

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH
PART 5: SIGNS AND WONDERS - ACTS 3-5
Stonebrook Church - Sunday AM - 8/23/20 - Matt Heerema

This morning we are in our fifth week of our walkthrough of the book of Acts. Please open your bibles with me to Acts chapter 3. We'll be covering a fairly large part of scripture today. Chapter 3, about a third of chapter 4, and a bit from chapter 5. There's a lot going on in this section, and we'll be making two passes through here at least to cover some important themes.

This morning, I want to talk about the miracles we see recorded by Luke in the book of Acts.

How to be a New Testament Church

As a church, we try very hard to be a good example of a "New testament church", one that believes and practices as similarly to the beliefs and practices of the early church as can be. With exceptions we'd consider obvious like the ability to use electricity and air conditioning, or the style of clothes and music, things that aren't commanded or prescribed in the scriptures. One way to say it is that we want to be like the first century church, like the Acts church in all the right ways. Operating according to the same theology and principles of all true Christians throughout the ages.

And the book of Acts gives us a glimpse into certain parts of the life of the early church. And one question I'm trying to answer this what should our expectation be with regard to the miracles that are talked about in Acts? How are we supposed to understand the narrative we're given here? What is Luke's purpose in recording these things?

What about signs and wonders and miracles?

It is pretty evident that the kind of signs and wonders that were done by the apostles in the book of Acts aren't a normal part of our daily life here in this church. Would you agree? There are some that think that this is the case because there is something broken with the church these days. Something wrong with the way we are operating or believing or teaching that makes it so we don't have access to the same kind of spiritual power the early church had. Or that maybe God is somehow displeased with our lack of faith and so withholds these miracles.

I'd like to challenge that perspective this morning. And in so doing I hope encourage you in your faith and cause you to act boldly as a Christian who is walking right where God wants you.

And I want to say up front that I am fully aware, the pastors of Stonebrook are fully aware, that this is a divisive topic among churches! And we are so bold as to say we think we understand this issue rightly, and that our practice and teaching on the issue is correct and no we aren't missing something we might otherwise have access to if we believed or acted differently.

I want to say that we believe that boldly but also humbly, willing to learn and grow in this area, and eager to clarify or correct our understanding if we can be shown otherwise from the scriptures. We also recognizing that other true

and faithful Christians believe and practice otherwise. We believe that they are mistaken, but not that they are heretics. And finally we also stand with many many other churches throughout history who have believed and practiced as we do, and thrived in their faith.

One final caveat: this is not going to be a comprehensive sermon on the topic of miracles. This is going to be a sermon on today's text. I want to focus on what Luke's point is. What his purpose for recording these events were, and therefore how we should understand it and what we should do with it. As we do this, we will accurately understand what this passage contributes to the bigger picture of signs and wonders and miracles. My hope is that we'll be equipped to read our bibles accurately and practice our faith boldly.

We're going to read this large section of scripture and then we'll go back and observe what actually is happening and what Luke is actually saying.

Signs and wonders in Acts were a unique occurrence, with a unique purpose.

The headline is this:

The signs and wonders recorded in the book of Acts were a miraculous and unique series of events, performed by God through the apostles and a select few others, with the purpose of showing the legitimacy of the apostles' message: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of God, foretold by all the prophets. So we should turn to him in repentance and faith.

Luke records these signs being performed by God through the apostles, Stephen, Phillip, Paul, and Barnabas, not through every believer. The miracles were not a standalone new part of some power available to Christians. They were signs and signals.

The signs existed for a purpose: to show the legitimacy of the apostle's message and the authority of Jesus. They signaled a massive shift in the way the people of God are to interact with God. Moving from the era of the Law to the era of the Holy Spirit and His church.

Because such a massive shift was occurring, it was as if God was turning up the volume so that people would have the opportunity see and hear clearly and unmistakably, so that they would listen to, understand, and believe the message of the Apostles: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of God, the long-awaited rescuer foretold by the prophets, and that we should all turn to him in repentance and faith.

Let's read the passage and keep an eye out for this message.

THE TEXT

Acts 3:1-4:12 (CSB)

1 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 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. 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!**" 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.

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. 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.

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**, 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. 21 Heaven must receive him until the time of the restoration of all things, which God spoke about through his holy prophets from the beginning. 22 **Moses said:**

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to everything he tells you. 23 And everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be completely cut off from the people.

