

Acts 3 introduces the next section of Acts, and next week we'll look at the response to Peter's sermon here. There's one verse from next week's text I want to note at this point:

“The man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old” (4:22).

It is certainly remarkable that the man had been lame for 40 years, but the part I want you to see is that Luke calls this a *sign of healing*. This miracle is not recorded to show you how to perform miracles, whether by invoking the name of Jesus, or by having strong faith.

This story stuck with me as a young Christian, and I wished I had the power to change broken peoples' lives like this. One winter in college I went on a mission trip to Vancouver, B.C., to the rough streets where drug dealers and prostitutes walk freely. One cold, rainy night I was on a prayer walk with a couple friends, and we came upon a rather large man lying on a doorstep, wearing thin, wet clothes, so drunk that he couldn't even talk, let alone get up and find some shelter. For whatever reason, this story of the lame man popped into my mind.

Now, of course, I'm a fairly realistic person, and so I thought, “Well, if I'm going to try to heal this guy like Peter healed the man in Acts 3, and it fails, I'd rather not look really stupid in front of my friends...” So, while my friends were figuring out how to get some help, I stooped down low and whispered to the guy, and basically quoted exactly what Peter said to the lame man. I grabbed his hand, and tried to help him to his feet. And do you know what happened?

Nothing. He was a big guy, totally drunk. Couldn't stand up. He did mumble a few words with a smile on his face, though.

You know what? I was pretty disappointed with myself. I thought maybe my faith's just not very strong. Well, obviously it wasn't, since I was embarrassed at the thought of my friends seeing my faith fail. So I took off my gloves and put them on his frozen hands, and we waited for the police to arrive and take him to detox.

You may have guessed by now that I was not thinking about this passage in the right way. Like I said, this miracle isn't recorded as an example for you to follow, but as a *sign*. And Peter attributed this sign of healing to the exalted Lord Jesus; *Jesus* is the one who performed this miracle.

This healing, like all the others that Jesus performed while on earth, is obviously a good thing, in and of itself. In fact, almost all the miracles recorded in the Gospels benefit the health of the recipients, whether Jesus is healing someone, raising someone from the dead, casting out demons, feeding multitudes, or saving lives by stopping storms. This, in itself, should encourage you that God is good, and that when he interrupts the regular course of things, he's usually doing something nice for us.

But Jesus didn't just perform the miracles for their own sake; miracles are often referred to as signs, which gives them a significance beyond themselves. So this text, this lame man being healed, points to something, which Luke communicates in the way he records the healing, and in Peter's explanatory sermon. This healing is a testimony to Jesus, particularly how he is a fulfillment of all God's work in history to bring restoration to a fallen, broken world. Dennis Johnson writes, “This miracle is a sign, given at the start of Jesus' heavenly ministry, to demonstrate how he has begun the healing of the cosmos by the power of his name in those who have faith.”

Now, it's a long text, and we're going to go through quickly and highlight a couple significant things as we look at how this sign of healing points to Jesus as the great Restorer. The account begins with the apostles Peter and John entering the temple, where they encounter the crippled forty-something. In that world this man would have been a big-time outsider, rejected socially and religiously. According to OT Law, you couldn't offer lame/blemished animals as sacrifices, and lame priests were forbidden from the temple... so there was a stigma associated with being lame. You were a burden that no one wanted to bear. You just weren't really welcome anywhere.

Interestingly, however, the giving of alms was viewed as a particularly meritorious act in the Jewish religion. People who were “well off” physically, financially, religiously would *give* to people like this—but they wouldn't *receive* him, they wouldn't include him. You hear this frequently enough about homeless people today; sure, they appreciate donations, but most of all they just wish someone would acknowledge them, would enter into a conversation with them, would treat them as if they were actually people too.

But Luke emphasizes the fact that this man wasn't treated that way, and he does so by calling attention to this man's place relative to the temple. The temple was supposed to be a place of grace and healing, of renewal and restoration, because it was the place where atonement was offered for the people, the place where God himself dwelt with his people. And this guy wasn't welcome. He stayed at the gate.

Imagine living in a broken body, in a broken world, for 40 years, so used to disappointment and rejection that you don't even allow yourself to hope for full restoration. He had a deep need for physical, emotional, social and spiritual healing, but that need was so far beyond his reach or imagining that certainly as a child he quit hoping for more than handouts.

And then along came Peter and John, who engaged with him as a real person, who directed their gaze at him, who told him to look at them, and who reached out to touch him and lift him up. He had expected to receive something, *but he had no idea*. Without asking for it, he was freely granted full restoration. A variety of words express his restoration—he was made able to “walk” and “leap” and “praise,” he was “made strong” and “given perfect health.” This calls to mind our OT passage, a beautiful picture of restoration from Isaiah 35...

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame man shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...” (Isa. 35:5-6).

