

Series: You Are Sent Vol 1

Sermon #5: The Miracles and the Message in the movement

Text: Acts 3.1-26; 4.1-4

When you came in today you likely found a card on your seat that says “I am ready to be baptized.” I’m going to explain that in a few minutes so hang on to it.

Introduction

A few years ago a good friend of mine went on a short term mission trip to another country. Now this was like a good close friend I trusted and was leading a bible study with. And he came back and told me that he and a couple of others experienced a miracle. They prayed over a blind person and asked God to give this person sight and then...the blind person was able to see. And he was pretty hype about it. And again...this was a trusted friend. And when he told me that story...my first reaction...was doubt. He was my good friend who wasn’t prone to lying and yet...I thought he must have misunderstood what happened. I smiled at him, but internally in the space of 3 seconds I concocted a pretty robust way to explain away what my friend called “a miracle.” I told myself He was unaware that she had been on anti-biotics for an infection and it just so happened it was time for her to regain eyesight and the adrenaline from the hope of his prayer sped up the effects of the medicine and she was all better. Now I didn’t tell him this of course. I kept good engaged eye contact, I nodded at the right times, and inserted “wow” at all the right times.

AND THEN...a couple of years ago I went with a team of Mercy folks to Cuba. (Just like Spero) And in the span of about 3 days we saw 750 people profess faith in Jesus Christ for the first time. That many people in that short of time almost all through one-on-one conversations...It was a work of God. a miracle. And we came back and told everybody. And ya’ll all kept good eye contact, nodded, and said wow. And I thought. Oh my goodness. Ya’ll don’t believe me. Then I thought oh, I know how you feel.

Today we are looking at the first miracle that is done by the early church and it is a healing miracle. If you are newer here at Mercy, we are in a series of sermons walking through the book of Acts. Where we see the church as a movement of people sent by God into the world with his power and his message of redemption. And miracles are a big part of the book of Acts.

The idea that miracles really do happen...Not LUCKY breaks, not incredible odds events...but a divine agent we claim is GOD with both the power and the purpose intervening to change a circumstance...that idea is uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable to **SOME** westerners who aren’t Christians because as children of the scientific method we’ve been told there is a physical explanation for all things if we just look hard & long enough. And over the course of history we’ve seen the term miracle applied to gaps in scientific knowledge. Something happened, we don’t know how...miracle. But then we discover how it happened and so claiming divine intervention gets discredited as intellectual laziness. Maybe you are coming in with that mindset. You are skeptical of the

“God card” because you’ve seen it misplayed so many times. I’m glad you are here. I’m glad you are willing to step into a church and consider the message of Christianity even after you’ve been frustrated by things like that. And I hope you’ll encounter something a little different today.

I’ll go ahead and say you aren’t alone. Miracles are something **some** western **Christians** are even skeptical of as well. Though we claim to believe in an all-powerful God, we claim to believe it is HE who pierces our hearts to illuminate our need for him and it is his work on the cross that permanently altered our eternity, the idea that he empowers signs and wonders today...many of us still doubt. I want to go on record saying this is something the Lord is working in me. It is in many way still wet cement that is being formed as we go through this book of Acts together.

So I’m excited for us to spend our morning in chapter 3 of the book of Acts because we get to see the first miracle and then right after it our dear friend the Apostle Peter preaches a message about the miracle. One commentator said IF you can understand what is happening in. this miracle, you can understand all the rest of them in Acts.

I want to give you the main idea of the sermon right out front: **Miracles display the power of Jesus for the purpose of verifying the gospel of Jesus.**

Here’s what we are going to do. 5 parts to this sermon.

1. First was the introduction. We did that. Good job everybody.

2. The second is to show you the miracle itself. We’ll do that pretty quick.
3. Common Questions about miracles today
4. How we respond to the miracle.
5. The blessings of a right response.

And here we go. Part 2: The Miracle. Nothing to write down here ok. Just put yourself in the scene.

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. 2 A man who was lame from birth Now over 40 years old the next chapter tells us was being carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so that he could beg from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money.

Most likely not the first time Peter & John have seen this guy. They go up daily to pray. This guy is there daily. But THIS is now after Pentecost. Catch you up: The Holy Spirit, main character in the book of Acts, has arrived on the scene. And he resides in every believer. Specifically, Luke shows us how he is working through the apostles to verify the gospel. So we are about to see how God can move in a very big way inside of a very routine situation. Let that be a heads up to you. Maybe a little wake up and look in. Your routine job, routine friendships, routine marriage, routine workout, routine errands, routine family dinner...God may just make that routine the arena for a great work in your life. Anyway...

