

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LAME MAN HEALED

(Acts 3:1-15)

OUTLINE

Facts Concerning the miracle (1-9)

1. The significance of miracles.

Miracles are a proof in the natural world of that which Christ and the disciples taught in the spiritual world. They are interwoven with the Gospel. They are essential to it.

2. A gift better than gold (6).

Health is better than money. Faith, a gift of God, is still more valuable.

3. The necessity of ascribing all honor to Christ (12, 16).

4. The value of faithfulness in witnessing (13-15).

A. Peter pointed out their sins.

B. Peter gave them a full Gospel.

The last chapter told of the first revival, this of the first miracle in the Apostolic church. Other signs and wonders were performed by the the apostles. This is the first one of which we have a record. It is recorded, we suppose, because it was performed in the temple and because the consequences were far reaching. The outcome was that opposition arose, led by the Sadducees, who were the rationalists of their day. They objected especially to the teaching of the resurrection.

Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the hour of prayer. This followed the offering of the sacrifice which occurred, according to our method of reckoning time, at three in the afternoon. As they passed along they came to a cripple who had been placed at the door of the temple which was called Beautiful.

He was taken there daily in order that he might beg for money of those who passed by. We are told that such a scene is still common at the entrance of many an oriental church or mosque. This man had been a cripple from infancy and was at this time more than forty years of age. **“And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”** (3:4-6). Peter took him by the right hand and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. **“And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God”** (3:8). The people knew him and were filled with wonder and amazement. They ran together into the porch that is called Solomon’s greatly wondering.

This, in substance, is the record of the miracle. There are a number of lessons which are apparent as a result of the study of the miracle and the address of Peter which followed.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MIRACLES

Since this is the first miracle in this Book it is worthwhile to consider, not only this miracle, but the larger subject of the place of miracles in the divine record.

That the cure of this cripple was a miracle there can be no doubt. The man was well known; he had been a cripple from birth; he had remained a helpless cripple for over forty years. He was cured in the sight of many witnesses. Those who witnessed it and inquired into the matter, even the enemies of the apostles, admitted that it was a miracle. No physician could cure him. The cure had been produced by the direct agency of God without usually secondary causes and effects.

It has been frequently asserted that miracles cannot be true because they are not consistent with the uniform laws of nature. Others declare that the miracles are of little importance; that they are no aid to faith, but that the Gospel can stand without them.

To those who admit the infinite power of God there is no difficulty about the possibility of miracles. God the Author of nature and of nature’s laws can counteract them just as easily as He could make them. A man who makes a machine can control it. He can start and stop it at pleasure. A man may fail in the control of a machine but God does not fail in the control of nature. It is as easy for me to believe that God can heal a crippled man as it is to believe that a mechanic can repair a broken automobile. All nature is understood and controlled by God.

To say that the Gospel can stand as well without the miracles is a shallow view; it is impossible. The Gospel cannot stand without the miracles. The miracles are a part of the record of the Gospel. If they are not true the Gospel is not true. If they are not true the character of Jesus is impeached. He claimed to perform miracles. In them He gave evidence of His Deity and of His power to forgive sins. Take away the miracles of the incarnation and of the resurrection and what have you left of the truth? If these miracles are not true our faith is vain and our preaching is vain.

What is the point in saying that the Gospel is its own witness? That if doctrines are true they will bear witness to their truth? One might as well say that it is of no use to bring evidence to show that a man charged with burglary is innocent, if he is innocent it will be apparent. He may be innocent but how are men to know without evidence? The man's character may testify to his innocence, but other evidence is of great value. There is internal evidence to show that the Gospel is true, and this is exceedingly important. But the external evidence was necessary at first, and is still necessary as part of the proof which establishes the Gospel. The Gospel is a spiritual message. We cannot see or discern the action of spirits. Evidence in the sphere of human life, among things which men could see and know, was given in order to assure us that Jesus was the true Messiah who came to, and who did, introduce a new order and who had power to fulfill the old order. Supernatural facts, within the sphere of our observation, prove that those who performed them were men of God and spoke for God. Miracles do not make doctrines true but they confirm our faith in their truth. They were of special value in the days of the apostles when the Gospel was being first promulgated. A conscientious Jew would desire abundant evidence before he would cease to offer sacrifices and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Their evidence is transmitted to us, therefore we do not need new miracles today.

