the need for this type of mercy as well.

- However, we can see that we have also wandered very far as well today if we continue on with verse 6 in Deuteronomy:

**“For Jehovah your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you.”**

- As our nation has wandered further and further away from God’s commands we have become the greatest debtor nation in the history of the world...  
In need of much repentance.

Continuing on in Deuteronomy we see the very case that Peter and John confront this day at the Temple: 7 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. 9 Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to Jehovah against you, and it become sin among you. 10 You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing Jehovah your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'"

As we saw with death and destruction last week, poverty is the result of sin and the fall: It will be with us until Jesus returns.

- Just as we are to reach out in mercy to those who suffer in an earthquake we are commanded to care for the poor among us!
- We will come back to this lesson many times in the Book of Acts.

So not only had those in Jerusalem failed to care for this man, but they placed him each day at the gate of the Temple for all to see.

- What we see next is a clear demonstration of God’s power:
- A miracle, plain and simple.

God often uses miracles to get people’s attention: Think of the plagues that were visited on Egypt! Or Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal. And of course the Prophets had said that this would be the sign of the coming of Messiah: Isaiah proclaimed that “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.” Words that Jesus confirmed when he reminded the doubting disciples of John the Baptist: “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

The miracle before us this morning is very similar to the early miracle of Jesus where he commanded the man brought to Him on his bed to rise up and walk:

- There Jesus said this was done to demonstrate that the Son of God had the power on earth to forgive sins.

These miracles are not for show or an end unto themselves...

- They point to the power of Jesus and how He has come to save His people from their sins.

Next week we see this man is saved by faith, but we must not get confused about what role is played by faith in the one who is healed ... When Peter and John ask the man to look at them many think they are discerning whether this man has the faith to be healed.

That is reading something into the text that is not there: We can point to miracles where the faith of the believer is very evident before the miracle like the faithful Centurion. We can point to miracles where the person appears to come to faith during the miracle, like the father who cried I believe, help Thou my unbelief and there are miracles where faith comes sometime after the miracle like the man born blind in John chapter nine. With this man we are not told!

We must always remember that Paul clearly teaches us that saving faith is a gift from our gracious Father:

- It is given through the power of the Spirit to those the Father has chosen
- The Spirit gives it as He chooses and when He chooses.
- Miracles are given to demonstrate God's power, but we must understand that the gift of faith can come before, during or after the miracle occurs.

As I mentioned earlier, the miracle that now occurs is very similar to when Jesus told the man brought to Him on his bed to rise up. The BIG difference being that Jesus said to that man, "I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home" and here the Apostles proclaim, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Peter proclaimed on Pentecost that God had made this Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ. Now Peter proclaims Jesus is the Christ and it is Jesus of Nazareth, the name written above His head when they crucified the Lord of Glory. The miracle is instant and dramatic.

Peter takes him by the hand and he rises and knows that his legs have been healed. Not only is he healed, but he is immediately able to walk, something he has never done.

- Soon this man is leaping and praising God for what has happened.

There is no doubt among those who are present that a great miracle has occurred because they knew the man who had long sat at the Temple gate: Who was now walking and leaping! Luke tells us that they were filled with wonder and amazement and that many ran together... This gives Peter the opportunity to preach the Good News which he does powerfully as we shall study next week and then consider how the Word of truth divides the sheep and the goats once again.

But before we move on we need to address the question of miracles today:

- Does God still perform such miracles?

The simple answer is yes He does and any who question this are simply not comfortable with how God may choose to demonstrate His power at any point in history. *[Even those who insist that the 'age of miracles' has passed can still be caught praying for healing when someone they love is taken ill.]*

As with many subjects we address we again need to see there are two cliffs on the orthodox road. We need to be sure we do not go off one of those cliffs because we are trying so hard to avoid the other.

- God has used miracles at various times in history to demonstrate His power and He can continue to do so as He pleases.

We must also recognize that we see in the Bible a concentration of miracles surrounding the life of Jesus and the early Church just as the prophets had predicted.

So the Biblical road has two cliffs we must avoid: The first is insisting that since the Church is established and the Bible is completed God has no need of further miracles. This position has to deny the witness of thousands; from the early martyrs for the faith to missionaries in pagan nations today. More importantly, it has NO Biblical foundation: God nowhere says that miracles will cease.

