

Part 6: Seeing The Right Miracle

Tyler Velin | Acts 3:1-16

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When was the last time you were “one upped”? Consider for example hunting or fishing stories where you share about the biggest catch you had last weekend, only to have a friend take out his phone and show you a picture of his catch from last weekend that was even bigger.

Or maybe you planted a little garden this spring and have been talking about it with some friends, only to have one of your friends invite you over to see their garden full of raised beds, greenhouses, and the purest organic vegetables the world has ever known.

When this happens to us, what kind of emotions do you feel? Maybe it’s genuine amazement! But we also know it can make us feel frustrated, ashamed, and even downright angry. When we are presented with realities bigger than what we expected, we generally fall into one of those two categories: we are either amazed, or we are annoyed

Today we read a story of “one-up.” First, a beggar who couldn’t walk asks Peter and John for some pennies—but what he was given instead was perfect health and healing. This is the kind of “one-up” that we would love to experience! When the crowds see this, they are filled with wonder and amazement.

But it’s Peter’s second “one-upping” that stirs a wider range of emotions—some extreme that it results in the first persecution of the Christian church. As a result of this miracle he says, “Why are you amazed at a man raised up from a mat—don’t you remember the man that you killed whom God raised from the dead?”

It’s this question that we will examine today, “Why do you wonder at this?” There are endless things in our world which cause us wonder and woe. Even in coming to church today some came with a sincere expectation to worship, others came with a sincere expectation of wonder and curiosity. But what Peter is going to show us today is that all of our expectations, and all of our hopes and dreams according to the world pale in comparison to the wonder we have in the gospel.

Our main point today is Peter’s attempt to draw us to the miracle the Bible wants to draw us to: faith in Jesus. That’s the main point this morning: **Faith in Jesus is the amazing miracle.** It sounds simple, but faith in Jesus revolutionized the life of a man born lame, faith in Jesus threatened to take the life of the men who preached it, and faith in Jesus annoyed and angered those who refused it.

To help us see this in proper perspective we are first going to look at the healing of the lame man. This is **the Miracle We Can See.** But as Peter responds to the Jews’ amazement he points out our second point **The Miracle We Can Miss**, which leads us to our point of application **The Miracle of Faith in Jesus.**

Last week we were introduced to the day to day life of the church, and our passage today picks up in that daily rhythm as Luke tells us **Acts 3:1**, “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”

It's in this ordinary daily pattern of following Jesus that Jesus continues to do miraculous things. If you recall Jesus' final reminder to the disciples in **Acts 1:8** he said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Chapters 1-2), and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." We talked about how this verse is the table of contents for the book of Acts as our passage today begins to record the Jesus believing, Spirit filled, baptized church bearing witness in Jerusalem.

And for the next five chapters the whole of Jerusalem is presented with the gospel by the church—but the evangelistic campaign of the church was simply the ordinary and ongoing activities of the church: the formal gatherings, and the day to day ministry. This is an important principle for us to remember, as we commit ourselves to faithfully walking out the Christian faith with our brothers and sisters—God brings ministry right into our path. And this is exactly the case this morning as we see our first point, **The Miracle We Can See**.

As they entered the temple, **Acts 3:2-3**, "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. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms."

You'll notice that this man, who daily was laid to sit at the gate, didn't even wait to be laid down before he called out to Peter and John. Last week we saw that the church was "praising God and having favor with all the people." As a genuine Christian community should—the church was getting noticed. This man probably recognized Peter and John as some of Jesus' apostles, and more so he had heard rumor of the Christian church who was so eager to take care of the material needs within their body.

So here, this man nearly falls out of his mat while being carried because he sees something distinct in these Christians—the people of Jesus are not like the other ones who are going to the temple. So he earnestly asks: "Do you have any alms?" Which is to say, "Do you have any spare change? Any money I might have for bread and shelter?"