It was because the Gospel was a supernatural message; it was because the Holy Spirit opened men's hearts to receive it, that it made progress against the culture of Greece and Rome. It is impossible to account for its reception in the midst of idolatry and its transforming power on merely natural grounds. If Jesus had not been a supernatural man and had not been able to do supernatural things His effort would have failed just as that of Theudas and his followers. The change in Peter, as we see him at this time and compare him with what he was before Jesus was crucified, cannot be accounted for if we eliminate the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost. The evidence is abundant, undeniable and invaluable that Christ was able to work miracles in men and through men.

A GIFT BETTER THAN GOLD

Peter gave to the cripple a gift more valuable than money. **“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”** (3:6). Peter did not mean to intimate to the man who asked for alms that he had something less important to give him than money. “What” he had was more important than gold and could not be purchased with gold.

Peter could not confer upon the man, faith, but he could show him the work of faith. He could show him the power of faith; what faith could do for him. He could thus awaken in the man the knowledge of the greatness, the love and the power of Christ. He could give him such evidence that the poor man would believe for himself. That is the best that any one can do for another. Even if the man had not exercised faith for himself Peter's promise would have been true. The blessing of health was of far more value to the cripple than money. Many a man who has a fortune and who has lost his health would give it if he might regain health. Many do spend a fortune in the effort to regain health. Charity is of value, but the end of Christian charity is of greater value. The object of the church is not to minister to the body. It does minister to the needy, but when it does it according to the command of Christ, it ministers in His name and for His honor.

To relieve the body of want is something, but a far greater thing is to demonstrate the love of Christ so that men may want to love Him. Even a cup of cold water is to be given in the name of a disciple. It is to be done in such a way that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

A man who was a vagrant of criminal habits was seated one night in gloom and misery in an alley of a city when a missionary came along and handed him a little tract. The poor fellow tore it in pieces and said with an oath: "If you want to help me give me your coat. You must see that I am freezing." Then the missionary, who was himself thinly clad, took off his own coat and gave it to him.

This act of kindness almost broke the man's heart. Though he was then deep in iniquity and far from God, he was wonderfully saved. It was not merely charity that saved him, but it was charity by a disciple and in the name of Christ.

The mind of the average man is set on that which is dazzling to the eye or attractive to the senses. Men seek wealth, prominence, honor or pleasure rather than Jesus Christ. The best gift for all men is itself a gift from God, it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

ALL HONOR TO CHRIST

Peter realized the necessity of ascribing all honor to Christ. When the people came running in amazement and saw the healed man holding to Peter and John, we suppose in an ecstasy of joy and praise, Peter said: "**And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?**" (3:12). God has glorified Jesus in this act: "**And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all**" (3:16).

Piety or godliness will not give miraculous power. Peter would not accept any honor which belonged to Christ, nor should we. The missionary does hard work. He is successful in building up a large mission. Men often give the man who is sent as the missionary great credit. But if the professed converts are Christ's own children, men added by the Lord, the results are not due to the power or energy of the missionary but to the Spirit of God working in the hearts. The worker is but an unprofitable servant, even after he has done his best.

The book by A.E. Glover, entitled, "*A Thousand Miles of Miracles in China,*" is not a book of miracles, but of wonders wrought by God on behalf of His missionary servants in protecting and delivering them during the Boxer uprising. God gave them marvelous protection, not merely for their own sakes, but for His glory. If they had not trusted Him and been willing to ascribe the honor to Him He would not have saved them as He did. They were delivered by faith. They were delivered by God's providence when all human aid seemed to be far out of reach. God rules the hearts of men, even of the heathen. For all that God has done for us, we should like the cripple when healed, rejoice and praise His Name.

When Leonardo da Vinci had finished his well-known picture of the Last Supper, which still adorns the wall of a convent in the city of Milan, it is said that he induced a friend to inspect it and express his judgment concerning it. His friend, when he had looked at it exclaimed, "Exquisite! That wine-cup seems to stand out from the table as solid glittering silver." When the artist heard that he took a brush and drew it over the cup, saying: "I meant that the figure of Christ should first and mainly attract the observer's eye, and whatever diverts attention from Him must be blotted out."

The person and power of Christ should stand out before us and in our testimony as He did before Peter and John. The glory that is due to Him should not be taken by another. Nebuchadnezzar tried it, and his demented history stands as a warning to us. Herod tried it, and his miserable end warns all future generations against assuming the honor which belongs to God.