The other cliff comes with those who insist that the concentration of miracles that we see in the Gospels and Acts will continue right down to today if God's people are faithful. They would hold that REAL Christians must speak in tongues to demonstrate the power of the Spirit like at Pentecost. They would argue for regular healing services so we can heal the sick and by this demonstrate God's power to the lost. Again we find NO Biblical basis for such a position: What we have is people wanting the Spirit to follow their lead rather than the other way around!

The deliverance of God's people from Egypt is a good example, which Paul tells us we should learn from. God brought His people out with many mighty miracles... [which by the way did not make them a faithful people!] God protected them in the wilderness and again brought them into the land with many more miracles. BUT once in the promised land they ceased to be fed with manna and they had to replace their shoes on a regular basis. God continued to bless them when they were faithful...

- But He did so through regular means which are just as miraculous when we consider God's control over all things.

Jesus fed the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes and we rightly call this a miracle. Linda fed our family for many years with bread she bought at a store, which was made by a baker who used wheat grown by a farmer who could not begin to explain how it was actually produced!

Jesus explains this and relates it to His Kingdom in the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel beginning at verse 26: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how."

Growing wheat is just as miraculous as Jesus blessing a loaf and feeding thousands on that hillside in Galilee. There are many born today with deformities that would prevent them from ever walking who are treated with various surgeries and therapies so they can eventually walk.

- They should walk and leap and praise God just as this man in the Temple did that day, but sadly many do not.

We must also remember that those who face disabilities that cannot be cured or who see no miracle in this life should also leap and praise God *[tell the story of Joni Erickson]*

So let us make sure that we allow God to be God and not try to run the show or cancel the show by avoiding both of these cliffs.

Now allow me to close by pointing out an important way I think this account should apply to us today.

- We see here a man healed in a miraculous way who now leaps and praises God because his legs and feet have been healed.

If we go back to the similar miracle that Jesus performed I believe we cannot miss the application: When faithful friends brought a man who could not walk on his bed what did Jesus first say to the man?

"My son, your sins are forgiven."

This outrages the religious leaders who are present because they rightly know that only God can forgive sin! Jesus responds by asking them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise take up your bed and walk?’ Understand the point Jesus is making here: Sure someone can say sins are forgiven and who is to know... It is not something you can see. BUT if you say rise up and walk, that is something folks can observe to see if you speak the truth or not.

Jesus then tells them why we see the concentration of miracles in His life and the early church: “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – He said to the paralytic – “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed & go home. Which is the greater ‘miracle?’

Obviously the forgiveness of sins! If you were born lame and had a choice of living a life where you could not walk and then spending eternity in the presence of Jesus as a forgiven Saint; or having your legs healed so you could walk in this life and spending eternity in hell... Which would you choose? Seems like a simple choice and yet without the saving grace of God we all would have all chosen the later!

- So how should we respond to having so great a salvation?

Sadly, we often take it for granted: That is why our Covenant Renewal worship is so important each week.

We should emulate the account of this miracle here in Acts three week after week.

- Peter and John got this man’s attention, told him to rise up and walk and he responding with leaping and praise.

-- God calls us to worship each week, wanting to have our undivided attention, which we should give Him!

-- God hears our confession and declares that we are to stand up and walk as those who are forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus! How should we respond?

- With thankful hearts that walk and leap and praise God throughout the service!

Our singing should be hearty and rich... Thinking about what we are singing and meaning what we are singing! Our AMENS should be hearty... As Pastor Wilson says, the folks walking by should tremble when they hear them! Our hearts should be attentive to what God has to teach us from His Word just as this man clung to Peter and John. We should be filled with joy as the Savior brings us to His Table... It might even be appropriate to have a little leaping and praising!

- It must certainly be a time of celebration with Jesus!

And finally as we are commissioned, we should be those who cannot wait to tell others about the great things that God has done for us!

Brothers and sisters, the Church in America does not need more healing services like those we see on TV.

The Church in America does not need dead orthodoxy that thinks all of God’s miracles are past

What America needs are more faithful churches where Covenant Renewal worship is practiced week after week preparing us to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as His Kingdom fills the whole earth.

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 35: “A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. 9 No lion shall be there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”