

Miracles in Acts | In Jesus Name

Not if, but When. . .

What a joy it is to be back together this morning. After months of altering our lives to avoid sickness, limit human contact, and confront uncertainty, we are worshiping together. You might even call this a miracle of sorts. **I'm sure this situation has taught all of us many things, but one thing I am sure we have learned is that in this crazy world, we all will confront situations we cannot control.** For many of us, I believe this was the biggest struggle with the virus prevention lifestyle. Going out of the house became a hassle because our return home involved a full disinfecting of our body by a CDC cleanup crew. Grocery shopping became a covert Special Forces mission behind enemy lines to procure much needed supplies. The "everyday" task of filling up your car with gas became an exercise filled with anxiety and fear because you heard on the news that this was one of the main ways people contracted COVID-19. Normal life grew out of our control, and we were forced to deal with a level of uncertainty unseen by many in the current generation. Therefore I think we can all agree that if this pandemic has taught all of us anything so far, it has taught us that facing uncertainty and a loss of control in our lives is not a question of "if" it is a question of "when."

Unexplainable and Uncertain

We all must be prepared to confront uncertainty. Even when it comes to matters of faith, we all deal with uncertainty in our faith journey. Last week Pastor Richard touched on this in his introduction to our series on the Miracles of Acts. At the beginning of his sermon, he said, "Another way to understand miracles is to call them unexplainable happenings." In my mind, it makes sense to think, if something is unexplainable, it is also uncertain.

Miracles as we know them, healing from a chronic illness, healing from a fatal disease, surviving an accident that should have taken our life, overcoming addiction, childbirth or a couple coming back from the brink of divorce, are both unexplainable and uncertain. We see some people who heal from physical ailments and others who do not. We see some marriages reconciled, and others not. Some addicts sustain long term meaningful recovery, while others do not. This fluctuation in results is what brings the uncertainty to our discussion of miracles. It is also why I think, at times, people can be hesitant to identify, discuss, and share about miracles. We recognize that miracles are a sensitive and uncertain issue, and we want to have compassion for people whose experience may be different from ours. I mean, who wants to have to share about miraculous healing in their life only to be confronted and challenged by someone with a different experience. While our caution surrounding miracles is well-intentioned, I think it creates a tension that we have to deal with: **Are we letting our fear and uncertainty prevent us from using miracles or unexplainable experiences to expand our faith?** By not sharing them, examining them, or seeking to experience them are we keeping others from seeing their life impacted by God? And in doing that, do we misunderstand their purpose?

God's Purpose for Miracles

The bible tells us that miracles are a tool **God** uses to reveal himself and his message to our world. (Repeat) If we were to go back and look at the miracles recounted in scripture, we would see that they directly correspond with God's plan to restore the world and establish his eternal kingdom. Nowhere is that more clear than in the book of Acts, which we are studying for the next few weeks. In Acts it is a common theme to see miracles performed and the gospel preached as a result of the miracle.

Last week Pastor Richard launched us into this series by sharing with us about Ascension and Pentecost as well as giving us a well thought out overview of miracles throughout the bible. Today I want to tap the breaks a little bit and examine the third miracle recorded in the book of Acts. Our story picks up after Pentecost and finds Peter and John preparing to attend an afternoon prayer meeting in the temple of Jerusalem. As they are entering the temple through a well-known gate, they are greeted by a well-known paralyzed beggar who is seeking money from people as they enter the temple. In response to the man's request for money, Peter looks down at the man and says, "Look at us." He does this to get the man's attention and make sure that he is aware of what he is going to say. Acts 3:5 – 8 recounts what happens next,

"And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 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."

The account ends with the man entering the temple gates overjoyed, leaping and shouting praises to God for the work that has just been done in his life. People are amazed, and a crowd begins to gather as people recognize what has just happened.