FAITHFULNESS IN WITNESSING

The value of faithfulness in witnessing is taught by the manner in which Peter spoke to these people. Peter was a different man from what he had been a few weeks before. Then he denied Jesus, now he is courageous. He said: "**The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses**" (2:13-15).

1. He pointed out their sins. God - not another god, but the God of our fathers - has glorified Jesus whom you have killed. This is none other than the Servant of the Lord spoken of in Isaiah. He is the Holy and Righteous One. He is the Prince, the Author of life. Even Pilate, the Roman governor, could find no fault in Him and would have let Him go, but you demanded the release of a murderer in place of the Son of God. We are witnesses of His life, of His power and of His resurrection and know that He is truly the Christ. He is the Messiah for whom we have been looking, the Holy One foretold by all the prophets.

It seems like a very simple and easy matter, as we look at it from this distance, to speak thus of Christ and to point out to men their sin in crucifying the Lord of Glory. It was not easy, and it was not done without great courage. We shall see, a little later, that some who heard Peter were greatly angered by his plain talk. Peter knew that plain talk was necessary in order that they might see their sins. They would see nothing of which to repent unless they first knew their sins. If the sins were shown in their real blackness they would see the greater need of earnest repentance.

Peter wounded, but not as an enemy, his wounds were those of a friend. The surgeon applies the knife, he causes intense pain, but he does it that he may heal. Peter wanted to bring these people to exercise faith in the Great Healer. His heart was overflowing with love for them. He knew Jesus, not only as a friend, but as a Saviour and he hoped that they might also know Him as their Saviour.

It takes courage to point out men's sins to them. The sinner does not like to be told of his evil deeds. But the messenger of God is not doing his duty unless he does speak plainly to men. I remember hearing Robert E. Speer, when speaking to an audience of young men, say: "I have played football and I know the courage it takes to go into a football line. But I want to tell you, men, it doesn't take half the courage to go into a football line that it does to stand up before men and tell them of their faults." The prophet placed a serious responsibility upon God's messengers when he told them that if they did not warn men of their sins, their blood would be required at their hand.

2. He gave them a full Gospel. He told them that the resurrection was an undeniable fact. They could not kill the Prince, or Author of life. They were witnesses to the resurrection. They should believe the prophets. They should believe the testimony of competent witnesses. We think little of preaching the resurrection of Christ today, but that doctrine was bitterly opposed by multitudes of men in that day, particularly by the Sadducees, who were then in power.

The world is suffering for lack of faithfulness on the part of God's messengers today. It is natural to court favor. The apostles might have done this, they had a splendid opportunity so to do. They did not stand with open ears to listen to the plaudits of the people. They spoke plainly, pointed out their sins and told them the whole Gospel which they must accept if they were to be followers of the Lord Jesus.

To be always faithful and never insulting is not an easy matter. It requires one to be as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove. A friend who will point out your wrong doings is your best friend. You may like the man who flatters you but he is not your truest friend. The minister who flatters may be more popular with men but he is not more popular with God. He is not faithful to the people to whom he ministers. The people in olden times wanted the prophets to prophecy smooth words. Some of the prophets acceded to their desires, but the true prophets would not yield. They are the men whom we honor as we look back upon history. They were the true friends of the church and of the nation.

QUESTIONS **(Acts 3:1-15)**

1. Are there other miracles recorded before this in the Apostolic Church?
2. What was the result of the miracle on the community?
3. Who were the leaders of the opposition?
4. For what did the Sadducees stand?
5. Why were they particularly opposed to Peter's teaching (v. 15)?
6. What was the condition of the lame man which made this miracle particularly impressive?
7. How long had he been in this condition (4:22)?
8. What does the poor cripple usually request?
9. What is better than money for such a man?
10. By whose power were miracles performed?
11. In what way and to whom did the lame man show his gratitude?
12. Can the Gospel stand without the miracles?
13. What is defective about the argument, the Gospel is its own witness?

14. Can the Deity of Christ stand without the miracles of the incarnation and the resurrection?
15. If we accept the fact of the infinite power of God do we have any trouble believing in miracles?
16. What is the ultimate object of Christian charity?
17. What in this record shows that Peter believed in warning men of their sins as well as pointing them to Christ?
18. Are witnesses for Christ usually as faithful as Peter?
19. What is the result of faithful witnessing as regards popularity today?
20. Name three doctrinal facts which Peter affirmed concerning Christ?

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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