

First Miracle

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! I'll assume you have, but I do think it's a terrific, exciting book, so I'm excited to kind of take out our next chunk of this book.

I did promise we'd move a little faster after last Sunday, and so we will. Acts chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

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.

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, look at us.

[1 : 1 8] 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 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. 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. Verse 11, While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together into the portico called Solomons.

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?

[2 : 3 4] 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 decided to release him.

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked 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. 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. Verse 17, Peter continues, And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.

[3 : 47] That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Moses said, The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.

Verse 24, And all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and those who come after him also proclaim these days, You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

God, having raised up this servant, sent him to you first to bless you by turning every one of you from your own wickedness.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priest and the captain of the people and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead, and they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

[5 : 16] And but many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number came to about five thousand.

It's the word of God. It's so fascinating to read a big chunk like that of God's word.

You know, the greatest danger to the people of God is not the culture, or the culture's influence, or opposition, or persecution, or suffering.

It's not the person in the White House, or how he or she could affect our life. It's not even our proneness to wander. The greatest danger to the people of God is our tendency to grow familiar with God.

When we grow familiar with something, it immediately changes. You know, that drive to work on the first day is exhilarating. If you ever started a new job, and you're driving into that job, you see all the sights and sounds, right?

[6 : 23] You notice the birds singing. You notice the shade of the old trees. You notice the shining of the sun. But on that 20th trip, you barely notice anything.

You're just trying to wake up and wishing that car in front of you would speed up so you can make it to work, for Pete's sake. That new baby, too, is a delight.

I always love new parents because of their exhilaration over this little creature that just lays and uses the restroom and eats and sleeps.

But every little stretch and yawn and smile and grunt is exquisite. But before long, all those little moments are barely noticed.

And that little delight begins to inconvenience you and frustrate you. Or that old hike through the Smokies. I mean, I love to hike, love to tramp through areas I've been before.

[7 : 26] And sometimes you're just walking down the one that used to dazzle you, and then it seems just like a yawn. Like you'd rather be at home watching the game. But the same thing happens with the Lord.

The Lord and our relationship with Him can begin to seem so common, so ordinary, so familiar. The greatest danger of the people of God is our tendency to grow familiar with God, to fail to see His goodness, to lose our all.

To become professional Christians who know the right things to say and do the right things, yet say and do these things without that all.

All is not a sidebar issue for the Christian life. It's not something we can afford to set aside for someday, maybe. It's our deepest need and losing it, our greatest danger.

This morning, we're going to jump into Acts again. And we see this first miracle, and it's just immediate response. It's just wonder, amazement, utterly astonished.

[8 : 46] And while the miracle is great, Peter points us and points our awe and wonder to Jesus. So where we're going is stop and wonder.

Jesus is doing a new thing. I mean, I think that's what sums it up. Stop and wonder. Jesus is doing a new thing. And so let's dive in right here. Just three points.

I'm going to break this out. The first is the miracle. Pretty straightforward tackling of this text. Our text begins a new section in the book of Acts. You remember last week, they talked about all the people that were gathered together, you know, all the people that were added to their number day by day.

And so that's kind of these summary statements. And our text kind of begins a section before the next summary statement, which is in Acts 6, 8. And, you know, some have said these chapters kind of meander along with little carefulness and comments about unrelated things.

But it seems to me that Luke has gathered this together to show us what Jesus is now doing. Luke begins by describing this first miracle.

[9 : 56] If you look up in Acts 2, 43, he says, yeah, many wonders and signs were being done to the apostles, but now he begins to describe one.

So there's lots of things going on. And Luke brings this to the church and brings this to us to describe one of these miracles so that we can see it. And we look down at verse 1.

Peter and John, they go up to the temple, right? They go up to pray. They come upon this man who's been lame from birth. Luke just tells us that because he did, to emphasize how lame he was, not in the way we often use lame, but lame in the way his body, his legs were unusable.

And so it was very common for a man like that, a lame man, to gather, a man that needed to be dependent upon other people because he couldn't work for himself, to be out at the temple because the temple was a place with lots of activity.

So people are coming in and out and he's waiting there for handouts. You know, much like us, when we see folks asking for a handout, we sometimes don't know how to respond, right?

[11 : 17] A lot of people see a lame man like this and see him in the distance trying to avoid him, walk fast, avoid eye contact, but Peter doesn't do that at all.

And I just love this little scene. Look down there with me in verse three. He says, seeing Peter and John about to go in the temple, the man says, I need some alms. I don't know exactly what he says, but he announces his need.

Verse four, Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, look at us. And he fixed his attention. That's the man, fixed his attention on them expecting to receive this.

