

The Father Accredits the Son by the Works of the Spirit

Acts 3:1-10, Healing at the Temple

March 23, 2025

Prayer

The older I get, the more amazed I am by God's Word and His work in our world. Think about it. What we are reading in the Book of Acts actually took place. It is an historical account of what happened when God's kingdom first broke into our world.

Jesus told them that they would receive power to be His witnesses when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Then, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did come upon them in a way that showed how God was moving out of the temple of stone and into the temple of the human heart. At long last, God was fulfilling the promise He made.

Life was now different for these believers and Luke tells us that "many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (2:43). The very first sign and miracle that Luke wants to tell us about is the topic for today. Acts 3:1-11.

As I read, I invite you to use your imagination and try to picture this scene in your mind.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

There is so much going on here and so many questions that flow out of this story. This morning I want to quickly review what happened and then spend the remainder of our time on some of the questions you may be asking yourself right now.

Peter and John were going to the temple at the hour of prayer because they were going to pray. This was the second of three daily designated times of prayer when people stopped what they were doing to gather for worship and prayer.ⁱ

The afternoon prayer could be offered anytime between mid-day and sunset but since the daily sacrifice took place around 3:00, it meant that this was the peak moment when most people would be flowing into the temple courtyards. If you were a beggar, this was the best time to sit at one of the gates.

The crippled-from-birth man was placed by friends at his familiar place at the Beautiful Gate.ⁱⁱ He saw Peter and John approaching and called out to them to ask for money. They stopped and looked intently at him.

We could spend time debating whether or not they were looking for faith in this man, but I want to leave it at a very accessible level—they looked at the man. Day after day after day, of the thousands of people who walked by him and heard his voice, how many made eye-contact?

You know what that is like. If you make eye-contact then there is the thought that you may be committing yourself to some kind of relationship now. This man had been begging at this same spot for years. What did it do to his soul to have so many people ignore him, as if he did not even exist. Peter and John chose to notice his presence.

Once their eyes met, Peter healed him in the name of Jesus. When Jesus healed, He would say, "I tell you, rise, take up your mat and go home" (Mk 2:11). When He taught, He would say, "You have heard that it was said but I say to you..." People were amazed by how Jesus acted and taught as one who carried authority in Himself.

So now His apostles are acting and teaching in the name and authority of Jesus of Nazareth.ⁱⁱⁱ To act in His name is to do what He would have done with the authority He carried. In doing so, Jesus is the one who gets the credit for this healing. Peter and John are just His representatives, His ambassadors, His servants acting on His behalf.

But saying the words is easy. So, as a way to prove Jesus has the authority to heal, Peter grabs the man's right hand and helps him to his feet. The limbs that never once bore that man's weight are immediately strengthened so that the man walks with them into the temple courts.^{iv} He was walking, leaping and praising God.^v

You can imagine the scene that must have caused. Everyone is doing their usual thing when one voice rises above the din. People look and they see an overjoyed man jumping and praising God. Then a spark of recognition hits them. "Isn't that the guy who..."

Solomon's Colonnade was a usual meeting place for Jesus-followers so it was natural that the threesome would have gone there. An astonished crowd quickly gathered. In the presence of the incontrovertible evidence of what Jesus had just done, Peter preached, admonishing everyone to listen to and follow Jesus as the Christ.

This familiar story raised a lot of questions for me, questions about miracles, their frequency and purpose, questions about the role of faith and the function of prayer. In the chance that you have had similar questions too, let's take a moment to unpack some of these things.

Even though I will not be able to go into great depth into these important topics, I trust that what I do say will provide a solid introduction and provide a good place to start. You can carry on the conversation with each other after the service or with your family in the week ahead.

Perhaps the best place to start is with how the Holy Spirit used miracles in the Book of Acts. Depending on your definition of the miraculous, there are some 20 to 25 miracles recorded in this book. And depending on how you catalogue them, these miracles fall into four, five or seven categories. Let's keep it simple and put all the miracles into four categories.