4 Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, “Look at us.” 5 So he turned to them, expecting to get something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I don’t have silver or

gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"

BOLD. I mean BOLD. Peter didn't have what the guy thought he needed. He wasn't there to help him have a good day in his routine. He has what the guy really needs. The POWER of God that resides in the NAME of Jesus Christ.

7 Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. 8 So he jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them — walking, leaping, and praising God.

Not a gradual healing at all. But an IMMEDIATE COMPLETE healing of this man's body. TO THE POINT WHERE HE LEAPS! He gets up. Stands up. Walks. And then just LEAPS. And what is the one other thing he does? Praises God. This scene is beautiful because the man directs praise where praise is to be directed. That's the point.

9 All the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and they recognized that he was the one who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate of the temple.

This was the guy who used to sit outside the temple. And they spent their days avoiding him. BUT NOW he's inside the temple. And he's walking & praising God. CAN YOU IMAGINE THE mixture of awe, fear, and maybe a little embarrassment? I don't know. What I do know, and I know it's not the point of

¹ These questions come from a larger set of questions answered by J.D. Greear in his sermon on this same passage titled "Miracles & The Message" preached in 2013 at The Summit Church.

this sermon but it's the reality of Mercy church: I do know our character will be tested when people who used to sit outside and beg for money start sitting inside this worship gathering with us. By God's grace he's allowed us to be near a bus stop at this campus. And near major intersections. WELCOME – We are glad you are here.

And people who have no home & no job have started attending our gatherings. And I wonder if we are going to embrace such image bearers with the compassionate love of Christ or if we will be the religiously masked enemies of God Jesus came to put on notice. But that's another sermon to come.

So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him. 11 While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astonished, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade.

Ok Peter is about to preach his guts out and it's going to get REAL GOOD. But before he does I want to take just a couple of minutes now that we've seen this miracle and I want to answer 3 common questions I often get about miracles today.¹

1. **Does God Still Heal Today?** – Yes. You won't find anything definitive in the bible that suggests these healings stopped. You'll also find the NT talking about healing as a spiritual gift different people in the church have. James tells the elders to

pray over the sick. & connects prayer to their healing. Yes. He still heals.

2. **Why Does God Heal?** – well as I said the main idea is that miracles like the miracle of healing are to display the power of Jesus for the purpose of verifying the gospel of Jesus. But let me dive further there:

As an act of love and mercy to the one who is suffering

As a sign of the coming kingdom of God - Not random. He doesn't just do random displays of power like: make the Hornets good at basketball. "the hornets won a championship.... God is real." No they have a purpose. Reversing the curse. Miracles like healing are reversing the effects of sin on the world. What sin unraveled, God is putting back together. And miracles are there to point to the one who restores and will restore in full.

As a witness to non-Christians (both as a warning and as an invitation)

To motivate Christians to worship

Listen – After every service some of our elders and our prayer team make their way down front and we stand here so that we can pray over all who desire it. Take advantage of this!

3. **Will everyone who prays in faith receive healing?**

Yes, and No. Eventually, yes. The day is coming when God will restore all things, the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible, there will be no more disease or pain or mourning or crying.

But in the short term, no. God sometimes has bigger purposes on earth than giving us physical healing. Sometimes he allows us to know him better through the pain in this life, and sometimes he uses our suffering to bring others to him. **Sometimes God glorifies himself by helping sick people get well; sometimes he is glorified when sick people die well.** That doesn't mean we don't pray boldly and expectantly. God calls us to that.

For those of you who have given up on God...maybe a chronic sickness that you've prayed for years over. Or maybe you've been left behind after somebody you loved died...I really believe Peter's message we are about to hear is for you because there are really powerful promises. And listen if we understood the greatness of God's gift to us in Christ, it will far outweigh even the worst pain we experience here on earth.

John Wesley: **How much you believe the gospel is measured by your ability to be joyful in all things.**

Ok, I know that's not all of your questions. And I'm happy to dialogue more with you. Really. This is important stuff. But if we want to know what to think about this miracle we gotta just read the next verses. Peter is going to tell us. The healing happens and Peter seizes the moment.