I love how vivid that little eye contact is described. But what's going on? Is this some kind of staring contest Peter's trying to have with this guy? No, that's not the deal at all, but the man cries out.

Peter says, look at me. Look at us. I just want to pause for a moment. Gospel men and women look pain in the eye.

[12 : 27] They stop. They make eye contact. They don't say, cheer up. Your sins are forgiven. They help.

They ease the burden. There's so much we could say right here, but we've got to say that. Gospel men and women make eye contact. The lame man looks to Peter for a handout.

That's what's going on. Peter looks, I mean, the man looks at him as if to receive something because he's looking for a handout, but what Peter gives is much better. He says, I have no gold or silver, but what I do give to you but do have, I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Walk. I mean, how great is this? Now, we've read so many miracles reading the Gospels, and so maybe it just kind of comes across as unfazed, but here's this man who's been lame his whole life, and Peter touches him, the man most people avoid.

He takes him by the hand and raises him up. Immediately, his feet and ankles were made strong. Muscles that have never worked begin to fire.

[13 : 39] Muscles that would have atrophied and would have taken months to learn to walk, even if he had the ability, fire immediately. The unused did not prevent Peter from healing this man completely.

He begins to walk. Have you noticed in that reading, four times, Luke tells us, he walked. He walked. He walked.

The lame man walked. The idea is the miracle's immediate and obvious to everybody around. The man walks, leaps, and praises God, enters the temple for the first time.

Yet lame men couldn't enter the temple, so that's why Luke concludes that detail. He enters the temple for the first time. Everyone in the temple sees him and is filled with wonder and amazes.

There he is. There's Joe. Probably not Joe, but some other more Israelite name. They were emotionally riveted and amazed.

[14 : 53] And yet, as Peter quickly notices, their wonder and amazement is at what had happened to him, not at what God has done. Look in verse 11.

10, actually. He concludes, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened. Point to the explanation.

the miracle to the explanation, very simple. the idea is, the miracle is great, but this immediate reaction concerns Peter.

They all run to the temple, to the courtyard. They're utterly astonished, but Peter doesn't want them to get the wrong idea. Look down there in verse 11. It says, they all gathered together at the portico called Solomon's, and when Peter saw it, when he saw the gathering, when he saw that they were amazed at this healing, Peter addressed the people.

He said, men of Israel, why do you wonder at this? Why do you stare at us as though by our own power and piety we have made him walk? And then Peter begins to preach his second sermon in this book, and kind of the core of what Peter's trying to say are two points.

[16 : 10] Jesus has come, and Jesus is gathering a new people. Immediately what Peter says, and a lot of what he said at Pentecost, he just says, you killed him, God raised him, and we saw him.

I mean, you see that when he breaks it out. He says, you killed him. That's what he proclaimed to these people. Maybe it wasn't literally them, but because they were part of the Jewish people, they were guilty more than by association.

They were guilty as a people. You delivered him over, Peter said. You denied him. Again, he says, you denied him. You chose a murderer instead. You chose Barabbas.

We know that from our gospels. You killed him. But he keeps going. He says, God raised him. Look at verse 26.

The conclusion of the sermon, he says, God having raised up his servant. Look down, or look up there into verse 13. He says, God glorified his servant, Jesus.

[17 : 23] Now, in the back of Peter's mind as he's proclaiming the gospel, in this setting is Isaiah 53, because this one would be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

He was the Christ who would suffer. Acts 18. But suffering, Peter tells us, is not the final word about Jesus.

God glorified him. Even as our Lord said, even as I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself. He means not just the cross, but the exaltation of Jesus Christ over all things.

And so, he says, we saw him. I've reiterated this several times, but we saw him with our own eyes. That's the core of his message.

Now, if they were listening, they're probably like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I heard about this guy. What's that got to do with me? Probably much like you might be thinking and saying in your heart.

[18 : 31] But Peter continues to preach. He says, Jesus is gathering a new, completely forgiven people of God right now.

The miracle and these verses point to the new thing Jesus is doing. I think that's why Luke has it clustered in the way he does. Miracles are signs. They point beyond themselves.

That's what Peter's concerned about. They saw the miracle, but did they see it as a sign? In the early 2000s, Hollywood released the movie Signs.

And all the parents are old enough to remember that movie. It tells the story of a former priest played by Mel Gibson who lives on a farm in the middle of nowhere. And crop circles begin to appear in his farm.

And he's like, what's going on? At first they say, well, it's vandals coming in and taking out your corn and making these crop circles. But then these crop circles begin to appear all over the world.

[19 : 44] And then lights begin to appear in the sky. These signs pointing to an unknown world.

And one of the final scenes, one gripping scene, Mel Gibson, the priest, is sitting on a couch with his brother trying to help him understand the signs.

