

Sunday 18th February 2024 - Sunday Service

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2024

Preacher: John Ross

[0 : 00] Very good morning to you. My name is John. I'm a member here of the church. It's very nice to see you this morning. If you're not part of the men's WhatsApp group, then please let me know if you'd like to come to breakfast or you'd like your name added to the WhatsApp group.

Breakfast on the 24th here at 8.30 for men. Do keep your Bibles open. It'll be really helpful, I think. You probably know that I come from a Jewish home and I had two Jewish aunts who were fond of telling stories.

And often they were people that they had met or what happened at the bus or on the shops. But the stories were not told to us merely to inform us of what happened.

They were for us as a family to discuss. And at the end of every story, one aunt, I am Jewish so I'm only mimicking myself, one aunt would shrug her shoulders and say, Well, Vel, what do you think? What do you think? What do you think?

And everyone was expected to give an opinion. If you said nothing, well, what do you think?

Anyone else? She would press you to say something worthwhile.

[1 : 14] Well, in a sense, that's what we've got in the book of Acts. We've got a miracle. So what? Let's put a... We have a miracle.

What does that mean? So what? What do you think? About the miracle. Well, just as we had the wind and fire and tongues in Acts 2, followed by Peter's explanation, that's what we've got here. A miracle followed by Peter's explanation. And just as the explanation in chapter 2 took us squarely to Jesus, the same is true here as well.

It's rather like one of the healing stories in the Gospels. When Jesus healed a man with a disability, he does it just with a word. And then he sometimes talks about it and explains it.

When he heals a man who's paralysed and they lower him through the roof, Jesus then discusses it with them. Here in verse 2 is a man who is lame from birth.

[2 : 21] And such was his impairment that he needed to be carried daily to the temple gate. Now please notice how Luke is drawing our attention to his health condition.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple, verse 1, at the time of prayer, 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.

And his request in verse 3 is not for healing but for money. Do you see that? When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Money. Because he couldn't walk. He couldn't work. Peter and John respond with two instructions. Instruction number one, look at us.

Lift your eyes up and look at us, verse 4. And the man gave them his attention. Again, still expecting to get something from them.

[3 : 29] With no money to give, they instructed the man to walk, verse 6. Peter said, silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Notice it's in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And look what happens at verse 7.

I hope you came to church walking and jumping and praising God as you came in this morning. And when all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful. And they too were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

I want you to notice the instantly there, the instantly, instantly. In our modern medical world, healings take time, usually, don't they?

[4 : 41] Break a leg and it takes some days, some weeks to heal. A friend of mine has just had major surgery on his arm, on an artery in the arm.

And it's taking weeks and weeks and weeks of physio to get his fingers moving again as nerves have been severed. This healing is instant, instant, instant.

Okay, he did help him up, that is true. But it's instant. He jumps to his feet, he begins to walk. And the walking is a big thing. It's mentioned four times.

He's helped up. His feet become strong. He jumps to his feet. He begins to walk. He walked and jumped and praising God. And the people saw him walking and praising God.

He didn't used to walk and now he walks. Now, please notice the reaction. The man praises God, verse 8. He went with him into the temple, walking and jumping and praising God.

[5 : 39] So not only does he walk, he rejoices in God's goodness to him. And the people react in the same way. And the people react in the same way at verse 10, don't they?

They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened. So Peter takes up the opportunity to talk about Jesus. Now, the Pharisees take quite a dim view of this.

And the priests, the temple guards and the Sadducees, we're told in verse 2, were greatly disturbed. And they take it out on Peter and John.

It's rather troublesome. Chapter 4, verse 2, sorry. The priest and captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking.

And they were greatly disturbed because of the apostles. Greatly disturbed. So there is going to be trouble. We haven't got it now, chapter 3. But we will have it next week in chapter 4. Trouble.

[6 : 40] What I think is important to see for us is that all miracles need interpreting. A great miracle has taken place. Instant healing. They're praising God. They're going into the temple.

And Peter stands up and starts to speak. All miracles need interpreting. Whenever God acts, like the miracle of crossing the Red Sea in the Old Testament, there has to be an explanation.

All events have to be explained in the Bible. It's even true at our Lord's Supper or Communion. Why do we have a cup with red wine? And why do we have bread to eat?

They have to be explained, don't they? They're symbols. What do they mean? An explanation is needed. And so when Jesus healed, the miracle always pointed towards him, the healer.

In fact, the miracle was rather like a messianic sign. Isaiah had prophesied that the lame would leap like a deer. The lame would leap like a deer.

[7 : 37] That's what you've got here. Isaiah 35. Here are the apostles continuing to do what Jesus began. You remember that in Acts 1.1? In the former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

And now I'm continuing to tell you more. A miracle plus an explanation. Now, please don't make the mistake of saying this.

Jesus healed. The apostles healed. And therefore, we should heal. We, his followers, should do similar works. No. Jesus started it.

The apostles continued it. So must we. No, no, no, no. Be careful. No, we're not miracle workers. We are explainers. The miracles that Jesus and the apostles perform authenticate Jesus as the Messiah.

