

WALKING, AND LEAPING, AND PRAISING GOD

Open your Bible with me to Acts 3. Singing has played an important part of our family culture ever since our children were small. Today, there is often spontaneous harmony that fills our home, the sound of a piano being played, or guitars being strummed. Once they could read, I bought each kid their own hymnal so we could sing together in family worship from time to time. But before they could harmonize, or play instruments, or even read, we often listened to CDs of kids' songs as we drove around town. (Students, if you don't know what a CD is, you can text you parents and ask them after church.)

One album we had on repeat in the car was entitled "Wee Sing" with an extra 'e.' Wee as in little. It was a collection of songs that taught bible stories and helped children memorize the books of the Bible, ones like "This Little Light of Mine" and so on. One of them told the story of the text we arrive at this morning. The lyrics went like this:

Peter and John went to pray,
They met a lame man on the way,
He asked for alms and held out his palms,
And this is what Peter did say:
Silver and gold have I none,
But such as I have give I thee,
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Then the chorus goes:

He went walking, and leaping, and praising God,
Walking, and leaping, and praising God.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Of Nazareth rise up and walk.¹

¹ Rob Evans, *Walking and Leaping*, vol. Follow the Leader (Integrity Music, 2001).

When I went to study this passage that little melody popped into my mind all these years later. I wondered if our kids would remember this song and more importantly the story of which it sings. I also thought about many adults who perhaps have read or heard the New Testament miracle stories yet still wonder how they are meant to shape our lives as believers today. I even thought of students who will soon be off to college and be taught that there is no way that the miracles of the Bible could have ever happened. It made me eager to gather with you and marvel together at the power and plan of God revealed in the text before us today. Before we look at the passage, let me ask a question to get us thinking in the right direction. In what ways have you seen the power of Christ at work in your story?

Sermon Summary

In Acts 3:1-10, the apostles Peter and John encounter a lame man begging at the temple gate. When the man asked them for money to help his situation temporarily, the apostles saw his greatest need and gave him more than he ever imagined. That day, the man who had never known use of his legs went “Walking, and Leaping, and Praising God.” The main idea of the passage emphasizes the power of Christ at work in and through His apostles as evidence that the kingdom of God had not only come but would continue to advance.² We will explore these ten verses from two different angles. *First, The Story, then The Sign.*

¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ 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!” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Reprinted in this format, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, v. 5 (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 93.

The Story

First let us look at *The Story*. We noted how Acts 2:42-47 serves as a summary statement highlighting specific characteristics of the Jerusalem church which included signs and wonders, meeting in the temple courts, praising God, prayer, and the Lord adding to their number. By the time we reach the end of chapter 4, we will see each of those characteristics detailed in real life. We have looked through a wide-lens description of the church, but now the focus zooms in on one specific miracle in one specific life that illustrates how the gospel shaped the story of individual lives. Martin Lloyd Jones pointed out that, “One of the glories of the book of Acts... is that it does not confine itself to didactic teaching. It also tells stories; it gives examples and illustrations of all that it puts before us... It gives us the Gospel in action, as something living and real.”³ Before us today is something living and real.

Commentary on the Story

No one tells the story better than Luke does. Yet, as we walk through the account of what happened that day, allow me to point out some commentary. To begin, let’s consider the setting. Verse one says it was the ninth hour, or 3 o’clock in the afternoon, which was the time of the second daily sacrifice called the *Tamid*. This is when Jews would go to the temple to pray, and we find Peter and John on their way to worship God. As they approach the temple gate, we are introduced to a man sitting on the ground asking for money. So that we don’t just hurry by this nameless person, Luke includes some of his backstory. We learn that this man had a congenital condition from birth so that he could not walk. Acts 4:22 tells us that he was now forty years old. This was ages before the wheelchair was invented, so he had to be carried from place to place by other people. The man was positioned in his normal spot just beside the entrance to the Court of the Gentiles, begging for money at the foot of what is known as “The Beautiful Gate.” The historian Josephus tells us that this massive door was covered in Corinthian

³ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authentic Christianity*, 1st U.S. ed, Studies in the Book of Acts, v. 1 (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2000), 212.

brass and that its beauty even excelled those that were covered with silver and gold.⁴ So, the scene is set as a man with no use of his legs, unable to provide for himself, sat day after day, year after year, asking worshipers for alms as they passed by on their way into the temple court.