24 "In addition, **all the prophets who have spoken**, from Samuel and those after him, have also foretold these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors,

saying to Abraham, And all the families of the earth will be blessed through your offspring. 26 God raised up his servant and sent him first to you **to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.**"

4:1 While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, 2 because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening. 4 But **many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**

5 The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem 6 with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. 7 After they had Peter and John stand before them, they began to question them: **"By what power or in what name have you done this?"**

8 Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: 9 If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that **by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—**by him this man is standing here before you healthy.** 11 This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 **There is salvation in no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

Acts 5:12-16 (CSB)

12 Many signs and wonders were being done among the people **through the hands of the apostles.** They were all together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared to join them, but the people spoke well of them. 14 **Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—multitudes of both men and women.** 15 As a result, they would carry the sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 In addition, a multitude came together from the towns surrounding Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE MIRACLES

1. The miracles were not a result of their own power or strong faith/godliness (3:12)
2. The miracles were performed by God's power, and for God's purposes (3:13, 4:10)
3. The miracles were accompanied by an explanation of the fulfillment of prophecy (3:18, 3:22-24, 4:11)
4. The miracles were always accompanied by a statement of the truth of the gospel. (ch 3-4)
5. The miracles were performed only "through the hands of" the apostles, and a select few others, and not all believers. (5:12)
6. The preaching of the gospel resulted in multitudes believing and being added to the church, including from among the pharisees and priesthood. (5:14, 6:7, 15:5)

These miracles were for the purpose of proving the authenticity and truth and authority of the message of the apostles: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of God, promised by Moses and all the prophets, and that everyone should now turn to Jesus in repentance and faith.

APPLICATION FOR US TODAY

So what are we supposed to do with these passages about the miracles? How do we apply this today? A few points:

1. Understand and be encouraged: miraculous signs and wonders are not to be expected with regularity, and **their absence does not mean there is something wrong with the church.**

Even the Apostle Paul's normal mode of ministry did not include signs and wonders:

1 Corinthians 1:22-25 ESV

"Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

2. Be on guard: False teachers will come with accompanying signs and wonders, but with a false message.

Mark 13:22-23 ESV

"False Christs and False prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand."

Many have come with false signs and wonders, leading people astray and beginning cultish religions which are anti-christ (replacing christ)

3. Remember the reason signs were necessary: to signal a shift into a new era of interaction between God and his people. This era was promised beforehand by "all the prophets". We are not in that same situation.

The next promised era that we expect is the return of Christ and the restoration of all things, and the sign to look for there is an unmistakable one: we are explicitly told that it will not involve signs and wonders, and in fact that those things are indicative of imposters, but rather we will see him coming on the clouds with the angels, and it will be as clear as lightning in the sky. There will be no secret about it!

4. Trust the message of the apostles (who wrote the scriptures) - Because the signs and wonders attested to the authority of the apostles, who preached Christ, So we look to the scriptures they wrote for everything we need for life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3-4, 20-21). Just like the early church in Acts 2 "devoted themselves to the apostles teaching."

And most importantly, **5. Never forget the most miraculous sign and wonder of all of them:** the salvation of a sinner. This is one we can look forward to happening with regularity!

Acts 3:16 **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**, 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.

CONCLUSION

One final point, and I think an important one in our day, I think: **the signs and wonders given in the Bible were never about the believers’ comfort or convenience. They were always about the forward advance of the gospel. All the miracles in Acts are here to show us that when a miracle is needed in order for God’s mission to be carried out, one will be given!**

Do be discouraged that our every desire for physical health is not met. That would be too short sighted. Something far better, far more important is offered to all who turn to him in repentance and faith: seasons of refreshing that come from his presence, that he is with us always, the Holy Spirit sealed inside us, leading us, guiding us, comforting us, and most crucially of all, protecting us and preserving us for eternity with him when at last every physical ailment will be healed.

And more than that, more than we can ask or imagine, the things we REALLY need and REALLY would want if we were able to comprehend them, finally ours. We are coheirs with Christ of Glory! That’s the best blessing, the best miracle.

Let us not grumble because we struggle with what the scriptures call our “light and momentary affliction” here, but fix our eyes on the glory that awaits. That’s when we will get something even better than the temporary relief of temporary pain here: we get peace, contentment, a source of joy, hope, and help that lasts through any circumstance this world or our frail flesh can throw at us. What more could we ask?