He says, people break down into two groups when they experience something lucky. Group number one sees it as more than luck, more than coincidence.

They see it as a sign. Evidence that there is someone someone up there watching out for them. Group number two sees it as pure luck, as a happy turn of chance.

I'm sure the people in group number two are looking at those signs, at those lights in a very suspicious way. Deep down, they feel that whatever happens, they're on their own.

[20 : 46] And that fills them with fear. fear. But there's a whole lot of people in group one. When they see those lights, they're looking at a miracle.

And deep down, they feel that whatever's going to happen, there'll be someone there to help them. And that fills them with hope. He says, see, what you have to ask yourself is, what kind of person are you?

Are you the kind that sees signs and miracles? Are you the kind that just thinks people get lucky? Luke's telling us that this miracle is a sign.

Luke includes it to show us what Jesus is doing. And I think that's where his sermon jumps off. He says, Jesus is right now performing signs and wonders from heaven.

You know, after this lame man is healed, the first thing Peter says about him is, I didn't do it. It wasn't me. Look in verse 16. He says, his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, who you see and know.

[22 : 07] The faith that is through Jesus has given this man, the man, this perfect help in the presence of you all. Jesus' name is not a magical word or a special formula that Peter has to utter.

Jesus' name announces his rule over all and his ability to reach in and heal right now. I love this. He raised him up. Remember, Peter reached out his hand and raised him up.

Every other reference to raise him up, which we pointed out as we've gone through Acts, is pointed to God raising up Christ. Well, here, Jesus Christ raises up another. That's what's going on.

So the apostles in Acts 4 say, stretch out your hand, Jesus, to heal. The hand was Peter, but Jesus raised him up.

He's saying, don't be in awe at the power of any man. Be in awe at Jesus Christ. He continues, Jesus is granting forgiveness from heaven.

[23 : 08] I feel like we can read these words. I just don't want us to grow familiar with him. He says, repent therefore in verse 19 and turn back that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Now, we don't talk about blotting, but the idea is that the image is of removing ink from a papyrus. So they would have written on vellum and on papyruses in those days and when you would write on a papyrus, the ink wouldn't sink in like it does on paper.

So you wouldn't use whiteout. The idea is you would wet a cloth and you would blot out that ink. You would remove it from the surface of the papyrus erasing that ink.

I love that picture. Peter's saying, Jesus is in the heavens. He's erasing sins. He's blotting them out.

Jesus is moving up the judgment day for whoever would come to Him. Only the Lord blots out transgressions. Isaiah 43 tells us, but Jesus is the Lord and blots them out now.

[24 : 27] Now. now. So that whoever would come to Him might have sins blotted out once and for all.

You can never be more forgiven than the moment you're saved. And that's what's incredible. It's amazing. He's saying, all in wonder at this.

Yes, this lame man is healed, but be in wonder and amazement that the reason Jesus healed him so that he might give him life and might blot out his transgressions.

I mean, I think the Lord would remind us don't rejoice that the demons submit to you or anything else that might lead you to think that you matter now. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven.

What he's saying is forgiveness of sins is to be the stream from which all our joy flows. One author says about heaven, he says, heaven does not get over the cross.

[25 : 43] As if there's something better to sing about, heaven is not only Christ-centered but cross-centered and quite blaring about it. that's why we sing what we do, that's why we sing all I have is Christ with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength is because Jesus Christ blots out transgressions.

That's what Jesus says. You may tell him to rise up and walk, fine I'll tell him that. Or I'll tell him forgiven. There's a whole lot of people that sell false truths but Jesus Christ is the righteous one.

He is the one before whom all of us will bow, the only throne we must answer and he blots out transgressions to whoever would hide in him. And that's what he's doing.

Jesus did not ascend to the Father to leave the church on its own but to commission his apostles out in his name because in the name of Jesus there's no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

And Jesus is gathering a new people. He continues to preach. You know this whole section is a little bit confusing and I know I've been saying several things like this but you know why are the apostles still going to the temple?

[27 : 02] Why are they praying there? Are they offering sacrifice? I mean what's going on? You're supposed to be following Jesus. I think the whole section revolves around the temple is carefully organized around the temple to show the first century readers and us that Jesus is gathering a new temple.

He's gathering a living temple. He's gathering a church. He's gathering a people for himself and so Jesus continues to preach and this is where I need to move quickly. He says Jesus is the prophet like Moses.

Verse 22 he says this promise from Deuteronomy 18 he says the Lord will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers is what Moses said and Peter's saying that prophet is Jesus.

All who listen to him and follow him will be a part of the new people of God. Jesus says that Jesus is the promised son of Abraham. Now we all know about the promise of Abraham for land and blessing and a nation but Jesus is saying in this son of Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

The miracle and these verses are pointing to the new thing Jesus is doing. If you go to London you can travel to the Buckingham Palace where the queen resides.