Some are **miracles of inspiration**. These are moments of receiving information, insight or ability that opens the way for the gospel to spread. I think of how the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to declare the wonders of God in many languages. Or Cornelius' vision of the angel telling him to get Peter. Or Peter's vision that opened the way for him to enter Cornelius' home and share the gospel with Gentiles.

This category also includes prayer and laying on of hands that resulted in the Holy Spirit being poured out on a new and unexpected people group.^{vi} In this way the gospel spread.^{vii}

A more familiar category is the **miracles of healing**. There are about 15 stories of specific healing or mention of God healing many. Of those 15, ten show how the miracles supported the sharing of the gospel, two resulted in Paul being treated with respect so that his audience would be more inclined to listen to him, two resulted in hostility and one was for comfort, as Eutychus was raised from the dead.

Regarding the two cases of miracles causing hostility, it is interesting to note that both stories resulted in the gospel spreading. Stephen's death sparked a terrible persecution that caused the believers to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). Paul and Silas' severe flogging and imprisonment resulted in the Philippian jailer's family coming to faith and the planting of a church in Philippi.

So, 14 of the 15 miracles of healing resulted in the gospel spreading and becoming more firmly established.

Alongside inspiration and healing are **miracles of protection and deliverance** which each have to do with freeing God's ambassador from danger or difficulty. And the reason the disciple is freed is so that he can get back to sharing the good news.

I think it is instructive for us to notice that not everyone is protected or rescued. When Herod arrested John's brother James you can be sure that people were praying for him, but he was executed. Herod then arrested Peter. The church prayed and Peter was miraculously released (Acts 12:1-11). God responded differently to their prayers.

The final category I want to mention has to do with **miracles of judgment**. These are moments when God acts to remove a danger to the church or remove a barrier to the gospel. Ananias and Sapphira tested God, they died. The Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, Elymas, actively opposed Paul and Barnabas. He was temporarily blinded.

God protected the vulnerable early church to safeguard the gospel and removed a significant obstacle to advance the gospel.

Did you notice that no matter what the category—whether it is inspiration, healing, protection and deliverance or judgment—the vast majority of times the purpose of the miracle is to authenticate and aid the gospel message?^{viii} In this way, the Father accredits the Son through the Works of the Spirit.

The Book of Acts records that sometimes God spreads the gospel through martyrdom, as someone dies. Sometimes God spreads the gospel through suffering, as someone endures a physical trial in faith. And sometimes God spreads the gospel through miracles, as someone experiences inspiration, healing protection or the like. But God is the one to decide which option He will use because God through His Spirit is the one who is acting.^{ix}

Miracles in Jesus' name affirm, and endorse Jesus as the anointed Messiah and show that God's kingdom is breaking into our world. Even in our own day miracles appear to be more frequent in lands where the gospel is not yet known and the kingdom has not had the opportunity to become established.

Pastor David has shared his own experience with the church in Nepal and how one of their evangelistic strategies is to visit places where the sick gather and perform healings as a way to gain a hearing for the gospel. You can be sure that the man healed at the gate that day, along with everyone who knew him, listened to Peter's message.

It makes some ask, does God ever bring a miracle out of love for us and a desire to bless us? Yes, definitely. But the Scripture reveals that in this current season in human history our comfort and relief is not the primary thing on God's mind.

A time will come when Jesus returns and when He does, He will heal all who call on His name. The number of miracles we see in the Bible is nothing compared to what God will do out of love when everyone who calls on the name of the Lord is healed and given a new and glorified body!

That is what is coming. But for this brief season, miracles are more about endorsing the truth that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the only one worthy of our

undying allegiance. As hard as it is to hear it, that goal can be accomplished by someone's faithful death, suffering or healing.^x

I wonder, how many in this room have seen or experienced a miraculous intervention? It may be a healing or protection or deliverance or insight or something else that seemed more supernatural than natural. If you have experienced or seen or are convinced of a miraculous event happening to you or someone you know, as a way of giving silent testimony to Jesus, would you stand up? [I estimate that 35% to 40% of the congregation stood.]

