

The First Miracle

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[0 : 00] Now if you do have a Bible with you, could you turn back with me to Acts chapter 3? We're going to look in the context of looking through Acts. We've already looked at this chapter in our Wednesday night city groups, but we're going to look at it again this morning.

Can I just leave you with a nip or can I begin with an image today that I hope might stay with you or I hope you'll consider with regard to Luke who is the writer of Acts.

So it's his second volume. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and now he's written his second volume which is Acts and he is in his medical doctor kind of way seeking to make clear historically the reality of Jesus because he wants people to put their trust in him.

He tells about the life of Jesus in the Gospel and then he speaks about the life of the church, the followers of Jesus in Acts. And if I could leave you with one image of Luke that I think might be accurate to his thinking, it's of him holding someone just by the shoulders in a kind of loving way and saying, Luke this is all about Jesus. Take him seriously.

He loves you. He is hugely important and he's just in a kind of loving, pastoral, leading way. He's just longing for everyone who reads these volumes that he's written under the power of the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 37] He's wanting people to see clearly who Jesus is. He wants people to be gripped by Jesus Christ. So he tells the truth of Jesus and he tells of the amazing differences that have been clearly seen in the lives of his followers.

And I don't think under the power of the Spirit of God as we trust in the living Word that it's any different today. You know, I couldn't sleep at night if I thought for a moment that the word of God, the living word of God was boring you to death.

If it was incidental nonsense that you just shrugged your shoulders and thought about casually for maybe at best an hour on a Sunday but that you had been lulled by the awfulness of the preaching and by the dryness of your Christian experience to find Jesus Christ wasn't to be taken seriously and isn't the most glorious and marvellous character in the whole of the universe.

Because it's no different today in this crazy world in which we live. The longing for us as Christians is it not for ourselves and for those whom we love who are not Christians to take Jesus seriously because he's such an incredible character.

And this is a great chapter and it's one that helps as I hope to take Jesus seriously. If we talk about the currency of Christ, the kind of language of Christ, the philosophy of Christ that comes through this chapter it would be the one word that would be the word change.

[3 : 31] Because that's what the currency of Christ is and by that I don't mean loose change. But by change I mean that that is what Jesus is involved in.

He's involved in changing your life and changing my life and understanding that and what that means. I think there's two realities, maybe two extremes, maybe not extremes, maybe not mutually exclusive in any way.

But there's two things certainly that might be realities as we think about Jesus Christ and as we think about his currency of change. One is that we don't like change. We're not good at change as human beings.

We might like to think we are, but in many ways we don't like change. Now next week we're moving in our house from sky to BT.

Now that's going to mean change. It's going to mean change of remote. It's going to mean change of picture at the front. It's not going to be the nice sky thing at the front. We're going to have to get used to different colours and different things.

[4 : 35] And we don't like that. I've just got used to the sky and how to work it. Now that's a very small example, but we don't like change. At that level we like things to be the same.

We have habits and we have routines and we have ways of doing things and ways of living. And very often I think the Word of God and Christ challenges that and threatens that and makes us feel uncomfortable with that.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure if I want Christ in my life. I'll keep Him at a distance where He doesn't need to change me, but I'm not sure if I want Him in that place where He's challenging and threatening what I do, the way I do it.

The routines, the habits of a lifetime. And can I say in a congregation, this demographic I feel I can say it, that the older you get, the harder it is to change.

You're still fairly pliable if you're under 25, but anything after that, routines rule. And it becomes harder and harder. Now if you're here today over 25 and you're not a Christian, it becomes harder and harder to change your routine and your life and your thinking to not only accommodate Christ, but to give Him His Lordship, because we fix ourselves in that place of not liking change.

[6 : 03] But on the other hand, and this is a bit paradoxical I think, we are also people who long for change. In many ways we're creatures of routine, but in other ways we long for change.

How many of you have woken up thinking, I would really like something different to happen today. I would love if I was surprised, or if I didn't have to go to work, or if the routine that drags me down were to change.

And you're bored with life, and you're bored with routine, and you become cynical of every day, and you want surprises and newness, and you're longing sometimes at a very personal level for change, not only in your circumstances, but in your character, and in the decisions that you make which always seem to be a mistake.

