

The Miracle Acts 3

Luke 9:1-26

Romans 8:1-11

Responsive Psalm 137: 1-7

This morning we are going to start out in Acts chapter 3, Before we look at our text this morning I just want to take a few minutes to remind ourselves a bit about the Author and his purpose of writing this book. As we know it is widely believed that it was Luke who wrote this book and it is likely more or less a part 2 of Luke's gospel account both written to Theophilus. I bring this all back up because in the end of chapter verse 47 it says, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." I was talking to Josh a few weeks ago and he pointed out this trend to me that throughout the book of Acts is that phrase, or a variation of it.. that the church was growing, and the gospel message was being heard.

I have been thinking about this for a while, and I think one of the great significance of this is it is showing the power of the Holy Spirit and its ministry through these Apostles, and followers of Jesus. As was mentioned before, this even of Pentecost here in the 2nd chapter was only a few months after the ascension of Christ. Since Christ appeared to his followers only 3 days after his death, and he spent about 40 days with them, teaching them and preparing them for the upcoming ministry they were not doubtful in the accomplishment of God's plan. AT first we see right after the crucifixion they all went into hiding afraid that they would be gathered up and likely killed next, having everything that they believed and their hopes destroyed, that Jesus had come to restore Israel. Despite him talking plainly to them in the last days before he was taken, they still did not understand nor see...and neither could they for they had yet to receive the Holy Spirit. That being said though, all others who would have been familiar with Jesus and his teaching, for he was no stranger to Jerusalem, and his teaching threatened the Religious leaders authority over the people which is why they sought to have him killed.

So I am sure in the minds of the wider society, and of the religious leaders it would have seemed that those who were the followers of this Jesus, would have scattered and hid. Effectively by taking Jesus, the leader of this "new faith" :that threatened their power and authority over the people of Israel they likely believed that since this one died, who both claimed, and was claimed by his followers to be the Messiah then they were no longer a threat. I think one of Luke's motivations for writing this book and laying out an account of those early days is to show that God's plan of salvation was not thwarted, the work that God set out to do was not stopped...but rather all that which happened, the betrayal, the violence, and the awful death of Jesus on the cross which would seem to have been defeat.. was actually victory and the culmination of everything. The book of Acts stands to show the people of that time, and of the early church that it was indeed the opposite of the perception. The very thing that was intended to destroy and scatter the followers of Jesus, was the event to bring about the spreading of the gospel and growth to the faith.

Jesus promised his disciples that after he left, the spirit of power would come upon them, and if we were to look at compare those who believed and followed God verses those who came to God after the spirit, there is really a stark difference. Even when Jesus was walking on this earth, going about teaching and preaching he would have massive multitudes following him, hundreds if not thousands hearing his preaching and seeing the miracles...yet we only have record of a small amount truly believing..and then we read the account of the crucifixion and we see these same multitudes had changed, and they were now shouting for his death.

But when the spirit had come, it was different, for the spirit ministers to the heart, and through the Spirit the heart is changed being able to see the kingdom of God, being able to truly believe. There is a stark difference from the time before, and the time after God sending the Holy Spirit. I think it is important as we are reading through this book of Acts to remember that these accounts which really are accounts of the Spirit's work in the hearts and minds of these people, is the same spirit that works today. He is no less powerful, he is no less effective, now, then he was then. I think of the ministry of the gospel we see most today, it is one that appeals to mans will, mans choice, and it doesn't seem to leave any room for the spirit's work, how is this any different then Jesus ministry before the spirit? If people heard directly from the mouth of Jesus, if they saw with their own eyes the miracles, the healing, and even raising people from the dead and still yet did not believe....how can we think today that we can just decide by the strength of our own understanding to believe, if those who saw Christ himself did not believe.

Without this spirit's ministry, there is no no new birth. We do not just one day decide to follow Jesus and because of that decision get awarded the gift of the spirit's indwelling. No, the spirit is working upon the heart and soul of an individual before, he is already there making a way for understanding, working in the heart conviction and repentance so that the word of God will take root in a fertile heart which is yearning and crying out for deliverance. As the Author of Hebrews wrote in chapter 11 about this very thing, the last 2 verses he says, "And all these faithful who have gone before having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise. God having provided something better for us, that the should not be made perfect apart from us."

