

This Is Jesus (IV): To the Ends of the Earth

The People-Building Business

April 29, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

**Worship Songs – From the Day / King of Love /
T&G**

Video – Behind the Scenes

Drama – Heavy-Laden

Feature – Heavy

Let's pray as we begin.

Lord, we live in a world where people are hurting emotionally and physically. Whether it's from ...

- Things they've done to themselves ...
 - Or things that have been done to them ...
 - Or simply the pain and suffering that is part of living in a world cursed by sin and death
- ...

... people are carrying heavy burdens. They're

hurting and they need to be healed of those hurts.

And we know that You are a healer and so we ask that your Divine healing would come to them – and us, yet we know that's not always Your plan which, honestly, is confusing and disappointing.

So I pray that, this morning, You would give us understanding, and then a vision of how You have planned to use us in that cause.

I ask these things for the sake of Jesus and His Kingdom, Amen.

As most of you know, since the first of the year we've been talking in great details about Jesus of Nazareth and His Kingdom – the Kingdom of God.

More specifically, in this past month, we've been looking at ...

- How the proclamation that “Jesus is the true King (and not Caesar)” began spreading.
- How little communities of those who believed that to be true and wanted to follow in the Way of Jesus sprang up all over the Roman world.
- How those communities (otherwise known as “church”) embraced the calling of God not only to open wide their arms to people of different races, nationalities and socio-economic levels, but also to remove the cultural barriers that stood in their way.
- And how all of these things happened *after* Jesus’ crucifixion – an inconceivable development (historically speaking) for which the single best explanation is that Jesus really did rise from the dead and then hung out for six weeks with his disciples before He returned to His Father – just as the writers of the New Testament claim.

We've talked about a lot of things related to Jesus and the spread of the Good News since the first of the year. We've covered a lot of ground.

And yet, in all of that time, one thing we have *not* talked about ... is *all of the miraculous “signs and wonders”* that not only were a huge part of Jesus' ministry but *also* of the Apostles who carried out His commission to go “to the ends of the Earth” with the message of His Kingdom.

There's no debating the fact that, in the beginning, Christianity was a miracle-working movement launched by a miracle-working Messiah. Even those who were against Him admitted that Jesus did some things that could only be described as miracles.

Check it out ...

Video Clip – Jesus, Miracle Workerⁱ

Now remember that last statement because it will be very important in a bit ... but this same pattern of miraculous healings continues *after* Jesus has launched His movement through His disciples. In fact, the NT Book of Acts records 14 specific miracles plus several statements indicate that Paul, Silas, Barnabas, Stephen, Phillip, Peter and John were known for their ability to heal.

Those last two men – Peter and John – were actually the *first* to perform a miraculous healing which is recorded in Acts chapter 3.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

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. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

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.”

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate ... and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. *Acts 3:1-3, 6-10 (NIV)*

In fact, Luke adds ...

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.

Acts 3:11 (NIV)

*When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus” [through this miracle]. *Acts 3:12-13 (NIV)**

Right out of the shoot, right at the very beginning, right after the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and thousands of people hear the gospel in their own native language and become believers, Peter heals a guy and then *even more* people hear about Jesus.

And, as I said, as the Gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem, this kind of thing happens again and again ... which, if you're a thinking person, leads you to wonder: “*why doesn't it happen anymore? What happened to all those signs and wonders of the first century?*”

That's not to say that there aren't occasional reports of people being miraculously healed through prayer and through "the laying on of hands." But there certainly doesn't seem to be the same dynamic and frequency. Could it be that God really isn't in the healing business anymore?

That's what I want to talk to you about in the time that remains.

Looking Closerⁱⁱ

And to do that, we're going to take a closer look at this particular healing because, if you can understand what's happening here, you can understand miracles in general. In other words, this one is sort of a template for all the others.

Four things that this incident makes clear.

- 1. First of all, miracles are a “sign” that validates Jesus.**

When everyone comes running to see what happened, Peter explains the purpose of the miracle. Remember, he said ...

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.”

Acts 3:12-13 (NIV)

In other words, Peter is saying “this happened so you that you would know that Jesus is who we’re claiming He is. It’s validation that He is risen from the dead, God in the flesh, and King over everything (even higher than Caesar).”

... which is very similar to what happens when Jesus (in Mark 2) tells the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven. Remember what we heard in the video? “To confirm He has the authority to forgive sin (which only God can do), Jesus heals the man.” The miracle is the sign that validates who Jesus is.

And all of the miracles in the early church period

are intended to accomplish the same thing. They're saying to whoever is a witness: "listen to what these guys are telling you about Him. Take them and their message very seriously."

Second thing we see in this incident is that ...

2. Miracles point to "the future restoration of all things."

After Peter explains that the miracle is meant to glorify Jesus, he also adds that ...

"Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." Acts 3:21 (NIV)

In other words, Jesus has ascended to Heaven but He's coming back at some point to set things to the way they were intended to be from the beginning ... and this miracle is evidence that the prophecies such as this one from Isaiah are true:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

Isaiah 35:5-7 (NIV)

Those who saw Peter and John heal that man would have certainly been reminded of this passage! The miracle they witnessed was a foretaste of it.