Miracles do not explain themselves. There must be clear words as to what it's all about. And that's what Peter does here, as he did in the previous chapter. One writer says that the sign of this miracle is the manufacturer's guarantee or warranty confirming the veracity of the message.

[8 : 53] The beggar wanted money. The apostles heal. The people are amazed. So Peter explains. Let's look at the explanation. We saw the reaction.

Amazed. Let's look at the explanation. What is it all about? Well, there are a number of elements to it. I think the first one is that of fulfillment, you notice. While the man, verse 11, held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

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 your fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. And from then on, he's talking about Jesus. But it's fulfillment, isn't it?

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He starts there, back in the Old Testament. Everything has come to a head fulfilled in Jesus. You see, this is a work not of humans.

[10:06] This is a work of God. Which God? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the remarkable thing is that he moves straight from there to Jesus. That's the remarkable feature.

He says nothing about himself. Although he did say, look at us. But he says no more about himself. In fact, the second half of verse 12, he deflects about himself. Why do you stare at us?

As if by our own power and godliness we made the man walk. No, this is a work of God. This is a work fulfilled in Jesus, he's saying to them. He shows that God is behind this in uplifting Jesus.

And I think that's a great lesson to learn for us. The Bible always takes us to Jesus. And we should take people to Jesus. The Bible deflects away from us and moves the spotlight to Jesus.

We should do the same. It's fulfillment. It's also a contrast, I think, you see. There's a contrast here now coming up between what the people did and what God did.

[11:10] Look at 13. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed. And you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that the murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life. But God raised him from the dead.

See? You did this. You did that. You did the other. You killed him. But God raised him from the dead. God glorified Jesus, whereas the people handed him over to be killed.

The people disowned him. They killed the author of life. But God raised him from the dead. Now, think about this in our own conversations.

Shouldn't we make much more of the Lord Jesus, sorry, shouldn't I make much more of the Lord Jesus the way God fulfills his purposes in Jesus through his Son? Am I not far too human-centred, psychologically-centred, focused on myself and the troubles of this world?

[12:24] So I get caught up in all that's going on and the psychology of it, rather than calling my friend to look more closely at Jesus. There's a contrast.

Look what you've done. But God raised him up. Look at Jesus. There's another little lesson to learn, I think, of explanation. And that's the fact that this is all true.

And you get that at the end of 15, with the little phrase, we are witnesses of this. Did you notice that? You killed him, God raised him, and we are witnesses. We are witnesses. That means it's true.

That means we were there. We saw it with our own eyes. You see, in the Old Testament law, collaborative testament, it was crucial. We still have it today.

You want more than one person to say what they saw. Give the evidence. First-hand witness was crucial in the early church and in Judaism.

[13:22] We're witnesses. We saw it. In other words, it's true. It's true. It's true. Everything comes to a head in the man Jesus. It's by faith in this man Jesus that the beggar was healed. And look how he repeats faith.

Did you notice that? God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. Verse 16. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

We're telling you the truth. This is what really happened. And then this gives Peter a chance to enlarge on Jesus the Messiah.

He says, yes, he would suffer and he would die. Verses 17 and 18. Now, fellow Israelites, notice the identification with the Jews of the day.

I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders, but this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets. There's the connection with the Old Testament again. Saying that this Messiah would suffer.

[14:28] Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah who has been appointed for you, even Jesus.

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through the holy prophets. For Moses said, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.

You must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people. See how Peter enlarges on Jesus now.

Yes, God has done a work, but you've done a wicked work, a very wicked work. You made him suffer and die. Yes, it's true you acted in ignorance, that is true, but that's no excuse in law, is it? So therefore you need to turn away. That was disgusting. Turn away. Repent. He says. First of all, your sins need to be wiped out.

[15 : 26] That's very true, isn't it? Did you notice that phrase that came there? Repent and turn to God so that your sins will be wiped out, 19. Sins wiped out. Wiped out. And then that allows God to restore all things.

I find the difficulty with that phrase, the times of refreshment come. Are they times of refreshment now? Do you feel better?

Is there a peace in your heart because you've repented? It could be. Or is it the fact that God is now going to work in this world through you and times of refreshing will come in the future? But good things will come because of your repentance.

Good things will come because of it. And you must listen to Jesus. That's the point. You must listen to him. God will restore all things. And the key, the key person is Jesus.

All the way it's Jesus. You must listen to him. You must. He presses at home, doesn't he? So you saw the emphasis, didn't you, in Old Testament history. Abraham was quoted along with the other greats, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

[16 : 32] Moses is quoted. And he's going to go on with Samuel and all the prophets at 24. These are all your prophets, he says. Peter sent his Messiah, Jesus, to bless you.

But it requires you doing what the prophets called you to do, which is to turn from your wicked ways. Now, you notice how Peter knows his audience. Fellow Israelites, he called them. I know you acted in ignorance.

He's on their side. His aim is to lead them from the Old Testament all the way through to get to Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, verse 24, beginning with Samuel and all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days.

And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, through your offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you.

You're the first to hear, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways. Repentance.

Well now, as you read the passage, you hear Peter's explanation.

[17 : 41] What do you take away from it? What are your takeaways, as it were? What will you go home, ringing in your ear? Let me suggest one or two.