Yet, this day would be unlike the other 14,610 days he had sat at the Beautiful Gate asking for money. That day as Peter and John passed by and he asked for help, they *looked straight at him*. The word for ‘looked’ means to fix one’s eyes on an object continually and intensely—‘to stare at and keep one’s eyes fixed on.’⁵ Sometimes when we pass a person on the street, our inclination is to look down or look away or look anywhere but at the person asking for money. Certainly, the apostles had seen him before. Perhaps they had given him alms many times in the past, or maybe they just passed by. But today they saw him in a different light. When Peter told him, “Look at us,” surely the man’s hopes rise and he thinks he is about to receive a few shekels just like he has on most days in the past. But instead of hearing the clanging of a coin in his bag, he hears a strange sentence, “Silver or gold have I none.” And he is left hanging. Perhaps he thought to himself, “If silver or gold have you none, why are you bothering with me?” This sentence is deliberately structured to make an important point: what the man thought he needed (silver or gold) is contrasted with what he really needed (what I have.)⁶ This is a leading sentence. I love sentences like this. It is setting the stage for something far better. “But what I do have, I give to you.” What Peter had was the authority, power, and Spirit of the Risen Christ – and he could do far better than drop a coin in a bag. The man doesn’t ask to be healed, there is no prayer meeting called for. Immediately he is told to rise up and walk “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

⁴ William Whiston, trans., *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, vol. 5 (New York: James Virtue, 1849), 201.

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 281.

⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 169.

Instantly this man who had never been able to stand on his own strength his entire life, felt his ankles and feet grow stronger. He stands at first by clinging to Peter's hand, but then he is at full stretch. He puts one foot in front of the other and takes his first steps, perhaps wobbling around like a toddler. Then, standing and walking were not enough to contain the joy in his heart! He leapt through the air bouncing around town praising God for what He had done for him. The people who recognized him were filled with wonder and could not believe their eyes – but there was no denying what had happened. In the name of Jesus Christ he had been healed. The good news of Jesus changed the story of his life. There was now one day that separated his life in two parts: the time before Jesus healed him, and the time after.

Our Stories

Before we move on, think back to when your story was first intersected by the power of Christ. For each of us who are in Christ, there was a time when we were powerless to do anything about our spiritual condition. We needed the power of Christ to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. And this is what Jesus has done. I wonder, who looked at you and loved you enough to share the message of the gospel with you? As we hear this story, let us be reminded of our own. Perhaps it's reason to leave here leaping and praising God!

The Sign

Now, let us look at *The Sign*. What did this miracle mean? If signs are objects that point to things, what does this point to? Miracles are often called signs because they are supernatural events that point to something – and this sign is no exception. The purpose God has behind the miracle of physical transformation is to authenticate and point people to the lasting spiritual transformation that the gospel brings.

A Sign that Points

First, we must understand that this was *A. A Sign of the Continuing Work of Christ*. When we first pushed off in our journey of Acts, I highlighted the fact that Luke is clear in his

purpose of writing his gospel and this book. The Gospel of Luke records the things Jesus *began* to do in his earthly ministry, and the Book of Acts is an orderly account of the things Jesus *continued* to do through his apostles.⁷ Here we find the first account of his apostles doing something that we saw Jesus himself do. Luke 5:17-26 tells the story of Jesus and another man who could not walk or move. When Jesus meets him, he not only healed the man in front of a pack of Pharisees, but then did something even more extraordinary – Jesus forgave his sins. Here we find Peter walking in the footsteps of his Savior, empowered by the Spirit, healing people and as we will see next week – pointing them to the one who alone can forgive sin. It is important that we take note of this: it was not the power or authority of the apostles in and of themselves to cure the man’s condition. It was when the name of Jesus was proclaimed that the man sprang up to his feet for the first time in his life. It is clear that the power by which Jesus healed people during His public ministry was still alive, and present, and active in His apostles.⁸

The next truth I want to highlight is that this was *B. A Sign of the Kingdom Come*. It is important to remember where we are on the timeline of redemptive history as we read this miracle to realize Luke’s purpose in recording it. He is showing that the promised kingdom of God had come and was now advancing in and through the apostles. This physical healing illustrates the fulfillment of promises in the Old Testament of messianic salvation. Let me connect those dots through the language Luke uses. The word translated “leaping” (Gk. *Hallomai*) in verse 8 appears only here in the New Testament. Luke’s use of the word in this context is suggestive and is meant to point his readers to the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 35:5-6 foretold of a time when:

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 shall sing for joy.

