

A sign of what's to come

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[0 : 00] Well, it's true to say that the human race has always longed for a better world, because there's always been a realization that there is something wrong with this world, where we have this innate sense that the world is not what it could be or what it should be.

And so we've got this desire within us for all wrongs to be dealt with and for things to be put right. And this is captured, I think, in one of America's most historic speeches, one of its most iconic speeches, Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech.

And it was delivered in 1963. It was one of the defining moments of the civil rights movement. I have a dream, he said, that one day I have a dream. I have a dream.

King dreamt of a better world and he spoke of freedom and justice and equality and hope.

And of course, who would argue against any of this? And yet, despite this longing for a better world, at every stage, the human race has failed to deliver.

[1 : 10] Just look at where we stand in world history today. There's a war in Israel-Gaza. There's a continuing war in Ukraine. There's suffering and death for those who are directly involved in these wars.

And yet, there's also so much tension and so much hatred from those indirectly involved as we watch on from a distance. And so while we do all want a better world, we are painfully aware that as human beings, we are not able to bring one about.

And I mention this because Christianity does, in fact, promise a better world. But it's not just a dream. It is going to happen. It's a certainty. How do we know this?

Well, we get a glimpse of this in our Bible reading from Acts chapter 3 this afternoon. Because as we look at the story of a lame beggar and his healing, it is, in fact, a sign of what's to come.

A sign that points to something far greater, far bigger, far better, because it has a significance not just for the man at the time, but for the world.

[2 : 23] Because through this sign, we see who Jesus is, we see what Jesus has done, and we see how Jesus will bring about a better world.

And that's why verse 21 speaks of a coming time when everything will be restored. All things will be restored. Because Christianity is not just the good news that Jesus restores individual lives like yours and like mine.

It is also the good news that Jesus will restore this broken world. He is going to restore everything.

So this afternoon, we're going to look at two simple points following the flow of the passage.

First of all, the sign, verse 1 to 10. And then secondly, the significance in verse 11 to 26. So first of all, the sign. The healing of this lame beggar is a sign.

That's what it's called in chapter 4, verse 16. A notable sign. So it's not simply a miracle. It is a sign. And when you see a sign when you're driving, maybe to Edinburgh, or even better, to Aberdeen, you see the sign.

[3 : 31] The sign is one thing, but the destination is another. And when you get to the destination, it is far better than just a piece of metal by the roadside. And this sign here is one of many signs performed by the apostles in the book of Acts.

And so Luke is emphasizing that all of this, this sign, and all that's happening here takes place at the temple. And I think it's significant that Luke mentions in verses 1 to 10, six times he uses the word temple.

And more specifically, the healing of the man took place at the gate called Beautiful. And what happens here is indeed a beautiful thing.

And the lame man, of course, was at this gate, and he was carried there every day to beg. And we're told that he was lame from birth. Later on, chapter 4, verse 22, we're told that he was over 40

years old, so still young.

And so this is a picture of total desperation and utter helplessness. This man with a congenital disability had to be carried everywhere.

[4 : 42] And he spent his life basically begging outside the temple, hoping that all these religious people who flowed past him every single day would show him mercy.

And that was his existence. That's what he had to do in order to just survive. And yet when Peter and John make their way to the temple, this man gets far more than he expected because he asked them for money, but he ended up being able to walk.

Did you see that? Verse 6, Peter said to him, silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.

And then Peter took his hand and lifted him up. So his limbs that had never been used were instantly restored.

And he was up on his feet. We're told he's able to walk. Not only that, we're told he is jumping for joy. So no physio was needed to strengthen his feet and his ankles because we're told later, verse 16, that he was completely healed.

[5 : 50] He was a picture of perfect health. Jesus had healed him. And he was healed. And Luke, the author of Acts, he would know because he's a doctor.

And that's probably why, as doctors do, they go into all the medical details of somebody's condition. And that's what Luke does here. He's very specific in the details he mentions. And in fact, he mentions one detail twice.

He repeats the man's jumping, or depending on your translation, his leaping. He says that twice. Now, why would he draw attention to the man's jumping or leaping? Well, it's because this is a sign, a sign that points beyond just the miracle itself.

Because the language that's picked up on here echoes what's said in the prophet Isaiah. So those words in our call to worship from Isaiah chapter 35 are an echo, a reminder of what is going on here.

Just listen to Isaiah's words as Isaiah speaks of the saving acts of God promised for the last days. We read that, then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.

[7 : 05] Then later on in Isaiah chapter 35, we read, they will enter Zion with singing everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

And what's happening to this man? The lame man is leaping like a deer. He's singing praises to God. He's glad. He's full of joy. And so this prophecy in Isaiah anticipates the time when all of creation will be restored.

And it's what we catch a glimpse in in the healing of this lame man because it is a sign of what is to come. It's a preview of the main event, if you like, pointing to something far bigger and far better.

And the man is healed in the name of Jesus, really showing that Jesus is continuing to do his work. Jesus has ascended into heaven, but he does his work through his spirit and the lives of his apostles on earth.

And so the sign is pointing to Jesus as the one who not only restores this man's broken life, makes him walk, but who will restore this broken world.

[8 : 17] And that's what Peter goes on to explain. But before we get to that, some might have questions about healing today and for different reasons. So firstly, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you might just be skeptical when it comes to reading or hearing about miracles in the Bible.

Thinking that, well, we are modern, we are secular, we are rational people, and so we can't really accept miracles today, can we? And so you might have some doubts when you come and read a text like this.

Let me just address this for a moment. You need to remember when we look at the New Testament, that we're actually reading eyewitness accounts. So what we've got here are historical records of what actually took place, most of which was written down within the lifetimes of the people who saw and were around and involved in these events.