Miracles are part of our experience today.

The lack of a miracle in your life is not an indicator of how God views you nor it is an indicator of how weak your faith might be. It has nothing to do with us. It is all about Him and the work He is doing to confirm the truth of the gospel and let His kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This brings another question to mind. What role does faith play in these things?

Faith does matter. It might be the faith of the person representing Jesus in the miracle (Peter grasping the man's right hand to help him stand was an act of faith). Or it might have to do with the faith of the one receiving the miracle. Faith does matter, but faith is not the only factor in play.

In John chapter 5 we find a man at the Pool of Bethesda who was looking for healing from a source outside the Jewish faith. He didn't even know who Jesus was and so had no faith at all, but Jesus healed him. There were many others seeking healing at the pool and Jesus did not heal them that day. You can read that chapter to discern the reason why he chose that one man (spoiler alert: it had to do with advancing His purpose).

The man who was born blind was healed so that the work of God might be displayed in his life (Jn 9:3). In both cases the men did not know who Jesus was and in both cases Jesus sought them out later to introduce Himself to them and give them a chance to respond. The man at the pool responded by telling the religious leaders the name of the man who healed him. The man born blind responded by kneeling in worship.

This leads us to another interesting story of faith and miracles. Mark records that Jesus was only able to do a few small miracles at Nazareth and it seems like it was because of their lack of faith. But can a lack of faith stop God from working? We've already seen that the Holy Spirit can do miracles in people with no faith so what is going on here? I wonder, was it their lack of faith that brought this about or was it the fact that miracles would not have served to confirm the presence of God's Kingdom with this group?

When addressing what He called a "wicked and adulterous generation," Jesus refused to give them any sign other than the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:39; 16:4). Is that because any other miracle would not have furthered the cause of the gospel or the advance of God's kingdom with that crowd?

And then there is the challenging story of the Apostle Paul. He had seen God do many miraculous signs through him. If anyone had "enough" faith for God to do a miracle in their life, he certainly did. Yet when he asked three times to have his thorn in the flesh removed, God said "No". The reason was that the thorn Paul carried would better convey the truth of God's kingdom than would a healing. "My power is made perfect in weakness."

When it comes to God working miracles, faith plays a part, but it is only one part of the work God is doing. Other elements are also in play. This brings me to my last question. What does that mean for our prayers? How are we to pray? Let's begin with the things we know for certain.

We know we can pray with confidence because we know the Father receives us and hears us. We also know that we can pray about all things and bring every concern to God. He's not going to belittle you or your requests. Since the Holy Spirit lives in us we know we can pray at any time and are, in fact, commanded to pray without ceasing. The Holy Spirit in us also means we can be confident that even our groans and tears are a prayer God hears.

When it comes to prayer in the midst of a great need, I think the Lord provides a wonderful example. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus wrestled with the horror that was in front of Him and He asked for a miracle.

Jesus begins with a term of affection and closeness. "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mk 14:36).

Daddy I know you love me and have the power to do anything. If there is another way, would you please take this cup from me and provide a different cup for me to drink? My soul is in anguish. Even so, I surrender my life into your hands and choose your will over my own.

Some thirty years ago Anne and I started calling this the prayer of the Open Hand. There is a great need and so we call out to God with fervency and consistency asking our loving Father to provide what we think is best. Even so, we hold our desire in an open hand, choosing not to demand, require, or cling to what we think needs to be done. Take whatever you want. Provide whatever you think we need. Your will be done.

Go ahead and pray for the specific thing you desire, even if it is miraculous. Yet, instead of claiming or demanding the "good" we want, I think scripture teaches us to rest in and receive the good God wants.

Miracles happen, and in this season when God's kingdom is present but not yet fully established, God often uses miracles to advance the gospel and establish His kingdom in new lands.

If you have placed your faith in Christ then His Holy Spirit lives inside of you and you are empowered to be His witness which means you can both act and speak with His authority.