[28 : 32] I know we broke away from this country but you know you can still go and this palace is spectacular surrounded with 10 to 12 foot gates of iron and inside are a number of red coats a number of British soldiers guarding the palace.

And if you go to London like many others you'll probably go at 11 a.m. for the elaborate ceremony called the changing of the guard.

in a way that only England can do they change out the guard. The old guard comes and they kind of signal each other and I'm not going to describe it because you'll reveal how much I don't remember about it and they transfer the protection of the queen to this new guard and then that new guard comes in and gets positioned.

I guess similar to what's going on in this passage. Jesus is doing a new thing. The old guard is being relieved. The temple, the sacrifices, the priests, the law are being relieved.

They are now seen for what they are, temporary servants. The new guard is in place. In need, the new king is in place and Jesus is gathering a new people.

[29 : 53] He's going out with the old and in with the new. And all of it's meant to fill us with wonder. the idea is that our lives are about something bigger than ourselves, bigger than careers and success and families and health.

Our lives are meant to be and are all about Jesus and what he's doing in the world. And we gather to celebrate it.

We gather to announce it. We gather to announce news of a far country that the king has come and there's mercy in his hand and we gather to push back against the darkness until he comes.

Stop and wonder what Jesus is doing. Point three, the response. The response.

If you understand what Jesus said and did, you either love him or hate him. in the Bible belt, we're famous for trying to find a middle ground.

[31 : 01] But you either run to him and collapse in his arms or you run away from him. And that's what immediately happens in this passage. Some run from him.

Some oppose him and oppose his disciples. Look down in verse four, or chapter four, verse one. And he says he was speaking. They were speaking to the people, the priest and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them.

Those are the men in charge, the big dogs, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead and they arrested them.

The old guard can't let go. They never can. And the opposition, as we will soon see, only increases against Peter and John.

But others run to him in repentance and faith. Remember, Peter tells them that the lame man was saved by faith in his name. Then he commands all those who are here to repent.

[32 : 05] The idea is that faith and repentance are two sides of this same coin. They open the door of salvation. Faith holds out empty hands and says, there's nothing I can do to earn salvation.

There's nothing I can do to deserve it. And repentance says, Lord, in turning to you, I will turn from everything else. And Peter preaches, and many turn.

I just love this little summary statement. Chapter 4, verse 4, and many of those who heard the word believed. believed. It's almost like that should be in technicolor or something like that.

They believed. And the number of the men came to about 5,000. It's amazing. Jesus is gathering a new people.

We should stop and wonder. But in conclusion, I just want to say, you know, the call to faith and repentance is not a one-time call.

[33 : 14] It's the way to life and the way of life. Life. Martin Luther once said, faith is a busy little thing.

And I think that captures it so well. You know, it's little, right? Jesus said, it can be as small as a mustard seed, the smallest known seed, and yet when it gets busy, it makes all the difference.

And I think this sermon and this morning is an exhortation to us to walk by faith. Martin Lloyd-Jones has a brilliant quote about faith.

Look with me on the screen. He says, faith is not a mere matter of feeling. It cannot be because one's feelings can be very changeable.

That's the first thing. Second thing is still more important. Faith is not something that acts automatically. Faith is not something that acts magically.

[34 : 19] faith is something you and I have to bring into operation. So he concludes, faith is the refusal to panic.

I just love that. Faith is the refusal to panic. What you see is not the full picture. So faith is the refusal to panic. Faith is unbelief kept quiet, kept down.

And faith reminds itself of what the scripture calls the exceedingly great and precious promises. Faith says, I cannot believe that he who brought me so far is going to let me down at this point.

It's impossible. It would be inconsistent with the character of God. So faith, having refused to be controlled by circumstances, reminds itself of what it believes and what it knows.

Faith walks not by sight. Faith is not a matter of feeling. Faith refuses to judge the invisible in light of the visible, but judges the visible in light of the invisible.

[35 : 31] The fig tree may not be in blossom. Fruit may not be on the vine. Promises may not be seen.

Hopes may still be deferred. The sad feelings may still be oppressive and overwhelming. The marriage may be hard.

The job may be biting back and so disappointing. The pain may still be there nagging away. The friends may still hurt.

I dare say there's nothing we need more than faith. We must fight. Must turn away from our feelings. We must stop listening. Must refuse to buckle.

That's the only way we will be a people that isn't caught up trying to keep up with the Joneses or chasing the bright lights and it'll be the only way we'll be a people that's filled with wonder.

[36 : 32] The only way we're a people that doesn't move on. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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