Another way of thinking about it is that a miracle brings the “normal” future into the “messed up” present.

As Tim Keller puts it in his great book, *The Reason for God* ...

“Miracles are not a *suspension* of the natural order, but a *return* to the natural order. Jesus’ healings are the only natural things in a world

that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, the way things *are* is not the way things were *intended to be*. Our world as it currently exists is unnatural.

And a miracle turns it upside-down to give us a taste of what, in the vision of God, is natural. It restores the created order ... *for a while*, at least. For it is only a pointer, which leads to the third observation ...

... which is that ...

3. Miracles are temporary and do not solve our greatest problem.

That guy who was lame from birth who Peter healed? He was still going to die at some point, just like every person who Jesus healed – even his buddy Lazarus who he raised from the dead – also died at some point.

The “fix” (so to speak) for all of them was only temporary.

No *miracle* – no matter how great it is at the time – solves the greatest problem we have ... which is why, to all of those who are amazed by the healing they have just seen, Peter doesn't say something like, “now, y'all line up to get your miracle, too. If you just have enough faith like this man, you also can be healed of whatever ails you.”

Instead Peter says:

“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life ...”

Acts 3:14-15 (NIV)

“Your biggest problem,” Peter says, “isn't some physical or even emotional issue. It's your sin. It's your rejection of God” – which is what sin is and what all of us are guilty of in some way.

“You rejected Him and killed Him,” Peter says ...

*“... but God raised him from the dead.
We are witnesses of this.*

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so
that your sins may be wiped out.”*

Acts 3:15,19 (NIV)

The fix for your biggest problem, Peter was saying to them (and to us), is to change your thinking (which is what “repent” means) ... change your thinking about Jesus. You rejected Him once. But you can turn to Him now. Trust Him as your savior and follow Him as your King so that your biggest problem – your sins – may be wiped out.

So ...

- Miracles are a “sign” that validates Jesus.
- Miracles point to “the future restoration of all things.”
- Miracles are temporary and do not solve our greatest problem.

Here's the fourth thing we learn from this incident (and this one is very simple) ...

**4. Miracles are the exception not the rule
(which is why we hear about them in the first place).**

Even in the first century, this was true. After all, if it was a common thing for people to be healed by a miracle, then people wouldn't have come running to Peter and John!

But it wasn't common. It was unique.

And it was unique because miracles are not God's "standard operating procedure" (so to speak). They are the exception, not the rule of how He accomplishes His will in this world ... which, obviously, then leads to the question: how does God ordinarily do that? How does He typically accomplish His will?

- And, don't we still need some kind of

validation of the claims of Jesus in our day?

- Don't we still need something that points to the future restoration of all things?
- And if that doesn't come through miraculous healings, then how will it come?

And again, that's not to say that God doesn't do those things. Sometimes, He does, especially in parts of the world where people have not yet heard the name of Jesus.

But God has another way He prefers to get things done.

Back to the Future

And to understand that way, we need to go all the way back to the very beginning; back to the time before sin entered the world.

Genesis chapter one tells us that ...

God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said ...

Genesis 1:27-28a (NLT)

“Y’all pray for miracles, now. Pray that I would divinely intervene so that things will be the best they can be; exactly the way I want them.”

No. That’s not what God said.

God said ...

“Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.” Genesis 1:28b (NLT)

In other words, “flourish in every way” (which is what it means to be fruitful). You and your offspring are in charge” (which is what it means to govern).

“So spread out and fill the earth. Take what I’ve created – the raw materials of this Earth – and then *you all* apply your intellect and your will and your creativity like I have applied My intellect and will and creativity” (which is part of what it means to be created in God’s image – not that humans *look like* God but that we uniquely reflect God’s uniqueness in those things).

That, friends, is and *has always been* God’s number one plan for getting things done on this Earth. That’s God’s plan for making things the way they ought to be. God put humans on this planet and told us to “tend the Garden” – to *work it* (and not to look for miracles).

But, as we know, things didn’t work out according to the plan.

Instead of honoring God and fully investing ourselves in the flourishing of His world, all of us, in some way or another, have disowned the Holy

One and rejected Him. We've made “self” our god.

And that collective rejection – our collective *sin* – has resulted in a curse being placed on everything

...

- Which is why “everything is so heavy” (to quote the song we heard earlier).^{iv}
- Why there is sickness and disease and death.
- Why we need healing of our bodies and our minds and our spirits.

And so God, who loved the world He made and all the people who were filling it, made a promise to one day restore it back to the way it was; the way it was meant to be. For hundreds of years, the prophets of Israel would remind God’s people that the day of a renewed creation was coming.

And then along comes Jesus who says, “I’m going to do some things – miraculous healings – that point to the reality of those promises. I’m going to bring forward in time some of what awaits in the

future restoration so that you will know that a) that day really is coming and b) that I am who I say I am.”

And that is amazing, obviously. But Jesus does something even more amazing.