Let me ask, do you believe that? Think of that for a minute. We have this record in scripture of all of these men and women throughout the old testament, who God dealt with directly, who believed in his promises, these champions of faith....yet it is we who have received the promise, it is we who have now seen the messiah, it is we who have received his spirit, it is we who have been as Paul writes, given the mind of Christ. Is there anything better then that? Seriously, we have God himself, ministering to us directly...not through some shadowy prophesy, not through some priestly temple worship, not through some righteous law written on stone tablets, but in each of us, personally. Now having direct access to God....both Jews, and gentiles, both Slave and Free, all are equal in the site of God, for he truly has provided something better for us, he has given us his spirit, he has changed our hearts, we have been born again, we not only believe in the Sovereign God, but by the death of his Son have been justified, and declared righteous, and have been given not only faith, but also a desire for him.

With all that being said, I want to read some of our text this morning, which is Acts chapter 3, verse 1-11 I think often times there is a tendency to look at accounts such as this, and marvel at their miraculous nature. And of course the truly are miraculous, they are super natural occurrences brought on by God for the ministry of his word. Such miracles never happen merely for the sake of the individual, of course there is always that element but there is also a larger element of the gospel ministry. Throughout scripture every single account of a miraculous healing is always met with abject and total praise for God, there never is a doubt in the mind in the individual that they have been healed by the mercy and grace of God, and even when Jesus tells them to keep it to themselves, the first thing they always do is go and share what had happened with everyone. And how could you not? Look at this account of this lame man, who had been lame since birth spending his life at the temple gates begging for money so that he may live.

And it says, when he was healed, “leaping up, and walked and entered the temple with Peter and John, walking, leaping, and praising God.” There is a larger redemptive story and purpose here outside of the miraculous healing of this one individual. This was a very public miracle, done to a man who would have been known by probably everyone who visited the temple. And as we will see in the following verses was used for the very purpose of spreading the gospel to all those who witnessed it.

Continuing on verse 12, (read to verse end of chapter.) This is the problem of what we see today as so called miracles....they lack this element of the gospel ministry and are focused on the supposed healing, or signs of the holy spirit. There really is no glorification of Christ in them, but rather the focus is put upon the one who has preformed the miracle. When was the last time you heard a faith healer standing before a crowd say, “Why do you marvel at this, and look at me so intently, as though it was by my own power I did this.” Sure, they will say it has been done by the power of God...but they focus on the power of God working through, them. It is very different from what we see here in scripture, there is always a redemptive, Christ centered, gospel purpose to these miracles.

And verse 16 says, that it was the faith of this lame man in Christ that has healed him. It was not Peter, it was God through his faith. Everyone wants to get so caught up in the miraculous, always looking for a sign, or a message from God. But I tell you this morning that this very same power that caused this man here in the book of Acts to leap up, to walk, and to jump and praise God is the very same power of the Holy Spirit which brought you to believe. The fact that you believe in God this morning, the fact that you desire him and seek to please him is no less of a miracle then this man walking. It is no less miraculous, it is no less supernatural then any miracle we read about in scripture. For God takes one who is dead, and resurrects life into them so that they may again be in fellowship with him. If you are one who has been born again into a new life with Christ then a greater miracle has been given to you then all of these.

We read it this morning, Jesus' words recorded in Luke, he said, “IF anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and is himself destroyed or lost.?” So really, what is more important in this account of the healing of the lame man outside of the temple? That he can walk again? Or that he praises God and believes? What good is walking if when you die you are pitched into hell? What good is seeing if when you die you are pitched into hell? What good is success, riches, glory, and the praise of our peers...if when you die, you are pitched into hell. None of this matter, none of it in comparison to the precious gift given in the new birth.

As we all know, God's focus is on the heart, it is on the root, it is not merely outward, and it is the same with these miracles we read about, and it is the same with the new birth. Even in the healing of this lame man, it is his faith that is the key point, it is Christ who was crucified which is the point. All else is secondary, all else is nothing more then an instrument used to deliver this message of salvation and hope. Imagine, if you will...Christ in his ministry as he goes about healing the sick, and the blind, casting out demons and all he ever did was these physical things without the concern for the spiritual, without a mission to reach what really matters. IF the miracle only healed the ailment, and that individual didn't believe, didn't have faith....what good would it have done, to heal the body to let the soul go to hell? Yet, This is exactly what we see today that passes itself off as miraculous works of the spirit, this is what we see today in any supposed healing ceremonies, or miraculous works of the spirit.

