

Acts 3:1–10 // “The Miracles and the Message” // SENT, #5

Announcement:

"We're praying for Jesse that thousands will come to know him through our church plants overseas. We're praying the same here in RDU as we gear up for ServeRDU. More to come on that later..."

Introduction:

Actors have a way of getting typecast—you kind of know what to expect when you see them in a role.

- Some are known **action heroes**; some are always **buffoons**; some are **wisecracking sidekicks**.
- When **Tom Cruise** stars in a film I know to expect a macho, insecure guy with daddy issues; when **Brad Pitt** stars I know he'll play the role of some mysterious weirdo in a plot I can't quite figure out.
- **Vin Diesel** is never going to be the articulate, witty, romantic type.
- You never hear that the lead role in a certain movie has come down to **two finalists**: Channing Tatum or Kevin James. Tatum only plays Tatum roles, and James plays James roles.
- **Hugh Grant** is never going to play a “man.” **Nicholas Cage** is never going to be anything but “awesome.”

I read an article¹ the other day that explained that the church has been “typecast”. For many people, **the role we play in society** is as an antagonist to progress. We're **morally regressive**; against the progress of science and the development of culture.

- Now, that's **not a new characterization**: from the very beginning the powers that be have tried to paint Jesus' followers as **hateful enemies** of the state, and so forth.

¹ <http://www.qideas.org/blog/the-typecast-church.aspx>

- But I want to show you that **while it is not new**, it's not at all accurate...

We're going to see that by looking at the **first miracle in Acts**.

- This is the **first post-Jesus miracle**, and it involves Peter and John healing a guy.
- **Physical healing appears frequently** throughout Acts—some 14 times, in 12 of 28 chapters.
- Acts 3 is first instance, and some scholars say that **if you understand** this miracle, in a way, you understand them all.
- This miracle shows you **how God feels about suffering** in the world and what he's doing about it, and **what he's saying to us** in that suffering; and it shows us, as the church, **what our mission is in the world**.

So I'm going to walk through this miracle and Peter's explanation of it, and then at the end I'm going to answer several questions about physical healing that I often get asked.

Acts 3:1–11

The miracle went like this:

- **Peter and John** are walking...
- “**Silver and gold** have I none...”
- **Pulled him up** by his hand, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And he began to walk and leap and praise God.
 - No “**crawl before** you walk...”
- Well people were **amazed**; **word spread** and people rushed to the area to see what was happening.
- Peter **stands up** and says...

Acts 3:12–23

[12] “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?”

[13] The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the

God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him... [15] You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

[16] And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

[17] “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers... [19] Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.²¹ Heaven (had to) receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

[22] Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.

[23] And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’

One commentator says that this miracle points 4 different directions:²

4 Directions

1. UPWARD: to God’s authentication of Jesus (v. 15)

- Peter says, 3:15, “*You killed the author of Life, but God raised him from the dead. To this we are witnesses... and his name has made this man strong.*” (3:15)
- Miracles were God’s validation of the apostles.
 - The **writer of Hebrews** says: “*(Our great salvation) was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, [4] God also bearing witness by signs and*

wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit...” (Hebrews 2:3–4 ESV)

- Miracles were **God’s way of saying**, “This is really me.” It was like a **divine signature** that could not be forged.
- If you have **two contradictory opinions** about Jesus, take the one that is validated by miracles.
- About **40 years ago** it became popular to say that a true academic would never posit a miracle as an explanation for some historical or scientific phenomenon.
 - In most places, I would agree.
 - For example, a century ago, as we were just beginning to understand the **basics of chemistry and thermodynamics**, no one could figure out where the sun was getting all of its power. Nothing we knew explained it. So **some scientists** suggested that the sun drew its power directly from God. But today we recognize that the sun's energy output is from nuclear fusion.
 - **Shoving God in wherever there is a gap in knowledge is bad scientific technique.** That attitude will keep us from discovering things God wants us to know about the world. **God made the world** to run according to laws and if we keep pressing we can almost always discover those laws.
 - It’s kind of like a **magician**... if you want to figure out his trick, take off the table that it’s actual magic. There’s always a reason.
- But, **having said that**, there are certain things in history so extraordinary that any reasonable consideration you must conclude they are divine. The **events of Jesus’ life and resurrection** are in that category.
- You say, “Well, but I’m an educated person and I don’t want to believe in miracles.”
 - **If you believe in a God**, you are acknowledging the possibility of miracles.