Will you say to yourself, in my conversations, I've got to get to Jesus better than I do. That's one of my takeaways. It's not the only one, but it's one. I must get to Jesus. I must. It was a Billy Graham lesson I heard years ago when he was being interviewed years and years ago.

I think he was being interviewed by Michael Parkinson. And he was brilliant. He never finished everything he wanted to say. He stopped halfway. So, Parkinson said something like, so Billy, you're a great preacher.

Yes, he said, but I haven't always been. He stopped. And Parkinson had to say, so what were you before? And he told me a bit more. And he stopped. And as the conversation went on, you realise that Billy Graham had taken over the control of the conversation.

Because he knew he wanted to get to Jesus. He didn't want to blast everything out in one go. He stopped. He stopped. He stopped. And he forced Parkinson, who hates talking about religion, to ask him all the religious questions.

[18 : 51] It was brilliant. He knew how to get to Jesus. And he once wrote, you take the shortest route, the straightest path to Jesus Christ. Get to talk about Jesus.

That's crucial, surely. Understand where people are. Yes, fellow Israelites. I know you acted in ignorance. Understand where they are, but take them to Jesus should be uppermost in our minds and prayers.

That's, in fact, what we're going to think about on Saturday for a few minutes at the men's breakfast as we pray together. We're going to think, how do we help our friends come to Jesus? So I think get to Jesus is a big takeaway for me from this passage.

I think the other takeaway is to repent. It's probably the biggest in the passage. This is a biggie.

Since God has acted in raising Jesus from the dead, because of our human wickedness, we should repent.

They should repent and we should repent. See, our wickedness contributed to his death. Isn't this the great call of the gospel?

[19 : 55] And it's probably one of the hardest things to say to somebody. You've got to turn away from your sins. You've got to turn to Jesus. You must. You must. You'll never be free of the past if you don't turn away from it and turn to Jesus Christ.

Never. In fact, I was thinking about this. You know, every Sunday when I walk away from church, you walk away from church, I think two big things should go on in our minds as we're walking away. We should say to ourselves, I've realised afresh this morning the depth of my rebellion against God. It's just driven home to me what a rebel I am.

The disgusting nature of my sin. But secondly, I marvel, I absolutely marvel at the grace, forgiveness, beauty, love of the Lord Jesus.

Shouldn't those two things be in our mind as we go? The depth of my own terrible nature and the glorious, glorious joy and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 02] Or perhaps I could put it to you like this, those two points again just slightly differently. In Peter's explanation, he is saying that God has acted. You see, in the passage here, you see the uniqueness of Christianity.

The uniqueness of Christianity is that God has acted and therefore we should respond in the right way. But all the religious systems in the world start with us, how we should respond, how we should act towards God.

We must do something first. I must go to the temple. I must light my candle. I must bring my sacrifice. I must do something.

In Christianity, the opposite is the case. God has to do something first before I respond. God must act first. And he has acted on my behalf in Jesus. So I should respond appropriately.

I am in his debt because he's acted. Whereas to be religious and to keep offering God some excuse, I'll try a bit harder, promise, promise, promise, I'll do better next time, sorry I messed up.

[22 : 11] It's really just an expression of my sinful nature, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. It's an insult to carry on saying that to a God who's already done something about it.

Before we even came on the scene, he acted. It shows that we think we know better than God, doesn't it? We think too highly of ourselves. I've got something to offer. Religion, one writer says, is too optimistic because it calls on people to do what they are incapable of doing.

I found that very helpful. Religion is too optimistic because it calls on people to do what they're incapable of doing. See, true biblical Christianity starts with what God has done.

We announce the creator of the world has raised Jesus from the dead. Men crucified him, we crucified him, God raised him. And that momentous news, including his remarkable suffering and death and triumphant ascension to God's right hand, is the gospel.

And our response is always the same, to repent, to repent. So God has acted. I must therefore humble myself.

[23 : 30] Don't be hostile. Don't get annoyed with the person who's explaining it to you. Just be humble. Just be humble. Whenever this great news is presented, you see, it always elicits two responses.

There are some people who get very hostile to this. Others warmly, warmly embrace it. Rarely are people indifferent. I think the same is true today.

Tell friends about Jesus, as I did many, many years ago to my own mother, Jewish mother. She was very happy with his kindness. She liked him. She thought he was a great teacher. But she winced and she shuddered when I mentioned his death and resurrection.

Others, when taught about Jesus, you see, especially about his sacrificial death and his love, his remarkable resurrection, they just embrace it and they follow him. Two reactions. There are a few, of course, who just shrug their shoulders and say, so what, so what, so what?

Well, where are you in response to Jesus? Well, if I may quote my aunts again, what do you think about him? Let's pray. Dear Father God, how very good of you to give Peter such a clear understanding of biblical history.

[24 : 54] We can all benefit from the way he takes us to Jesus, our ultimate king. We value these great Bible stories, but please help us today to be participators more than we are onlookers.

Bring us to Jesus, we pray. Help us to become repentant people on the basis that you have acted and call us to respond positively. Humble us and our friends, we pray, under your mighty hand.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.