Which one of our members told me the other day was her favorite part of Acts 2 and I see it here too. Peter makes the most of the opportunities God gives him. He doesn't just walk off like "BOOM! PETER OUT." No he explains it.

Which brings us to Part 4 of the sermon. **Our response.** Really Luke our author is setting us up for this ok. The healing prepares the heart with the awe and wonder it needs in order to properly receive the gospel message. So I'm going to read you the first half of what he says and I'm going to cut it off so that I can save the rest for part 5.

12 When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14 You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer released to you. 15 You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in his name, his name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

17 "And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders also did. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had predicted through all the prophets — that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Therefore repent and turn back...

Ok Peter is GOING IN. MAN this is an awesome chapter of scripture. He calls them to look in two directions.

look upward

The miracle calls us to look upward to God's confirmation of Jesus

The very first thing Peter does is make sure they are attributing this display of power to the right power source. And he almost does it a little sarcastically doesn't he? "WHY you looking at us?" Remember they are in the temple. He's talking to Jews. They are familiar with the knowledge of God but clearly not familiar with the power of God. And so he says 15 You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this... the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

Here is what Peter is saying. This miracle was God's divine signature saying Jesus really was who he said he was. Remember that's the purpose of the miracle we said at the beginning. To point you to the **reality of a BIG POWERFUL God** and what this God said about Jesus.

So here's a question: **Do you really believe God is real?** Because if you believe God is real then you are by default acknowledging at least the possibility of miracles. A much bigger miracle than this healing is Genesis 1.1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Do you really believe he's real? Because certainly the God who created the laws of the universe could suspend those laws. That's what I want you to see first. That you are either a committed avowed Atheist or you allow the possibility of miracles. Those are your only two options.

AND THE POINT of the miracle God says...is to direct your attention to Jesus. Jesus, a person, is to be the object of our

faith. We aren't supposed to base our faith on miracles. We are supposed to base our faith on a person. Jesus. And the miracles are signs that are there to point you to him. That's what Peter is getting at here. When you rest your faith in his words and his character and what he's done for you...that is solid resting ground for faith. This is a big deal.

Peter says in verse 23: **23 And everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be completely cut off from the people... 26 God raised up his servant and sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways."**

Let me say what Peter is saying in the form of a question: Have you listened to Jesus? Are you listening now? God says he is the Lord and the only way to salvation. And every miraculous sign is meant to point you to the miraculous person. To the miraculous one: Jesus.

Look Inward

The Miracle calls us to look inward to repent of our own rejection of God

17 "And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders also did. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had predicted through all the prophets — that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Therefore repent and turn back..."

The first response to look up Peter says see what happened? You really killed the source of life. YOU WERE WRONG. And he

says "I know you acted in ignorance." You didn't know you were killing the God of life. And even what you meant for evil there God was using for good to bring about salvation. This is the response we often overlook but the scriptures often emphasize. This miracle made everyone simultaneously aware of the holiness and REALness of God, and it made them aware of their own sinfulness. And Peter says you did this. You denied him, you handed him over, you pressed for his death when he was about to be released. Your bloodthirsty rebellion ensured those nails went into his hands & feet and that he hung there until dead. But then GOD raised him. Because as we saw 2 weeks ago...death could not hold Jesus. The source of life.

And Peter says: I know you didn't know...but now you do know. And now you must repent. He says repent and turn back. Which is almost like saying to stop and turn. Repent: recognize your sin as a rejection of God. Turn AWAY from it and TOWARD God.

Listen this is the role of the Holy Spirit. The holy spirit is always leading TO THE CROSS or FROM it, to carry its message of healing to others.² Here and now will you turn? That is the right response. That's the response I am confident many need to make. BELIEF! You've been playing the church game but now...now you see what is at stake. And you are ready to believe. And THAT is what that baptism card is for. Baptism is the step Jesus called us to take as a step of trust in him as our Lord. He said your faith isn't just a private matter because he didn't die on a private cross. He experienced public

² J.D. Greear *Jesus Continued* (important publisher info) 92.

humiliation and calls us to public celebration in response. So next weekend you can take that step. All 3 services you can get baptized.

And when you respond to the gospel of Christ dying for your sin & rising again: That belief unlocks the blessings of God to you. And this is part 5 of our sermon. Listen to these blessings in just two short verses.