² Tim Keller, “The First Miracle,” Acts 3:2–8, 13–23

- **The most astounding miracle** is “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*”
- If you believe in God, you have to accept the possibilities of miracles. A God who created the laws of the universe could certainly suspend them.
 - **Little girl**, “How could the fish find Jonah at just the right time... and how could Jonah stay alive in his belly... and how could he know where to spit him out...?” God made it happen. “Of course if you bring God into it...”
 - So you are **either are a committed, avowed atheist**, or you allow the possibility of miracles. Those are the only two categories...
 - Doesn’t mean that’s the way the universe normally works, but God surrounded the ministry of Jesus with miracles, authenticating his message, and there’s really no other explanation for the events besides that.
 - ~~(Now, having said that, the miracles are really there just to point to Jesus. If you’re looking for a solid resting place for your faith, it’s in him. It’s when you encounter him—when you see his character and beauty—that’s when you become really convinced.~~
 - ~~Our faith does not rest on the watertight evidence for miracles; it rests on the revelation of the person of Jesus. Or I’ve heard it said this way, “God did not give us a **watertight argument**; he gave us a watertight person.”)~~
- **So, let me ask you the same thing Peter asked his group.** Have you *listened* to Jesus? [23] And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ You’ve got an opinion about Jesus. God has an opinion of him, too—his verified through miracles and the resurrection. God declared him to be the Lord and the only way of salvation given under heaven. *Are you listening to him?*

So this miracle points upward, to God’s authentication of Jesus...

2. **FORWARD**, to the future restoration (vs. 21)

- Peter (vs. 21) says that this healing is a sign of the coming restoration of all things that God had promised.
 - You see, Jews would have recognized the healing of the lame man as the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:6, “*Then shall the lame man leap like a deer.*”
 - Isaiah explained that God would send a Messiah to purchase the healing of the whole world: “*...By his wounds we are healed.*” (Isa 53:5)
 - Through his work all the pain of the earth will be reversed...

“The lion will lay down with the lamb... and the infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. (and it’s ok) 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.”

“Look around you and see, for all your children will come back to you... they will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.” ((Isaiah 11:6–9; 35:5–7; 49:18, 22)

- That’s the future. So... (and this is important)... **does that mean that from now on anyone who believes in Jesus will be healed?** No, this healing was a “sign.” There were lots of sick, lame people in Jerusalem that day; **Peter healed only that one** It is a sign of the full restoration coming to the future.

- You see, not only did the apostles' miracles point upward, showing God's authentication of their message, they pointed forward, to the kind of restoration that Jesus was going to bring to the whole world.
 - Jesus' **miracles were not simply magic shows** about how powerful he was. If Jesus simply wanted to prove his power, he could have **written his name** in the sky; **lifted up** the Temple; **helped NC State** win a national championship. But he didn't do things like that.
 - Every miracle Jesus and the apostles did was an alleviation of suffering. They pointed to his saving purpose.
 - I've heard it says, "Jesus' miracles did not show off the **naked fact** of his power; they revealed the **redemptive purpose** of his power."
 - He healed **leprosy**; cured **blindness**; stopped **storms**; raised the **dead**
- **These miracles show us that God is no happier** with the world as it is than you and I are.
 - **God did not create the world** with pain, or blindness, or disease or death. That all came through the corruption of sin. **Pain and disease are not natural** to a world now red in tooth and claw; it's foreign.
 - These miracles point us to the world as God created it to be, and as he wants it to be again.
 - Maybe you've heard me say this before: "**Miracles are not a suspension of the natural order, but a return to the natural order. Jesus' healings are the only natural things in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded.**"³
- To those of you in pain, that is your great hope and your sustaining joy. It's temporary.
 - **Joni Eareckson Tada** (paralyzed in a diving accident as a teenager),

- *"At that great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the first thing I think I'll do on resurrected legs is fall to my glorified knees and praise the God of Resurrection and healing, and then I'll stand and dance before him with all my might."*

Do you want that future healing? Don't you know deep down you are made for it—to be in a world without brokenness and pain?

- You must repent toward Jesus, for only in him is that healing found and the only ones who will go into that world are those who have surrendered to him.

Which leads me to...

3. **INWARD: to our soul's need of salvation (3:6)**

- The physical ailments of some point to the heart condition of all.
 - **Some people are physically blind**; but Ephesians says we are all spiritually blind.
 - The physical sickness of our bodies points to the inward sickness of our souls. (*I don't mean that if you're physically sick that there's something specific God is punishing you for.* Simply that physical sickness in general corresponds to the sickness of our souls.)
- **The miracle is a message** about the salvation Jesus can bring to our souls.
 - The lame guy first asks for money. But Peter says (3:6), "*Silver and gold have I none...*" In other words, "What you want from me is good, but what I'm going to give you is much better, much deeper." Instead of giving him money he gave him physical healing. And eventually, in chapter 4, this guy becomes a disciple of Jesus, which is the greatest gift.
- **As bad as suffering is, there's something worse**—being crippled by our sin. And as great as physical healing is, there's something greater—soul salvation.