But you've become cynical of, if you're a Christian, of your Christianity, because you think the promises of God aren't changing you, and the promises and the glory of God is so distant from you, and you're in this routine of unkind of, God is distant and far away, and you feel that all the promises He makes are vacuous and empty, because they don't change your life.

And these are things that I think challenge us. And I hope that as we look at this chapter, we will consider the truth of Jesus Christ, and how it speaks into these realities of change, or no change in our lives.

[7 : 41] And first of all, by looking at the ex... There's so many things you could look at in this chapter. So I'm cherry picking some things. And look at the example of Peter, because Peter hears the apostle, he understood change.

He really did. He understood that the gospel meant change in his life. He had, you know, you know that, we've talked about that a lot, that Peter moved from this position of betraying Jesus and denying Jesus to being the great leader of the church, and he knew that the gospel, meeting with Jesus Christ, the risen Savior, changed his reality, and he knew that the kingdom of God that he preached would be a message which would change the world.

He had preached once, and 3,000 people had been converted to Jesus Christ. There had been this radical transformation and change, and he must have thought his sermons were fantastic.

And if 3,000 would be saved every time he preached, he must have truly understood and recognized. The example and the power of the gospel.

And so he focused on two things, or Luke focuses on two things, as well as Peter, in other words, the Holy Spirit focuses on at least two things, that challenge us to understand change when we meet with Jesus Christ.

[9 : 07] The first is truth, and the second is testimony. Both are very important in our own lives, and as we seek and pray for people who are not Christians to become Christians, these two things are really important, truth and testimony.

So, Luke, we've seen that already. Luke is really focused on bringing the truth of Jesus Christ, the historical facts of Jesus to the people.

And he writes his gospel, and he writes the Book of Acts, he writes them as truth, he writes them as factual accounts.

These are not the accounts of legend that we have here, at three o'clock in the afternoon. That's the language of fact that he's wanting to tell us that this happened, it happened in a specific time outside the temple, in a specific place in Jerusalem, at three o'clock, and Peter was involved, and

John was involved, and a man who was, a paraplegic was also involved, and it's a historical truth, and a great healing of that man occurs in this story.

So, Luke speaks truth, but also Peter, as he preaches in response to this great healing, also focuses, and we've seen this before, he focuses on Christ, and the truth of Christ, the reality of Jesus.

[10:37] He heals in the name of Christ, and then he emphasizes to the Jews to whom he is preaching, who would have known their Old Testament, that this is the Messiah of the Old Testament.

This is the Saviour who they should have understood and known and put their trust in. He speaks in verse 13 about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, who glorified his servant, Jesus.

And then in verse 18 he speaks about the reality of the prophets, all the prophets that spoke of Jesus. He's using the truth of the Old Testament to focus on that this Jesus was God's chosen Messiah.

He speaks about the crucifixion, he speaks about the resurrection as recognizing that he himself, along with the other disciples, were witnesses of that. They were there. They saw what happened. And he is making clear that if they are to be changed, and if we are to be changed, then it's on the basis of factual reality and truth, that Jesus was real, he is the appointed Messiah, he is central as we saw in all our preaching on the mission of God, central to God's purpose and plan.

[12:03] And he speaks of this great truth and their apostolic witness to that. That's important for us. If we are to change, it's not...

It's something that's tangible that we first must recognize and deal with, the person, the truth about Jesus. I'll go on and say a little bit about that later. The word, the word incarnate, that's crucial to us, that we take him through his word seriously, and that every page of Scripture speaks of this person, this expression of truth, I am the way, the truth, and in life there's no way to God outside of him.

So truth is crucial to Luke and is crucial to Peter, and I hope is crucial to us. But also a testimony. So in our Christian lives, we want to share the truth, we want to live the truth, but we want to share the truth of Jesus with others.

But the bare facts are not enough. It's not enough for us just to splurge out a whole lot of factual truth about Jesus. Jesus lived Jesus, died Jesus crucified, and pass that on, as if the mere recitation of facts in some mystical or magical way will bring people to life, as if the words themselves are magical.

Truth is accompanied by testimony so often in Scripture, that in Christ and in Christ church, it's a living truth.

[13:42] It's embodied in our lives as we speak about Jesus. It's because we live for Jesus as believers. We testify to Him.