Along with physical health, now this man was able to enter the temple, he was able to participate in society fully for the first time. The transformation in his life could not have been more drastic, *and he hadn't even known to ask for it*. David Peterson writes, “[The apostles’] initiative... demonstrate[s] the sovereign grace of God, acting through Jesus Christ to rescue and restore those powerless to save themselves.”

This was such an astounding thing that the people couldn't take their eyes off Peter and John, as if it had been something about *them* that accomplished this. But Peter redirects their attention to the exalted Lord Jesus, and insists that it was *he* who had restored this man.

Now, the text is really interesting here. Luke uses the word “temple” six times as the location of this episode, and Peter emphasizes in his sermon that it is the “name” of Jesus that brought healing and restoration to the man.

When the original temple was first built by Solomon, about 1000 years before this scene, Solomon blessed the Lord God, and said:

“It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to David my father, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.’ Now the LORD has fulfilled the promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel” (1 Kings 8:17-20).

So, the temple was built by David's son as a house for God's *name*, and as such would be the fulfillment of God's promises to David. Alan Thompson writes:

For Solomon “the name” was the active presence of Yahweh (in the fullness of his character), the God who would keep his promises to David, forgive and restore Israel... Now, in Solomon's Colonnade (!) of the temple, Peter declares that it is the “name” of the exalted Jesus, who sits on David's throne as the Lord in fulfillment of God's promises to David, who must be called upon, who answers prayer and who brings forgiveness, wholeness and the restoration hoped for by Solomon and anticipated by the prophets.

In the Bible, the name of God is his authoritative, active presence in the fullness of his character, the means of blessing his people.

And the name of God is “Jesus.”

It was in Jesus' name that this man was restored to perfect health, which, in this setting, is equivalent to saying that Jesus is God.

And the temple was intended to be the place where the name of God lived and blessed God's people, right? Where did this miracle of restoration take place?

Outside the temple... Outside the stone temple, anyway.

But the name of Jesus fills his temple, that is, his Body. Those who place their faith in Christ are the temple of the living God. That's what happened at Pentecost, in Acts 2, and this is the result. The exalted Lord Jesus, the great Restorer of the cosmos, dwells in and with his people by his Spirit, and he is making all things right.

In his sermon, Peter calls attention to the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of every promise, every covenant God made with people. The holy prophets long ago spoke of the restoration he would bring. Moses foretold of Jesus. Samuel prepared the way for Jesus as he anointed David. All the rest of the prophets proclaimed the days of the Messiah. God promised to Abraham that his offspring would be the conduit of blessing for all the families of the earth. God glorified his servant Jesus, the suffering servant foretold by Isaiah. Everything God has ever revealed to people about his intentions to bless them, about his work in the history of the world to bring about salvation, every promise of refreshing and restoration is summed up, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the Author of life, the Holy and Righteous One.

When Jesus died, he took your sin and guilt on his shoulders and bore them away into the darkness. When Jesus came to life again, of which the apostles were witnesses, he came bringing eternal life and light and joy and love for those who turn from their sin and put their trust in him. He is the Restorer. He is the Resurrection. His healing of the lame man is a picture of his power. John Chrysostom wrote that “This act was... an image of the Resurrection.”

What happened to the man who was crippled from birth is an image, a shadow of what will happen to all of us when Jesus returns and finally makes all things new. Give attention to this part of Peter’s sermon:

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things...” (3:19-21)

If you have turned from your sins and put your faith in Christ, your sins are obliterated, wiped away, never to be held against you, and his refreshing presence is with you in the person of his Spirit.

And when God sends Jesus back to the earth from heaven, not only will our bodies be made perfectly whole, but all our emotional and social brokenness will disappear, we’ll fully know what it means to be perfectly received by God in his holy temple. Then, not only will our sins be wiped away, but as John wrote in Revelation 21, every tear from our eyes will be wiped away, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. As it says in Isaiah 35, everlasting joy shall be upon our heads, and we shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, because God will dwell with us. And there will no longer be any need for a temple, because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb will dwell with us, and his glory will be our light.

Dennis Johnson writes: “Astonishing as it is for a man of forty who has never walked to leap in the temple, the cure of hearts paralyzed in sin is even greater... Astonishing as it is for a lame man to leap, it is nothing when compared to the cosmic restoration to come—the restoration of all things.”

Do you get that? *You will be fully restored by Jesus.* You are being restored by him even now, with a restoration that began with your complete reconciliation to God, accomplished by Jesus giving himself for you so that you might become a child of God.

When your heart is full of the grace of Jesus Christ, when you long for his work in your life to be brought to completion, when you long for him to work through you in the lives of others, then you are part of his temple, the place where his name dwells.

Maybe lame people won’t spring up and dance in your presence.

But then again, maybe they will, when their hearts are lifted up by the hope of the Gospel. Maybe those who are blind to God’s love in their lives will see that God accepts them as you extend his grace to them. Maybe people who gave up on hope long ago will sing for joy as the name of Jesus on our lips brings that ancient-promised restoration.

Like this story, your whole life can be a sign pointing to the one who makes all things new, to the glory of God. So turn back to him, and he will bless you.