

The first miracle and the second sermon

Acts Chapter 3

Introduction

At the beginning of this chapter a lame beggar is miraculously healed. Two ideas emerge: the first is that it is a natural continuity of the work of Jesus Christ – in this case by the Holy Spirit through Peter and John. So on the one hand we have a continuity of what started in the gospels. But it was also a commencement, a new beginning, the first recorded miracle of the period we call the Church age...

A lame beggar is healed (Acts 3 v 1 to 10)

- In Acts 2 v 43 Luke mentions that the apostles did “many wonders and miraculous signs”. Why do you think Luke chose to record this particular miracle in detail?
- What was the man crippled from birth asking for? What was he expecting? What did he receive? Did he have time to pause and consider carefully what Peter was saying (v 7)? Did he understand what was happening? What was his reaction? Do you think that his faith healed him (see below)?
- What was the reaction of “all the people” who had seen what had happened (v 9, 10 and 11)?
- *“The lameness of humanity is the Church’s opportunity. Christianity does not give out doles to help the world bear its limitations. It comes to give men life, to put them on their feet and to enable them to do without alms...”* What do you think of these statements as an interpretation of the above event?

“Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you...’” (v 6) – Peter did not have any money, but he did have authority from Jesus to heal the sick. Peter knew what it was like to have God use him to heal others, because Jesus had trained him in this (Luke 9 v 1 to 6). “He took him by the right hand and raised him up” (v 7) – it was one thing to say, ‘rise up and walk’, but it was a much greater thing to so boldly take the man’s hand and lift him to his feet. At this moment, Peter received the gift of faith described in 1 Corinthians 12 v 9 – a supernatural ability to trust God in a particular situation.

“Immediately his feet and ankles were made strong” (v 7) – strength did not come to the lame man until Peter said ‘rise up and walk’, and not until Peter took him by the right hand and lifted him up. A famous commentator, Morgan wrote:

Perhaps only medical men can fully appreciate the meaning of these words; they are [the] technical words of a medical man. The word translated ‘feet’ is only used by Luke, and occurs nowhere else. It indicates his discrimination between different parts of the human heel. The [word ‘ankle’] is again a medical phrase to be found nowhere else. The word ‘leaping up’ describes the coming suddenly into socket of something that was out of place, the articulation of a joint. This then is a very careful medical description of what happened in connection with this man...

Peter’s message in the temple (Acts 3 v 11 to 26)

Peter’s message in the temple is fascinating and warrants careful study. Notice he is addressing fellow Jews “Men of Israel”. It’s as if he is saying, “Why does this miracle surprise *you*? Why do *you* stare at us? If you were ordinary non-Jewish people you would be amazed, but as Jews, if you understood your history you should have expected this...”

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“When Peter saw it he addressed the people” (v 12) – Peter wisely took advantage of the gathering crowd, fully aware that the miraculous in itself brought no one to Jesus: it merely aroused interest. Though they were “utterly astounded” (v 11), they were not saved. Peter knew that saving faith did not come through miracles, rather “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10 v 17).

- Is Peter being diplomatic (v 13 to 15)? What does Peter accuse his Jewish brethren of having done? But what has God done? How do we know the Jews “acted in ignorance” (v 17)? (What did Jesus pray on the Cross?) What had God foretold through all the Old Testament prophets (v 18)?
- What were the listeners told to do (v 19)? What would happen if they obeyed? If they disobeyed?

“His servant Jesus” (v 13) – the greatness of Peter’s sermon is that it was all about Jesus. The focus of the sermon was not on Peter nor on anything he did, but on Jesus. The first thing Peter said about Jesus drew attention to the idea that Jesus was the perfect ‘Servant of the Lord’, as explained in the Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 42; Isaiah 52 v 13 to 53 v 12).

“Asked for a murderer to be granted to you” (v 14) – one of the ironies of the crucifixion of Jesus is that while the crowd rejected Jesus, they embraced a murderer named Barabbas (Luke 23 v 18 to 25; John 18 v 39, 40). Peter boldly confronted this audience.

- Verse 21 is one of the most interesting verses in the New Testament. A literal translation from the Greek would be: “(Jesus) whom heaven must receive until the times of restitution (restoration) of all things, of which (God) spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets ages ago.” The word for ‘restitution’ is ἀποκαταστάσεως (*apo-kata-staseos*), and has the sense of restoring something that has been spoiled or lost to its original (better) status. What does this verse mean? Restoration of what? (see Acts 1 v 6 – where the same root word is used). What would this have meant to educated Jews?

An important idea embedded in verse 21 is the concept of the Jubilee Year. Peter makes reference to Moses (v 22), who sets out the requirements of the Jubilee Year in Leviticus 25. This year was celebrated after seven ‘weeks of years’ (i.e. every 50th year), and it literally involved the “restitution of all things”:

- (a) all debts were cancelled and all debtors were forgiven;
- (b) all slaves were released from bondage;
- (c) all prisoners were freed;
- (d) all families were reunited; and
- (e) all land reverted to its original owners.

Peter made it clear that Jesus will remain in heaven “until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets” (v 21), and since the repentance of Israel is one of “all the things”, there is a sense in which Jesus’ return will not happen until Israel repents. Here Peter offered Israel the opportunity to hasten the return of Jesus by embracing him on a national level, something that must happen before Jesus returns (Hosea 5 v 15; Matthew 23 v 37 to 39; Romans 11 v 25, 26).

“Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers...’” (v 22) – the Jewish people of Peter’s day were aware of this prophecy of Moses (recorded in Deuteronomy 18 v 18, 19), but some thought that the prophet would be someone different than the Messiah. Peter made it clear that they are one and the same.

Prayer – Lord, thank you for these amazing truths.

Help us to remember that our own power or godliness is of no account, but the name of Jesus, and the faith that comes through Jesus, is powerful and able to bring healing and life. Amen.