The people who were converted on the day of Pentecost recognized they grasped grace and that grace changes us.

And that's where the testimony powerfully impacts the truth. Where the truth has come into our lives and has changed us.

That's the testimony. When we have met with Christ, it changes our lives. So we've got here faith in action. And we recognize and we see faith in action both from Peter and the disciples, and also from the changed life of the man who's healed.

So we've got Peter doing something quite remarkable. I think we forget that. Absolute boldness. He takes a great risk.

[14:50] He looks in the eyes of this congenital, paralyzed from the legs down individual. And in the name of Jesus Christ, he looks at Him, he holds out his hand to Him, he lifts Him up and he commands Him to walk.

It's great faith in action in the life of Peter. Tremendous. And there's great change in the life of the man who he heals.

It's a glorious picture, this poor, broken man with the ugliness of his condition, having to be carried every day to this place to beg.

And the ugliness of what this broken world means for people. And he is brought to this place which is called beautiful.

There's an irony there, that the ugliness of his condition is exposed by the beauty of the temple and the gate that is called beautiful.

[16:04] And it's as if God is saying, well, these are beautiful creations and this temple is beautiful, but don't put your trust in the temple because I see this man here and I see beauty.

And I can see the beauty of healing that will come to him. And there's this dramatic healing, utterly miraculous, congenital paraplegic that doesn't only have the power restored to his legs, but can walk and dance and leap immediately.

That is miraculous beyond understanding. What is it? What is it that's happening here? There's something very important happening here.

It's a testimony to the power of the Gospel for all time. It's a sign. There's a couple of verses that are important. In chapter 2 and verse 43, I think that's coming up on the screen, you remember that the disciples all came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And then also we have in Isaiah 35 verse 6, the prophecy of the great Messiah being one where this healing is spoken of, the lame man shall leap like a deer, the tongue of the mute shall sing for joy.

[17:33] And then Paul, when he later is speaking about his apostolic credentials in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 12 says, the signs of the true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, that is, that he was doing, the signs and wonders and mighty works.

So we recognize that whatever else is happening here, it's a sign of the power of the Gospel to heal and to change. It's extraordinary.

Even within the Bible, healings like this were rare. Someone who instantly were brought to health in this way. And Paul, if Peter isn't praying to God and ask God, please heal this man, he isn't doing that.

He is declaring the man healed in an apostolic authoritative way because it's a picture, it's very real, but it's also a picture of the healing power of the Gospel for us.

The Gospel is about recognition of need, about the beauty of Christ and His healing, and about a changed life.

[18:44] Does this kind of healing happen today? Well, we don't have the foundational apostles anymore. We have no need for their signs at that level to authenticate the message they brought.

We still have these signs, we have these healings recorded for us. But God is sovereign. God gives people gifts of healing.

And I think we often forget because we often look at the physical reality of the healing here, that you need healing every day, and I need healing every day in Christ.

Because there's broken elements to our lives. This man being healed physically, do you think he was perfected? Did he not have more healing still to undergo?

Was there not psychological and spiritual and physical and relational healing still to be done? I'm sure there was. And so each of us in our lives are taken by Christ, and He deals with us according to our need, and Heals us inside and out throughout our lives as we allow Him, because that healing still is the mark of the God, the change.

[19:59] That's maybe another word for change that Christ brings into our life, is healing. That is what He's doing. He's restoring. He's bringing back. We have this great picture of Peter, and the example of Peter, truth and testimony, which is very significant for us.

Can I just bring it to a conclusion by bringing the challenge of Jesus Christ from this chapter, both to the... I'm dovetailing it together, the way Peter responded to the healing by preaching to the assembled crowd and taking that and applying it to ourselves, bringing it up into the 21st century. And what Peter does, what Christ does through His Word, is to remind us to listen. Listen. That most active engagement around the Word of God that you're responsible for, and I'm responsible for for myself, and you are today for you.

Listen in verse 22, he says, So that's the kind of overarching message of Christ that we are people with open ears that are listening to what Christ is saying to us through His Word.

Listen. And I think there's briefly three very profound, central truths about change. About healing.

[21:34] About the Gospel that comes from this chapter 1. Is that great, deep and profound sense of need. Have you ever been in that situation where you get completely lost?