⁷ Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 27 (Nottingham, England : Downers Grove, IL: Apollos ; InterVarsity Press, 2011), 49.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, Rev. ed., [Repr.], The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2009), 78.

This lame man leaping is ultimately a sign that God had brought salvation to His people. This is a foretaste of the day when all creation will be renewed: all of the lame will leap with joy, all of the blind will see with new eyes, all sickness will have passed away with perfect healing (cancer, etc.). This miracle is a little window for us to peer through to the future. You see, in a sense the kingdom is already here – and the kingdom is not yet here. It is very important to think of it in these terms. The kingdom is now here in part, but when Christ returns again it will be here in all of its bright fullness and joy! For now, sometimes we see healing either through supernatural means or through the providence of God in medicine. But there will come a day when there is no more need for doctors. In the age to come, our bodies will no longer feel the gravity of sin. Our hearts will no longer ache for things to be made new and made right. Isaiah 53 and Acts 3 both point to the blessings of the eschatological age – the end time when the Messiah will come. This miracle, then, is not seen as an isolated incident but as part of the grand scheme of God to fulfill His promises in and through Jesus and His followers.”⁹

Who are We?

Often as we read stories in Scripture, we are able to tell how it is meant to inform our lives today. A friend asked me this week about this account and said, “Who are we in this story? Are we the man sitting in need of healing, or are we the disciples sharing the message of Jesus?” And the answer is both! You see, before Christ we are the man sitting in need of someone to find us and minister to us and point us to the truth of who Jesus is. The miracle accounts are like parables that teach us spiritual lessons. Like the man we also have a condition from birth that cripples us – our sin keeps us from entering the presence of God – so that we might come to the gate, even go into a church, but we cannot lift ourselves up. We cannot heal ourselves. We need Jesus to forgive us our sins and cleanse us. We need the gospel to heal us. We see in the reflection of this story each of our stories. Patrick Schreiner writes, “The lame man was socially

⁹ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Nachdr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 176.

and physically blemished; now he is welcomed. He was spatially cut off from the people of God; now he is able to enter the temple. He was economically destitute; now he has received riches from the true King.”¹⁰

Yet, we are also like the disciples – a people sent to our community, our families, our workplaces, our circles of influence and are called to keep our eyes wide open for where God might be moving. In the example of Peter and John we find an example of what it looks like to be led by the Spirit with our eyes open to what the Lord is doing in the lives of people around us. It may be that the same people have been in our path for years and we don’t even notice them. Who do you see and what do you have? The greatest need of our friends, and family members, and neighbors is not their physical need – but their spiritual need.

We have looked at the story and explored the sign. Next week, Lord willing, we will look at Peter’s sermon that this miracle gave way to – and specifically the Savior he preaches of – Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

On January 6, 1850, the wintry Sunday morning of his conversion, a snowstorm blew through town, and Charles Spurgeon made his way to a church close to his home, walking through the door of the small Primitive Methodist Chapel. He had also been roaming from church to church listening to trained ministers of the gospel, but it was the word preached by a “poor, uneducated man, a man who had never received any training for the ministry, and probably will never be heard of in his life”¹¹ (Spurgeon’s description) who preached salvation in Christ to Spurgeon. In the middle of the sermon, the man looked directly at Spurgeon and said, “Young man, you look very miserable.” Spurgeon knew that he looked—and was indeed—

¹⁰ Patrick Schreiner, *Acts* (Brentwood, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2021), 151.

¹¹ Charles Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 104.

miserable, and felt this direct approach as “a good blow” which “struck right home.”¹² The minister explained that he would always be miserable until he obeyed the text being preached that day: Isaiah 45:22, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” The man raised his hands and shouted, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live.” Spurgeon says, “I saw at once the way of salvation.”

Perhaps January 14, 2024 might be the wintry Sunday morning of your conversion. It might be through the word preached by this ordinary man. So, if you find yourself on this wintry morning still without spiritual life, without forgiveness of sin, without the joy of leaping with praise because you have been spiritually made right with God, “Look to Jesus Christ.”

There is another song I taught our kids when they were small – a scripture song that I wrote for them so that they might understand how they might come to know Christ. It is from Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” Believe. Believe. The Lord does not require silver or gold, He does not ask for your resume to check any of your fleeting accomplishments, He simply says, “Come. Believe. Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live.”

¹² Spurgeon, 1:104.

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