He was reliant upon these donations because as we saw, he was lame from birth. In those days there were no power chairs, no government services designed to help people like that get a job, no healthcare able to fix it. As we see in Acts 4:22, this man had been reliant upon these funds for over 40 years.

40 years of asking. 40 years of relying on others because he could do nothing on his own. But here comes the church! Here is that generous and caring community who he thought would be able to help him! If these men could get him some money—he'd be good! He'd be able to make it.

And it looks like everything he wanted was about to happen: **Acts 3:4-5**, "And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them expecting to receive something from them."

This guy asked thousands of people each day for the same thing. Most didn't probably didn't even stop to notice him, after decades he was probably white noise to most of them. But Peter and John stop, and they look at him, and you can imagine the genuine optimism growing in his heart. But then he hears these crushing words: **Acts 3:6**, "I have no silver and gold."

This would have been shocking to the man. Everyone went to the temple with money. The giving of alms was part of the meritorious work Jews would do to feel good about themselves. If you wanted to know

God was pleased with you, you were supposed to give to the temple, and you were supposed to give some alms to others when you had the chance. But these men went to temple with no money!

Why? Two reasons. First, as Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant, believers didn't give to the temple instead they gave to the local church. But secondly, these men didn't need merit. They no longer had to offer alms at the temple because they had the merit of Jesus—they could never give enough for God to be pleased. But they had taken what God had given them—the precious blood of Jesus by faith.

In light of this, these two men find themselves without the ability to give him anything of monetary value. And I'm sure his heart sank. Maybe you're someone who has come to Jesus or to church this morning wanting and expecting something very concrete, the thing you think is most essential and urgent to your life. You might have a sinking feeling that I'm looking at you and saying, "I have no silver or gold for you. I have no spouse for you. I have magic formula for an easy life, a restored relationship with your parents or kids, or a matching 401K."

But notice how Peter wants to show this man that he knows a guy, who is able to do far more than what he is asking for. He doesn't have money, he doesn't have gold, **Acts 3:6-8**, "...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 his 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."

You can imagine the headlines the next morning: "Christian church denies money to homeless man." It's only funny because of the irony of it. Prior to that moment, getting those alms was the thing he hoped these men could give him. And he was denied that provision. They provided him with no job, they gave him no housing. But he didn't care.

Why? Because the man who was lame for forty years was made strong. The greater need behind his felt need was exposed. In that moment you could have offered the man all the riches in the world and he would have turned it down. Why? Because he was raised up.

And in this process we see the totality of the healing. Peter told him to rise and helped him, but the man didn't need help! How did he rise? He leapt (vs. 8), and then he stood, and then he walked, and then he leapt some more, praising God and running around.

Kids, one thing we've been trying to work on at church is not running or leaping after service. It's part of how you can care for others who might easily be knocked over. But here's the one time you can do it: if by a miracle you once could not walk, and now you can--go hog wild. Run, jump, sprint, squat.

This man didn't need any PT, forty years of no leg muscles was overcome in what Peter says in verse 16 is "perfect health." This is a wildly powerful illustration of our own conversion. New life in Jesus gives us muscles we never had to do things we never thought we could do.

And as he ran around the temple, those who knew him asked a question we will see often in the book of Acts and which we will get asked a lot as we come to faith and grow in our walk with Jesus: "What in the world happened to you!?"

Acts 3:9-11, "And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 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. While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's."

You can imagine people going home that day and saying to their neighbor: "Did you hear about Larry the Lame Man? Peter and John helped him!" "That's great, so he got some money?" "Oh, no. He's still super poor. But he's been healed."

You see the primary problem still remained—he was in poverty. And yet no one would have cared. Why? Because for the first time, he had the ability to address it. He could work in fields, he could carry hay bales—by nature of this miracle—he could return to the same problems but with new hope and fresh power.