Maybe it's on the hills and your GPS has gone all wrong with your phone and there's no reception, and you're completely lost and it's quite dangerous. Or maybe you're in the car, or maybe you're visiting from the Netherlands and you're in Edinburgh, and everything is crazy about the city. And you're separated from your friends and you're entirely lost and your battery's dead. And it's a terrible... Sometimes it can't be... it's not that dangerous, but sometimes you can feel hugely isolated and in great danger when that feeling of control and belonging and being in charge has gone and you're just lost.

Well, can you take that and recognize that spiritually that profound sense of need must come into our lives if we are ever to understand the healing power of Jesus Christ.

And Peter brings that great sense of need to the people. He says, you know, powerfully, one of the most remarkable verses or statements in the whole Bible in verse 15, you killed the author of life.

[23 : 06] You killed the author of life. He's instilling within them if they didn't know it, a huge sense of need. He says that you handed him over. He's innocent.

You handed him over to a pilot. You swapped him for a murderer. In other words, you condemned the innocent and you acquitted the guilty.

And he brings that great sense of guilt, that great sense of need into their lives, a profound sense of need. And that, my friends, whether they were actually there or not, some of them would have been, but many of them probably wouldn't be.

But it is the overarching reality of sin in our lives, the paradox. Sin and selfishness and pride, it's the paradox of killing, we're killing the author of life.

If you're not a Christian this morning, or if we're Christians who don't sense any need for change, or who don't really take sin seriously, it's light and flippin' and hey, it's not so bad.

[24 : 11] I'm just like the rest of them. But sin's not a great problem. Then we have lost sight of the fact that we are killing the author of life.

If we try and silence Christ, which they did, or if we try and blame Christ and exonerate ourselves, God, you're bad, you're terrible, I'm the one really who's doing okay.

If we try and do that, if we paradoxically condemn Him and acquit ourselves, then we are silencing the author of life.

We are, in a sense, putting Him to death. If He has no place in your day, no place in your time, no place in your heart, if there's nothing there for you in Christ, and if you have no profound sense of need, you will never come to Him for healing.

Peter, through the power of the Spirit, exposes this great sense of need. I do think we live in days where that's kind of marginalised and mocked a little bit, and the whole idea of guilt and need before God, and our sophisticated life, and our sophisticated ways.

[25 : 29] We don't really deal with guilt. We don't allow this personal quenching of God, silencing of God, condemnation of God in our lives to be something that exposes our great need.

We need to allow the truth of Christ and the reality of sin, and the horror of Calvary, where the innocent was condemned because of our sin, because of what we did, to impact us so that we will see that He has come to heal.

A great sense of, you will never seek Christ unless there is a sense of need, that profound sense of need. That's the first, the second thing then, is a fundamental change of direction.

That is what the truth does for us. If a husband has an affair with a woman that's not his wife, and that is exposed, and he is, for want of a better word, maybe repentant about that, then to say sorry is one thing.

But he knows, and she knows, and those who are around them know there needs to be a whole change of direction. He needs to focus on his wife. He needs to look at her.

[26 : 57] He needs to spend time with her. He changes attitude to her. He needs to have a whole turn around in his attitude to his wife, or if it's the other way around, to her husband.

It can't simply be this acknowledgement of sorrow. There needs to be a new lifestyle. And we see that very clearly, for example, with an alcoholic, don't we?

An alcoholic who recognises that alcohol is an addiction that is taking and destroying their life. It's one thing to say, I'll never drink again.

But you know the life of the alcoholic needs to, a reformed alcoholic needs to change dramatically.

They need not to go to the places that they used to go to. They need to stay away from what is powerful temptation, and they need to fill their lives with other things and recognise sometimes what

lies behind the alcoholism, a fundamental change of direction.

And that's what Peter, and what God reminds us is that the Gospel is in verse 19, he says it very clearly as he did in the previous sermon, Repent therefore, and turn back that your sins may be blotted out.

[28 : 05] And in verse 26, again, we have this reminder that God, having raised up a servant, sent you to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

So there's this great reality that for us, that truth exposes a great, profound sense of need. And as we come to Christ with that need, and as we see the power of the Gospel, then it brings a fundamental change of direction into our lives.