As we come to the communion meal today, I invite you to exercise your role as a witness with each other. Paul said that when we eat the bread and drink the cup we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. That means what we do is an expression of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ—it is a proclamation of the Gospel.

Jesus is the one who gave us this meal. He is the One who said, "This bread is my body, broken for you." "This cup is the new covenant made in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins." He is the one who said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

As you receive the elements today, follow Peter and John's example. Make eye-contact with the person handing you the tray and receive from them the words they offer. Then, make eye-contact with the person you are serving and speak a short phrase of truth about the bread or the cup to them.

When the bread is passed the screens will show several options for possible words you can say. The same thing will happen when the cup is passed. Feel free to use one of the phrases or let the Spirit guide you in speaking your own short phrase of truth about the bread or the cup. Ask the Lord what He might want to say to the person you are serving today and then speak the words in Jesus' name, with His confidence and authority.

If you are here but have never placed your faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, we welcome you and are so glad you are here. When the tray comes to you, receive the words you are given and then pass those words along to the person you serve. I hope you will then observe what is going on and listen to the voices speaking the words. And then ask the Lord how He views you and how He would like you to view Him.

Prayer

ⁱ In his gospel and in the Book of Acts, Luke records the frequent connection between prayer and divine activity. The first chapter of Acts we see that the believers were "constantly in prayer" (1:14). The next chapter we are told that they devoted themselves to prayer (2:42). Going to the temple at the appointed hours for prayer was one way they did this.

ⁱⁱ Two options have been suggested for this gate. One led from the Court of Gentiles into the Court of Women. The other from the Court of Women into the Court of the Israelites. Both were spectacular. We don't know which gate it was, but we know that it was on the way into the temple, which suggests the first gate leading from the Court of Gentiles to the Court of Women. This was also called the Nicanor Gate. It was covered with bronze. The historian, Josephus, said this gate was more beautiful than gold.

Either way, it was common for beggars to sit at a gate to engage those who are passing through. Some scholars believe there is a good chance that this was as close to the temple as those with disabilities were allowed to go.

ⁱⁱⁱ Many mighty acts are done in the name of Jesus and each one is performed "by means of the name" or "through the name" of Jesus (4:30). Baptisms are done "in the name of Jesus." Believers witness and suffer

"on behalf of the name." Opponents are said to act "against the name of Jesus." The person is acting only as Jesus' representative. Jesus, alone, gets the honor for the healing.

^{iv} This could have been significant in that the disabled may not have been allowed into that part of the temple complex. This might have been the man's first time!

^v The lame leaping is what God promised to do when He redeemed His people (Isaiah 35:6). This verse twice mentions the man jumping or leaping. The word choice is intentional.

^{vi} Some may not consider visions, angels or the receiving of God's Spirit as a miracle, but it is a supernatural event that is all about getting the gospel out into the world and getting people into the kingdom of God.

^{vii} Or how about the number of times Peter or Paul would pray for people and they would receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17, this was the way the Holy Spirit came upon new believers in Samaria, thus confirming God had included them in His redemption. The gospel spreads!

^{viii} At his famous Pentecost sermon Peter summarized the purpose of miracles with these words: "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

Their prayer recorded in Acts 4:29-30 shows how the disciples understood God's intent for miracles. In the face of stiff opposition they prayed,

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Their primary concern was for power to speak God's word with great boldness, and the resulting miracles only reinforce their words.

^{ix} When you keep these stories in their context and line them up the result is a bit stunning. Stephen is killed, the church scatters, and the gospel spreads. When Paul is chased out of town, the gospel spreads further. When he is stoned, dragged out of town and left for dead, he gets up and goes back into town to wrap up before he moves to the next town, and the gospel spreads. Put him in jail, and the jailer converts. Put him in a storm, and he is driven closer to Rome.

^x Jesus was moved with compassion. God works miracles out of love for our relief. Even so, the reason He was working miracles was to confirm the truth that God's kingdom has come. When John's disciples asked if Jesus was the one or should they expect another, Jesus pointed to His miracles as the evidence that God's kingdom was breaking into the world and He was the promised Messiah.