This is so true for anyone who comes to Jesus. I spoke with a non-Christian friend once who knew someone who had joined our church. I told him that he was a Christian and a church member and the guy said, "Good, I'm glad to see he cleaned up his life." I said, "Oh no, his life is still a mess, but he's been saved by sin, given the Holy Spirit and is part of a community who is going to help him with it."

If we aren't careful, our lives and our responses to our own conversion, can conceal the greater miracle. The world wants to see something, but in seeing that one thing, they can miss the greater thing. These people saw a miracle and felt amazed, and yet they still missed what was greater.

This is our second point this morning: **The Miracle We Can Miss.**

If we were Peter, this would be a good day already. In a church trying to gain traction—he facilitated a miracle that now has crowds flocking to him in amazement. But Peter isn't content with this. Amazement alone doesn't mean anything. Amazement doesn't save. Amazement isn't necessarily Christian. But Peter here wants to show them what they really should be amazed about: the miracle of the gospel and saving faith.

Acts 3:12, "And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: 'Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?'"

From a public relations perspective this was social suicide! Nothing could have been more helpful to use this moment to validate the apostles themselves as the powerful leaders of the church. But Peter and John actually begin to deflect the praise and refuse to take credit for it. This makes no sense by worldly standards unless these men really believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

If Jesus rose from the dead, then they know they can't take credit for it, and they know they don't need to take credit for it. The church already has a powerful leader, the resurrected Jesus Christ, and even though they can't see him now—he is ruling and working and this miracle proves it. This is where Peter's critic goes nuclear—the second "one upping": **Acts 3:13-15**, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and ask for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead! To this we are witnesses."

Did you hear his logic? "Why do you wonder at this? You are amazed that I raised a lame man from his mat? I mean it's not like I raised him from the dead? Because that would be a real miracle right? Can you

imagine if that were the case? How amazing would that be? This man was carried by people and laid at a gate and I raised him—but what if there was a man murdered by a group of people and someone raised him?”

And then that wonderful line that Peter uses so often, and that God uses in our own hearts to draw us to himself, “Do you remember Jesus?” Look at verse 16, and how he calls this man the one they “see and know.” Only to say, “Shouldn’t you know God better? You’re all here in the temple? As faithful as this man sat here, wasn’t the prophecy of God daily read here?”

Remember Isaiah’s servant? **Isaiah 52:13**, “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” Remember the “Holy and Righteous” one in Psalm 16. Jesus is God’s holy and righteous servant. He is the one who God glorified.

“Do you remember how Pilate, the pagan ruler decided to release him? Do you remember what you did?” Notice the verbs here: “You delivered him over, you denied him the presence of Pilate and even after he made his appeal, you denied him again, then you asked Pilate for a murderer to be mercifully released to you instead, and you killed the author of life.”

But God raised him up. And you’ve all witnessed it.

If you miss that miracle, then you’ll never make sense of anything. Peter raised this man up with his right hand, but God raised Jesus from the dead. The Greek word is the same in both instances and it’s the same word for that one, great miracle: resurrection.

This man was lame from birth, and you are born sinners. Dead in your sins. But there’s a God who raises the dead. You think your greatest need is figuring out how, and by what means a lame man walks—but what you don’t realize is that your greatest need is how and by what means dead sinners can be raised back to life.

Peter is saying, you don’t need to understand this miracle—you need to experience the greater one. This is our last point this morning: **The Miracle of Faith in Jesus.**

Peter continues: **Acts 3:16**, “And his name--by faith in his name--has made this man strong whom you see and know and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

You see, at the bottom of this man’s obedience was faith in Jesus. He turned first to the disciples because he thought they had something to offer. But these apostles show us the miracle that any Christian can offer—faith in Jesus. This man, though he didn’t yet know the full extent of his need was convinced that in that name, “Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” there was his hope. That’s what he needed.