While it would be easy for me to end the explanation here by telling you that this is proof miracles happen and that our only response should be to praise God for his intervention in our life. Though this is true, I also believe this passage carries some less obvious truths for us to consider. Here is why: If we dig into this story, we will find is that it is not just a single miracle that takes place in the life of the beggar, but really a series of miracles that impacts Peter & John, The Lame Beggar, and the temple crowds who are viewing this very public display of supernatural power. **Here are three miracles we observe in this story:**

1. Peter and John were able to function in uncertainty

Please make no mistake about it; this situation is fraught with uncertainty. Jesus is gone, Pentecost has just happened, and Christ-followers have only begun to establish the movement known as the Church. They are still outcasts in Jewish society; remember we are in the capital

city of Jerusalem, and this a dangerous situation because tensions from Jesus' ministry are still raw in the minds of religious people. There is much uncertainty here. The Church is not an accepted body, and in many ways, it is a dangerous time to be a follower of Christ. Persecution is very real, and performing a public healing in the name of a religious heretic is not a good way to stay under the radar . **Peter and John have no idea what the response of people will be when they heal man, but they function in the uncertainty and allow God to move through them.** They were faithful to the call of the Holy Spirit on their life.

2. The **gospel** is shared

In addition to Peter and John's faithfulness, we see another miracle in that the gospel, the saving power of Jesus Christ, is proclaimed and allowed to penetrate the heart of the lame beggar. It is not an accident that Peter gets the man's attention and then, in that moment of connection, calls on the name of Jesus to heal the man. Because of how polarizing Jesus was, you know that this lame man knows his name. We also can surmise by his response that he is going to tell anyone who will listen that Jesus has healed him. Peter does not want credit. **Peter does not want to be known as a healer; he wants this man to know that Jesus is responsible for what it about to happen.** Any time the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, and someone has the opportunity to come to a personal relationship with Jesus, that is nothing short of a miracle. It is the work of the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of the speaker and any who will stop and consider the words being shared.

3. God makes a **tangible** difference in the life of the lame man

We see the power of God healing this man. He has been paralyzed from birth, and now his legs and ankles are "strong." This miracle made a tangible difference in the life of someone who relied on pity and generosity of others for survival. However, if we stop there, we are missing how amazing this miracle is. Yes, the man can walk, but in addition to that, this miracle has also restored his dignity and self-worth. In biblical times, people in his position had little to no value, and it was probably assumed that since he was paralyzed from birth that his family had some secret sin. He was unclean. He was at the lowest level of society. **God healing him made a very tangible difference in his life, and the transformation that was taking place in his life was nothing short of a miracle.** This man could not only walk, but he could work, he could marry, and he could begin to live a life he had only dreamed of.

Now, what do these three miracles mean for us? **It means that the journey we are on, walking with Christ through this life is full of miracles.** We just have to be aware of them. We may never experience seeing a paralyzed human walk. We may never see a tumor shrink because of prayer. We may never see the dead resurrected. The reality is that we will pray for those things to happen, and they won't. This lack of results does not mean that miracles do not occur. Anytime the power of God has the opportunity to impact any aspect of a person's life, miracles will happen. That is the story of the Church in a nutshell, the power of God impacting peoples

lives. The purpose of miracles is **restoration**, healing that is only through Jesus' blood and the power of God. Sometimes it is physical healing. Other times it is spiritual healing. It can even be emotional healing. When miracles happen - People will be healed, they will experience grace, the broken will have their dignity restored, and many will come to know the mighty name of Jesus.

Everyday Miracles

If you want to see miracles, if you're going to see the Holy Spirit move in the lives of people, you must be open to the **impact** the Holy Spirit can have on your life. The only reason Peter and John were able to impact the lives of so many people is because they were in tune with how the Holy Spirit was working in their lives. They were aware of it. Just as you saw three miracles impact the experience of people in the temple that day, I want to pose for you that there are three miracles the Holy Spirit does in your everyday life. The question that you have to answer is: Are you aware of them?