³ Tim Keller, paraphrasing C. S. Lewis.

- **If Peter had said**, “Well, I don’t have any money, and I can’t physically heal you, but I can tell you that if you trust Jesus your sins are forgiven and you have eternal life.” You might think of that as much less moving, or spectacular?
- **But is it?** Isn’t the salvation of the soul (and the promise of full restoration) greater than a temporary miracle?
- Sure it is. **I’ll prove it to you.** This guy, sitting by the Temple each day, looking at everyone walking in and out, probably thought, “*If I could just walk, I’d never be unhappy again.*” **Ok, is that true?** Just about all of you in here walk, but many of you are unhappy. So walking does not equate happiness. (The guy would have walked for a month and then that would have gotten lame.)
- We all have something that we think if we can just get it, it will satisfy us. But many other people have those very things, and they are not satisfied.
- **We need something more than physical healing; something more than money; something more than great relationships. We need restoration to God.**
 - In fact, I’ll tell you... Physical healing without soul healing is worthless, potentially even harmful. Satan is willing to alleviate your momentary suffering in exchange for your eternal suffering.
- So **I could say to you, similar to what Peter said**, “The ability to physically heal I may not always have, but such as I have—salvation in Jesus Christ; forgiveness of sin; peace, intimacy, friendship with God; an inheritance incorruptible which can never be taken away—that I give to you.” Is that not the greatest of all gifts?
 - **Illus.** Man to me: “There’s nothing worse than being cheated on.” There is. Being the one living in sin disconnected from God. If God did this to teach me to know and walk with him, in eternity, I’ll count all this as a blessing.
 - **(Whatever pain you are going through, the richest of all possessions is to be reconciled to God through Christ.)**

4. **DOWNWARD:** in the direction we are supposed to go in our mission (4:1–4).

- **You think Peter and John rewarded for this miracle?** In the next chapter they are promptly put into prison. **No reward**, no praise, no CNN interview, no Time magazine “Man of the Year” cover story.
- *A little bit bad news from Acts: the miracles in Acts always get the miracle worker in trouble!*
 - That’s **different than other hero** stories, right? When someone in our hero stories gets super powers, their powers typically make them invincible! When God gives you power, it makes you vulnerable. As power comes on you, you start to suffer.
- **In order to relieve this man’s suffering**, the apostles must suffer themselves.
- The same was **true of Jesus’** ministry.
 - Jesus raised **Lazarus** from the dead: “*From that point on they determined to kill him.*” Tim Keller says, “*By taking Lazarus out of the grave, he put himself in.*”
 - When Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood who came up behind him and grabbed his garment, the power “**went out**” from him.
- **(Do you know what we call that? Substitution.)** One voluntarily suffers so that another lives! **Jesus poured out** his life so we could be saved. This guy got to walk; **Peter and John get to go prison because of it.**
- Healing for the world will come as life and power and money and opportunity—**go out** from us.
 - We’re supposed to **pour out our money** and power and opportunity as genuine sacrifice. We **enter into** someone else’s pain, bearing it, and they are healed through it.
 - **Sometimes I hear people** talking about how when they gave God blessed them, and I think “that’s great.” But they make it sound like it’s some guarantee that obedience to God always leads you

to more riches, greater comforts—and I wonder if we forget that God called us to the cross.

- Sometimes our giving leads to deprivation; or trouble; or genuine sacrifice. That should not surprise us.
- A great spiritual truth—that if you'd learn it would explain so much of your life: ***The healing of the world comes through the sacrificial death of the church.***
 - There's **someone you need to forgive**, and it's really going to cost you. But God is going to bring life to others through that sacrificial act of forgiving.
 - **Some sacrifice you need to make**—of money, of time. It's not going to be easy!
- BTW, **it's not always a voluntary sacrificial offering** you make—sometimes you suffer and you're like, *"God, why am I going through this? Have I done something wrong?"* And the answer is, "No, I've got a bigger purpose in this. Your suffering is going to bring people to me. How you suffer is going to show them that you have a joy that goes beyond the pleasures of this life or the pain of the grave! Your suffering is not about your sin but my glory." God's purpose in it is not punitive for you, but redemptive for others.

OK, so that's what this miracle teaches us.

So, using what we've learned in this passage, let me answer several questions I am often asked about healing, and then show you what all this means for our church mission.

Questions:

A. Does God still heal today?

- Yes, there is nothing in the Bible that indicates that he has stopped.
- Does that mean you have to believe every report you get? We've all heard those, right? Let me be real with you: just because I believe in miracles doesn't mean that every miracle story people tell me I believe. I know he heals. But I don't feel like I have to

take on the responsibility to be referee of all of them, and neither should you. So sometimes I just smile and nod.