The priorities of his life were immediately dwarfed by what was offered in that name: resurrection. And in that name, he was raised to perfect health. Next week we will look more intently on what a response of faith looks like, but I want to conclude by pointing out three works that faith did in this text:

First, ***Faith in Jesus restores us to perfect health.***

Now you might say, "Well I believe! And I'm not getting what I wanted!" Maybe you might say, "I still have a physical disability, I still don't have a spouse, I still have no kids, I still have a problem," But here we see the wonderful one-upsmanship of the gospel!

You might want perfect health, a perfect spouse, and a perfect bank account. You might be extending your hand over and over again hoping that Jesus would turn to you. But here we see he has come to offer you something better. Just as this man wanted money and was granted the miracle of movement—so too the wonderful one-upsmanship of the gospel says to any of us who want our own material miracle in this world that Jesus offers to grant us spiritual healing, new life, eternal life, resurrection life. That's the greater provision. It's not that these issues are unimportant to Jesus, it's just that in faith and the promises awarded from that, those needs are accounted for. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.

That's why Paul is able to throw the riches of the world on the trash heap when he says this: **Philippians 3:8-11**, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Brothers and sisters to know him is to know the power of his resurrection! Do not marvel at the wrong miracle!

To those frustrated at what they seem to miss in the world or even in the church, consider the testimony of Augustine who tried for years to get the alms of the world: **"I panted after honor, wealth, marriage and you laughed at me. In these desires I underwent much bitterness. [But] You, being more gracious, prevented anything to grow sweet to me which was not you."**

Faith reveals what we really need. When I go to a doctor I give him my symptoms in hopes that he will tell me what I need. Yet how often do we go to Jesus, as the good physician and attempt to tell him what we need for perfect health. That's why Jesus says, "It is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick."

Through faith, we are given perfect health, because we are restored by the perfect righteousness of Jesus to perfect life in him. And one day, we too will be raised up. Your time is coming my friends. D.A. Carson once said, "I'm not suffering from anything a good resurrection won't fix." And in Christ, just as he was raised, we will be raised. Believe it.

Second, ***Faith in Jesus restores us to true fellowship.***

Take a look back at verse 1 where we are told Peter and John are going into the temple together, then notice in verse 8 how the result of his strong legs was him entering the temple with Peter and John.

But now consider that he was carried each day by someone. There were a number of people close enough to him that felt responsible to carry him. Many more who gave to him. Yet you'll notice all they do is leave him at the gate, and set him up to ask for alms. While the Old Testament law prohibited

priests who were lame to enter the temple, there was no such prohibition for a lame worshipper to come in.

All these friends stopped. They were willing to carry him to the gate of the supernatural, but were content to leave him there and point him back to the resources of man. On this point, let us not be these friends!

You might not have what it takes to bear with those who are burdened and in need of compassion. You might not have the ability to perform a miracle. But you do have the same thing Peter has: the name of Jesus Christ. Give to your friends generous and charitable gifts, care for them in their weakness, but brothers and sisters, give them Jesus! Leave them not with the gifts of the world but the lack of he who saves the world. Help them see the ways in which the gospel reframes their thoughts and helps them reconsider what they need and what really helps.

And notice also, the joy of in faith, joining with the church in worship. The man, having found sweeter friends, proceeds with them into deeper worship.

This is our last point of application: ***Faith in Jesus restores us to worship.***

This man, when healed didn't run and tell his mom. He didn't go grab his camera and go for a hike. He didn't chase after the cute girl he saw—he went in and praised God. He had sat for years at the gate of the temple thinking he needed what others offered him, but now even in his poverty he offers praise to the God who saved him.

His healthy feet followed his resurrected heart. There's much this man will have to do, there's jobs to get, entitlement to battle, and bills to pay—but what undergirds all of that as of first priority is worship. The strength of his ankles reveals the source of greatest strength for all that would come—the heart that longs for and is deeply satisfied in the God who saved him. No one worships God who has not been saved by the miracle of God. So as we close today, would you marvel at that miracle with me?