Not just that we remember 23 years ago, six months and five days that I turned my life to Jesus, and nothing's changed. But since that day, I have turned around, and I am facing Jesus.

My mind has been turned, my life has been turned, my thinking, my attitudes. We turned to God, like Corey spoke about that last week, repentance, turning, changing of our mind.

It focuses on Jesus Christ. But also, we turn clearly here, away from wickedness and from sin. And I think that means that we put our spiritual, we roll up our spiritual sleeves.

[29 : 14] Stop blaming God. Stop sitting back as we often do, and just thinking, God can do that. This is our responsibility and the power of the Spirit, that we are to take our lives and be changed.

We are to spend time. Lord, help me today as we pray. Lord, where can I find the wisdom as we search His Word for every responsibility that lies before us?

What are the wicked things you want me to turn from? The selfish ambition? The gossip that is something I love doing? Being judgmental about other Christians? Closing your book?

Never praying? Being greedy? Complaining? Turning rather from not waiting for God in His time, turning from my wife and turning to pornography?

Enjoying pornography even though I'm not married, even though I haven't got a partner? Being cynical? Being filled with hate? The kind of things that we battle and struggle with in our Christian lives at every point.

[30 : 26] Christ is to be the game changer. He's to be the one who transforms who we are. The fruit of the Spirit is not for us an optional extra.

It is the healing power of the Gospel. It's a beautiful phrase in the Bible that says before we die we fall asleep in Jesus. But don't fall asleep in Jesus before we die.

Let's work and serve and know this fundamental change of direction. So that's just it. And very lastly, there's this unimaginable healing, glorious healing. And I hope that that brings us all to the reality of who Jesus is and what He does in verse 26.

He says, you know, He wants to bless us. And in the end, Corey spoke about that last week when he spoke about the benediction. It's the good word. He wants to bless us with healing.

It's the good word that Peter spoke to the man who was healed. Walk. It's a good word of Jesus Christ. In Zephaniah 3, verse 17, I read this in one of my verses.

[31 : 34] This week's beautiful verse isn't it? The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with His love. He's a loud singing. So it's not just the nice quiet word of Jesus.

He sings in praise and adoration of our salvation and what He has done for us. It's like receiving from Him that... I'm not sure if any of us have been in that position.

I certainly haven't of dying of thirst, literally dying of thirst and receiving ice, cold water. It's been amazing.

We're just going to a very added dry place and seeing the difference irrigation makes and the greenery and the fruit and the beauty of all that. That's the pictures we have in the Bible of His blessing.

It involves forgiveness. In verse 19, He speaks about that great forgiveness and your sins will be blotted out. As we confess and recognize Him, it's that the word could be obliterated.

[32 : 40] Our sins are obliterated. The slate is wiped clean. You're guilty this morning. The slate is wiped clean because Jesus Christ has died.

But also, He speaks of not only the slate being wiped clean, but He speaks of times of refreshing. Times. In our Christian lives, refreshment, fruitfulness.

That's what Christ wants for us. It's as we learn from Him. It's as we learn from the times of daily in our Christian life. Daily refreshment as the Spirit reenergizes us.

As we face Him, as we rely on Him, as we look to Him. And then gloriously, and we haven't got time to look at restoration, He speaks about that, the Lord.

Christ has returned to heaven as we've seen, but He will come back and He will restore all things. It's great and incredible hope for us.

[33 : 39] Of which the healing of the cripple is a picture of rest, complete plan Genesis, complete renewal, refreshment, where the whole of creation will be set free, all of us in Christ.

And the creation that groans and labors in the brokenness of a fallen world will be set free, absolute restoration. So we find here this is a great chapter of change.

And it's our only hope. It's our only hope. So your only hope today is in Jesus Christ, that great writer of the New Testament, Luke grabbing us by the shoulders and saying, you know, this is Christ.

Take Him seriously. He loves you and He will change your life, eternally. Let's pray.

Father God, we ask and pray for your help, for your guidance, for your Holy Spirit. We pray that you would change us, that we would understand you, and that we would know the power of the message of the gospel, and that the Spirit would take it and apply it to our hearts and to our consciences today for Jesus' sake.

[34 : 57] Amen.