B. Why does God heal?

1. As an act of love and mercy to the person who's suffering
2. As a validation of his servants
3. As a sign of the coming Kingdom of God
4. As a witness to non-Christians (both as a warning and an invitation!)
5. To motivate Christians to worship.

All are very valid reasons... different healings occur for different purposes, but all are valid.

C. Should healings like the one in Acts 3 be our everyday expectation?

- **Yes and no.** God can do anything, and, as I mentioned before, nothing says that he has stopped. And so I want to just say "yes" and be done with that, but I also want to help you be realistic...
- Let me point out something. **Peter in this story heals on demand.** Didn't pray about it or ask God to do it. He just said, "Be healed."
 - We see **that level of power fading** even through Acts among the apostles.
 - **2 Tim 4:12**, *"Trophimus I have left at Miletus sick."*
- What's happening? Is the little Iron Man thing in their chest wearing down? Has Satan given his people kryptonite?
 - Remember the verse we looked from Hebrews in point 1 above?
 - *"(Our great salvation) was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, [4] God also bearing witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit..."* (Hebrews 2:3-4 ESV)
 - God gave the apostles an unusual endowment of power for a time to authenticate the fact he was speaking to the world through them.

- That doesn't mean he doesn't ever do these things anymore—he most certainly does, and I've experienced some of those things—just that we should not expect them to be *as* regular or normative as they are in Acts because that was, by any definition, a unique time.
- If you see a someone in a wheel chair in the mall don't go up and say, "If Peter did it, I must always be able to do it."
- **God still does it, but the frequency and intensity** with which he did in the first chapters of Acts was to help authenticate the message he was giving through the apostles.

D. Should hope of supernatural healing ever replace normal medical procedures?

- Never! The Bible never says that.
- Luke, the author, was a doctor.
- I pray for both in the hospital! I always pray for...

E. 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.
 - *Way we've said: **Sometimes God glorifies himself by helping sick people get well; sometimes he is glorified when sick people die well.***
- I know people who have given up on God... If we understood the greatness of God's gift to us in Christ, it makes even the worst pain here seem somewhat trifling.
 - Wesley

F. What part of the church's mission should be focused on healing?

All of it. Which brings us back to where we started this message.

We've been typecast as the antagonist to progress. What we should be known for is the healing we bring to our city. Yes, as faithful witnesses we must warn; sometimes we must preach unpopular messages, but that should be done in the midst of massive outpourings of love and healing!

Our community should say about us, "We don't believe what those crazy people at the Summit believe, but thank God they're here, because if not, we'd have to raise our taxes!"

This article I was reading said that the church should be known as the place where healing for every place the community is broken can found. We should be able to say to our community:

- *Need counseling? We'll help.*
- *Need job training? We'll help.*
- *Need ESL classes? We'll help.*
- *Need a bag of groceries? We'll help.*
- *Need a safe place? We'll help.*
- *Need parenting insights? We'll help.*
- *Need rehabilitation? We'll help.*
- *Need medical care? We'll help.*
- *Need community and friendship? We'll help.*
- *Have questions and doubts about faith? We'll help.*
- *Have an addiction? We'll help.*
- *Have a desire for a fresh start? We'll help.*
- *Have a vision to help others? We'll help.*

N.T. Wright, in *Surprised by Hope*, says that evangelism "will flourish best when the church, (simultaneous to proclaiming the message), gives itself to works of mercy and beauty (pointing to the love and justice of God and highlighting the glory of creation and the glory of that creation yet to be revealed...)"

Our church has given itself, and we do every year, to our community. Culminate in our **SERVERDU** week...

- Details
 - October 10–12
 - Take a day off
 - ServeRDU.com
 - Small groups and families together
 - All of these projects are connected to an ongoing ministry of the church to HOPUD
 - Help us plan well...!
- Story:
 - Cary (school that opened up to another church because of us).
 - EK Powe (tears: there must be a higher power. mentors)
 - We get calls all the time from hospitals and foster care...

That's what we do!

Conclusion:

Let me close by saying this...

Peter's main message in this miracle was "repent." *You've been wrong about Jesus.* You **haven't paid attention** to him. You've written him off as someone you'll get to later when you have time.

God says: Jesus died to rescue you, to save you, and I raised him from the dead. He's the Lord. Without him you are lost. **You can't put him off.** He was **raised in power** to put you right again and start your life in a way for his purposes, to be used in his mission of world healing.

Repent! Change your heart toward Jesus. Listen to the message from heaven warning you to repent and come home to God. *Have you listened?*

Campus pastors will come and lead communion