Three miracles the Holy Spirit does in your everyday life:

1. The Holy Spirit **confronts** you with the gospel.

If you are a Christian, you know that every day you are confronted with the reality of the gospel. Peter and John knew this; that is why they made sure the man knew JESUS HEALED HIM. Whether it is through the impact Jesus is having on your personal life or the life of someone you know, you are aware that the gospel is affecting your life. What does this mean? It means that every day you experience a miracle in your life. Be mindful of that, look for those miracles, and be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit around you. Listen to how he speaks to you through the bible, prayer, and intentional connection. Listen to how he speaks to you through other people. Sometimes God is at work, and others may not notice it, but we should. **If we are trying to live out the gospel and the great commission in our lives, we need to be aware of the everyday impact the gospel has on our lives and the lives of others.** Every time you are confronted with a gospel-centered conversation or interaction, we are witnessing a miracle. The Holy Spirit is moving to open your heart or someone else's heart to move towards Jesus and engage him in a meaningful relationship.

2. The Holy Spirit **guides** you through uncertainty.

Just like Peter and John, we live in a very uncertain world. Many of us have experienced that, especially of late. Jobs are not easy to find. Food has been scarce. Toilet paper has become a currency for trade. It does not get any more uncertain than that. As Christians, we can have two responses to this: we can walk in fear like many other people, or we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can believe that God is going to meet our physical needs, that He is going to

protect us from evil, and that everything will be ok. Peter and John had no idea what would once they began to follow Jesus and publicly establish his Church. In many ways, they faced challenges similar to us. The performing of a miracle made these challenges even more extreme. The political climate was unstable. Their economic lives were challenged. Amid all of this, they still trusted God to meet their needs. We can trust Him to meet our needs too. COVID-19 cannot stop God. Riots and political rest cannot stop him either. **He is the calm amidst all of these storms, and sometimes he asks us to trust him.**

3. The Holy Spirit **empowers** you to be a tool God can use to make a difference in someone's life.

Peter and John were showing up for a regular prayer meeting at the temple. Likely, they never expected to be confronted with a paralyzed beggar or an opportunity to proclaim the saving power of Jesus. But when the opportunity came, and the Spirit-led, they were prepared to be a vessel for God to impact that man's life dramatically. **This truth does not change for us; we have the same ability to impact people's lives and serve as a tool for God to transform someone's life tangibly.** Whom do you know that could use some hope at this time? Whom do you know that needs healing? Whom do you know that needs salvation? Whom do you know that needs justice? God wants to use you as a way to bring those realities into people's lives. Like Peter and John, **He wants you to be available to experience miracles and serve as a physical conduit into the lives of others.** How are you doing that?

Christian author C.S. Lewis once said, **"Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see."** I think this quote helps illustrate the point that miracles are simply all small parts of a much bigger picture. You see amid all the craziness of our world; it is easy to forget that Christians believe God is at the center of it all. His handprints are on everything and every action you take, every word you say; every breath you breathe is a gift grace and an expression of love extended to us by God. Miracles are happening every moment. Are their big, unexplainable, supernatural miracles? Yes, there are. But there are also small everyday miracles making an impact on your life as well. If you look at your life close enough, you will begin to see Good in little things, and you will also start to realize just how big of a presence he has in our world. Again, God is at the center of it all. Are you looking for him?

We are a Tool

Moving forward, we need to realize that the **Church** is a tool God uses to reveal himself to others and advance the gospel. There is a world full of hurting people out there, a world full of "lame" beggars in search of the power to restore their life. God has given us access to the power they seek. He also has interested us personally into the lives of many who need a source of hope, love, peace, and joy in their life. While scripture is full of physical healings, divine

appointments, resurrections, and battles against demons, I would argue that we are in the midst of one of God's greatest miracles – The establishment of his Church.

Church, we have an opportunity to get in on the ground floor, to get our hands dirty, and to make disciples who have experienced transformed lives. However, that is not all going to happen here in this building. No, it is going to require us to be attentive to the presence of God outside this building. How is the gospel confronting our Church? Do we trust the Spirit to lead us through these uncertain times? How are we serving as a conduit for the power of God in our world? It is possible, but it is going to require us to get uncomfortable and live in uncertainty. It is going to require us to become a physical manifestation of Micah 6:8, which tells us to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. If we can come together and do that, then I believe we will begin to see God work powerfully and reveal himself to our world in exciting ways. I believe we will see a miracle.