Therefore repent and turn back... so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.

The blessings of repentance & faith

Peter issues past, present, and future blessings that God gives to his people. And I think it will be good for us to lean into these blessings today. In fact, these are some things you may need to just thank God for right as you hear them. We are at church, not an event with a speaker. A Church worship gathering is a participatory gathering.

[19] Therefore repent and turn back...so that your sins may be wiped out,

The blessings of repentance & faith

God erases your sin and frees you from it.

Say it again slowly. If we sinners who are bound and immersed in sin with no hope...if we turn away from it and say God, I believe you died for MY sin...God doesn't scold us. He doesn't pay us back. The imagery is rich here in an era where there

wasn't paper. Parchment was really expensive. So sometimes scribes would use acid-free ink to write with which means the ink would just kind of sit on the top of the parchment. And then if they wanted they could take a wet sponge and just wipe out the writing as if it were never there. For us, think about a white board with every sin you've ever committed. And God who has seen every one including the ones you dare not write on that white board...he just wipes them away. Gone. No record. Some of you came in with sins you feel are too giant and you are being beaten down by them. Turn back to your father. So that they may be wiped out. Find the miraculous healing of forgiveness. Find the power to break you away from it. That power is real. Some of you deliberately & knowingly disobeyed God last night and then came in here and began to worship. And what I'm calling you to is not to simply say 'I'm sorry God I'll try to do better.' It's a full surrender. God I can't have both you and my sin. So I choose you. And your past sins are washed away. Now, I want to say that the effect of those sins will linger in this life. You need to repent to the people you harmed as well and there will be a process of healing that will be painful and costly for you. But the power & presence of God will go with you in that. Which leads to the second blessing. When you turn away from Sin...you are turning towards God. And God is more beautiful, more attractive, more desirable than your sin.

20 that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

The blessings of repentance & faith

The Holy Spirit brings seasons of refreshing for your soul

That phrase seasons of refreshing...it's only used here in the new testament. The meaning is like when a cool breeze comes on a hot muggy day with no wind. That "ahhhhh" feeling. It's reprieve from the heat and refreshing. It is restorative. 2 meanings that translators end up having to choose from: relief from burdens & strengthening.

And I believe this is what many in our church need right now. Are you tired? Weary? Do your days burden you? the hardness of this bitter world have you feeling beaten down? Do you feel cold towards God? Lean in here and listen to this promise: The presence of the Lord...who is The Holy Spirit guaranteed to be with all who follow Christ...the presence of the Lord can refresh your soul. This is what the filling of the Spirit is that we talk about. It is the Spirit who is already with you...bringing you fresh REST, PEACE, FAITH, LOVE, JOY, KINDNESS, and STRENGTH. That instead of having to try and trudge on in your own strength you can instead be swept up in his strength. Church I deeply desire that for you. I desire it for my family. I desire it for Charlotte. When we talk about praying for a gospel awakening...this is what we are talking about. The people of God would experience a season of refreshing. The damn of spiritual refreshing would bust open and the river of God's grace would flood our hearts and the people of Charlotte. People would come to repentance and find forgiveness. And it would be dry souls finding water. So you know what we are going to do? We are going to ask God for it. He wants to give us that. PRAYER & FASTING STARTING WEDNESDAYS IN OCT – MEET RIGHT HERE at MPR.

We can't conjure it; we can only ask for it. But The one thing that will keep this outpouring away: Our own sin. Some of you are tired. You feel the Lord is far from you. And yet it is you who are running hard from him. Your sin will make you tired. So the message is for you: Repent. Turn. And you will receive the refreshing of the soul that comes through faith in Christ. Others of you are faithfully seeking him and feel like he's silent. He's there. You pray this week and then lets pray together Wednesday for it. God wants to give it.

Lastly: and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.

**The blessings of repentance & faith
God secures your eternal future**

Isn't this what the soul needs for true rest? Past sins forgiven. Present relief and strengthening. Future secured. Nothing can offer you that except Christ. The New Testament was written by a poor, persecuted people. Who fixed their eyes on Jesus and found SOUL STRENGTHENING HOPE in THE DAY they would see him face to face. This is your hope. The Day. Paul said present sufferings aren't worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. Christian, lay your burdens down onto this great hope.

So let me invite you now.... closing.