Somehow, in a way I don’t completely understand, He allows sin and death and evil to have its full expression in His own body when He is crucified. The Apostle Paul says “He who had no sin became sin for us.”

And, then, just when it appeared sin and the evil one had won, Jesus emerged victorious over death.

And this is so important to understand: when Jesus physically returned from the dead, it wasn’t a mere resuscitation of his body as had happened in the case of Lazarus.

Instead, His resurrection was the beginning

of the promised “restoration of all things.”

... which is why the Apostles would sometimes refer to Him as “the firstborn from the dead”^v ...

- Meaning that Jesus is the first human being to experience that restoration.
- Meaning that the new creation has already begun in some way.
- Meaning that, when Jesus rose from the dead, something about this world fundamentally changed.

Now, I know at this point some of you are thinking, “Ok, Rick, this is interesting but I’m not sure where you’re going with it.”

Hang with me. One more piece and I think it will become clear.

Paul wrote:

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

When a person puts their faith and trust in Jesus and decides to follow Him, that person also becomes part of the new creation, like Jesus!

Obviously, that can't be *physically* because we still have the same old bodies. Instead, we are “born from above” – of the Spirit, which means that *our spirit* becomes part of that new creation ... which is why those of us who are Christians are so conflicted at times: part of our being is experiencing “the restoration of all things” and part of our being – our flesh – is still experiencing this rebellious cursed world.

Greater Works

Now we’re almost there. Once we answer one

little question this will all make sense (I hope).

What is the purpose and mission and calling of a being like this – who is inwardly renewed and restored?

Paul tells us in the very next verse.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18
(NIV)

... of setting things right. That's our calling as followers of Jesus, as citizens of the Kingdom.

Elsewhere Paul puts it like this:

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

So, what are we saying?

- The world got messed up because of sin. That's why we live in a world where people are hurting emotionally and physically.
- God promised restoration – that one day it's all going to be set right and creation is going to be renewed.
- However, He isn't waiting until then to start. Restoration began in the physical body of Jesus.
- And it continues in and through those of us who belong to Him.

God's primary plan to accomplish His will in this world; to provide validation of the claims of Jesus; to point to the future restoration of all things ... isn't "divine intervention" like miraculous healing (though sometimes that happens).

God's primary plan is "restored people restoring people and creation."

It's us.

Our job is to fulfill the original creation mandate; to apply our renewed intellect and will and creativity to bring reconciliation and healing and light to every person and place our world is broken and suffering.

That's plan A. Healing for the world will come as life and power and money and creativity go out from us. You and I, if we're followers of Jesus, are in the people-building business.

Jesus once said:

“Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

John 14:12 (NIV)

In other words, “I’m leaving. You guys and gals are it.”

And when He said greater things, Jesus couldn't have been talking about miracles. It's hard to imagine works that are more spectacular or supernatural than the raising of Lazarus from the dead or turning water into wine.^{vi}

So ...

If your gift is preaching, then preach.
If it is serving, then serve;
If it is teaching, then teach;
If it is to encourage, then give encouragement;
If it is giving, then give generously;
If it is to lead, do it diligently
If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.^{vii}

Sell cars, write books, cook meals, build houses, clean teeth, raise kids, do surgery – as one who has been renewed yourself, do whatever helps people to flourish. Do whatever helps them become what they were intended to be as those created in the image of God.

Conclusion

But what about someone who needs a healing right now?

Two things:

1. Pray and ask God for a miracle. Seriously.
2. Thank God.

Thank God that centuries ago there were people who began to discover how the body could be healed through medicine. They opened the door and now we see things happen in hospitals and doctor's offices that truly are greater than what Jesus Himself did.

My mom died of lung cancer last summer but we were blessed with 8 additional months. That wouldn't have happened 10 years ago. And not too long from now, people with lung cancer will have

8 additional years.

“Aw, Rick, come on that’s just science. Jesus has nothing to do with that.”

Nope. Not true. The first scientists and doctors were Christians who understood the calling to give the world a taste of the coming restoration. They knew that Jesus was a healer and they wanted to be healers, too.

- Same thing happened in education.
- And with children’s rights.
- And in the abolition of slavery.
- And in labor laws.
- And in the civil rights movement (MLK Jr. was a Baptist pastor).

All those movements were led by men and women of the Kingdom determined to do the good works God prepared for them as agents of reconciliation. They were “restored people restoring people and

creation.”

Question is ... how are you, if you are a Christian, going to apply your intellect and will and creativity to bring reconciliation and healing and light to our world? How will you be a people-builder?

Let's pray.

Feature – Stand by You

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Baptism next Sunday
 2. You Belong mom's group – down front
- 3. Offering @Door / 90-day giving challenge card**

Endnotes

ⁱ From the John 10:10 Project @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRpQ9gOe6kc>

ⁱⁱ This section is based on J.D. Grear's message Miracles Are the Message.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tim Keller, The Reason for God, 95-96

^{iv} Heavy by Linkin Park

^v Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:4

^{vi} D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 495

^{vii} From Romans 12:6-8