But little to no credit is given to the Spirit, for the greatest of these miracles and gifts which is the new birth. To take that which is dead and make it alive again, to take those who hate God, and make them to love him, to take those who are only seeking to fulfill their own good pleasure and will, for them to turn and now desire to please God and seek his will. This my friends, is a miracle, a supernatural work done in the hearts of God's children through the holy spirit. It isn't loud, it isn't flashy, but it is powerful! And that is the thread that is running through this entire book of Acts, the ministry of the spirit in the hearts of those who are hearing the gospel. The miracle of the new birth, of a new life in Christ. As we read in Roman's this morning, this same spirit which raised Christ from the dead dwells in us, the same power which brought him back from the dead has brought your soul from death to life in him. Honestly, Can we even fathom that power? Can we even truly comprehend such mercy? Everything in scripture, from the beginning to the end points to Christ, everything which came before prophesied and foretold of the Messiah to come, the one who would suffer and die to bring life to those deserving of death, and everything that came after Christ's ministry on earth points to his death which brings righteousness to the unrighteous.

All of this, all of it....was to bring you to him. As Jeremiah wrote, “ Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying; Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations....just as God knew Jeremiah, he knew you. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as HE chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise and glory of His grace, by which he made us accepted in the Beloved.” Before the world was he knew you, he loved you, he chose you. And by the ministry and power of the holy spirit, resurrected you into a new life, to be accepted in the Beloved, to be one in the family of God.

Do you not see how precious this faith is? How miraculous this faith is? I hope that this is a great encouragement, and comfort to you, to know that the very God of this universe as chosen you, has loved you before you were even born, before the world was. This is the great miracle, the great power of the spirit, that we would be awoken to our sin and rebellion, turn and repent and believe. This is the point of Acts, to show that though Christ has returned to heaven, his ministry still prevails, and that he is still victorious over death, in the Resurrection of the dead souls into life. And none of that has changed, the ministry and the power of the spirit is no less today as it was then, it is no less effective as it was then, the word of God still has the power to save souls from everlasting damnation. Yes, God used miraculous signs to teach miraculous truths, he caused the lame to walk, and the blind to see, he brought the dead to life, and gave health to the sick....and he is still doing that today. For every soul who denies him, is lame and unable to walk upright, their paths are crooked as scripture says, turning this way and that stumbling in groping in the darkness, unable to see for their sin has made them blind to the kingdom of God.

Before Christ's intervention, before the holy spirit's conviction, before the new birth we were all dead, our souls being sick unto death, always seeking to please ourselves, pursuing our own glory, our own desires choosing sin, and death for it is what we loved. Yet behind every pleasure we chased after was found only more darkness, Just as the fabled Siren song talked about by sailors at sea, which would appear to be beautiful, and desirable but it would only lead to troubles, if pursued the sailors would crash upon the rocks and be killed.

Such is a life in sin, the desires of the flesh are a siren song, drawing us toward a promise of pleasure, a promise of some fleeting hope, but the reality is it is leading us to death, and destruction. This is every single one of us without God, this is our fate without the miracle of the new birth, we are dead, chasing the very thing that is set to devour us. But it doesn't have to be that way, Christ has broken that curse, he has come and revealed the dangers behind the Siren song of sin, by his power he has made us to see it, by his power he has enabled us who were choosing death, to instead chose life. And he has made it simple, he says all that we must do to escape this death, to be free from the curse of this Siren's song, is to repent of our sins and believe. And if that isn't simple enough, it is he who also works in us to do so! So that all of those whom are his will come to him and he will not lose one to those rocks of destruction.

That is the call of this book of acts, that is the call of all of scripture, that is the gospel which brings life to a dead soul. Turn, repent, and believe, for the path you are on now leads to destruction, but the gift of God brings eternal life. May God be pleased to call those who hear his word today, may God send the spirit upon the lost, the blind, and the dead to bring a new life that is only found in him. May he work a miracle today, healing the blind who can not see him, raising the dead who do not believe in him, causing the lame to leap up, and out of a new found joy dance and praise his name. God is still working miracles, but they are in the soul, they are of the spirit...which is the greatest miracle that all these others point to. Praise be to God for his sovereign hand, for his merciful grace and love that he would send his spirit upon those who are dead to bring them life, and hope. Let us who are his not forget this, let us not take this new birth for granted, let us see it for what it truly is, a supernatural miracle done to us which is greater than all of these miracles we see here, for those miracles healed the body, but the miracle of the new birth in Christ Jesus heals the soul.

Communion

Read account of Christ's crucifixion. Psalm 22
Warn of partaking unworthily 1 Corinthians 11:27-32
Pass out ordinances, then read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
hymn #118 When I survey the wondrous cross