And you'll notice that in the Gospels and in the New Testament, there are so many details. Times are mentioned, people and their names are mentioned, specific places are mentioned.

And so the earliest readers could essentially fact check that what was said in these documents was actually true or not. And so there is no way that a story of a man in his 40s who was lame from birth,

who sat outside the temple in Jerusalem every day begging and was instantly healed, able to walk, able to jump, able to run, and that story would never have gotten off the ground if it wasn't true.

[9 : 57] People were around, would have said, there was no guy outside the temple who couldn't walk. Yeah, I never saw him. I went to the temple every single day and there was no man there. But the details speak for themselves.

And also, the claim is that Jesus healed this man. And so it should focus our attention not just on the man, but on Jesus. Because if the even greater claim is that Jesus died on a cross and he rose to life again, then it's hardly surprising that the risen Lord Jesus, who came back from the dead, could help this man walk.

But secondly, you might be wondering, as a follower of Jesus this time, whether this healing here in Acts means that we should expect similar kinds of healings today.

And that's a great question. I mean, who wouldn't want to see people healed like this man? It would be such a help to our witness as a church. Just imagine if churches could heal people on demand. Well, just think for a moment what Peter and John didn't do in this passage. They did not go around healing everybody and then decide somehow to start a hospital where people could come and then be healed.

[11 : 17] That wasn't their job. Their job was not to go around healing people, although Jesus did use them to heal people, which is fantastic. But that wasn't their mission.

And that, in a sense, is why everybody doesn't get healed today. As much as we'd love for that to happen. And as much as we believe that God can heal anyone and God can do whatever God wants to do because he's God.

And yet we can't expect this to be the norm. Well, why? Because this world is broken. And there is a far deeper problem in this world than something like this man's inability to walk.

And so healing miracles don't even scratch the surface when it comes to dealing with this deeper problem. Because the ultimate problem in our world is sin. That's what the Bible tells us.

Sin is the cause of everything that spoils this world and spoils our lives. Sin is the reason why this man was lame from birth.

[12 : 26] And why we have all kinds of deformities, diseases, disasters, destruction, decay, and even death itself. This world is not what God intended it to be.

And that's why there is so much pain and suffering and evil and injustice. It is a consequence of the curse of sin on creation, on the perfect world that God made.

And so this world is never going to be a better place until what corrupts and damages it is destroyed. There needs to be a reversal of sin's curse.

And that's what's at the heart of this sign. Because the healing of the lame beggar isn't an end in itself. It authenticated the ministry and the message of the apostles, the message about Jesus.

But it was a sign that pointed away from itself to something greater. And so it gives us a glimpse that in Jesus God has begun the process of restoring everything that sin has broken.

[13 : 36] And so let's look at how Peter shows the significance of this sign. So first of all there's the sign. Secondly, there's the significance in verse 11 to 26. And there is a huge significance to this sign as Peter goes on to explain.

Because it is a sign that points to Jesus and a sign that points to the future. Which means it's also a sign that requires action in the present.

And so just as Pentecost led to a sermon by Peter about Jesus and the need to repent, so the healing of the lame beggar leads to another sermon by Peter about Jesus and the need to repent.

And so while all the people were amazed at the lame man walking, what does Peter do? He preaches about Jesus. Because it wasn't Peter and John who made the lame man walk again, Jesus did.

And that's why Peter pulls together various Old Testament references and allusions to show his audience that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. I wonder if you saw in Peter's sermon just how packed full it is of different titles for Jesus.

[14 : 49] And so he begins by telling these devout Jews that God has glorified his servant Jesus. Verse 13, he says that Jesus is the holy and righteous one.

Verse 14, Jesus is the author of life. Verse 15, Jesus is the Messiah. Verse 18, verse 20, Jesus is the prophet like Moses. Verse 22, and Jesus is the offspring of Abraham.

Verse 25, Peter is using all of these titles to show how Jesus fulfills everything that God has promised through the prophets in the Old Testament scriptures.

And so he wants to point out to his listeners that Jesus, the one who was crucified, isn't who they thought he was. Because while God, we read, glorified his servant Jesus, Peter says that his fellow Israelites killed Jesus.

Verse 13, you handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate. And then even more starkly, verse 15, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

[15 : 59] And so these people, these Jews, did not realize the true identity of Jesus. Not just that they missed seeing who Jesus is, it's that they killed their Messiah, the one their scriptures promised, the one they were waiting for.

And that's why this miracle at the temple, their place of worship, is a sign that points them to Jesus. Because the fact that Jesus healed the man is really the centerpiece of Peter's sermon there in verse 16.

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and who and know was made strong. It is Jesus, in Jesus' name, that, sorry, it is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

So the name of Jesus speaks of all that Jesus is. It was Jesus' power and authority that completely healed the man. And that's why the man went straight to the temple praising God because he knew that Jesus had healed him.

And so the sign is significant because it points to the person and work of Jesus. And that's what Peter expands upon as he calls for a response to his hearers there in verse 17 to 26.

[17 : 21] Verse 17 says, Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders, but this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

So although they acted in ignorance and they killed God's Messiah, he says it was part of God's plan for Jesus, the Messiah, to suffer and die.

And that's why Peter urges his listeners to repent because there's hope for them. Verse 19, Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out at times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Now that word repent comes up often in Acts and it means to turn that points to an even more astounding reality. The reality that through Jesus the complete restoration of everything is coming. And so this healing shows in a graphic form what the death and resurrection of Jesus means for the whole cosmos, the whole of creation. So it's not simply a random healing in one place at one time.

[18 : 35] It is a restorative sign that points to what is going to happen everywhere at the end of time. It's saying that one day everything will be restored.

It is not a promise of complete restoration now but it is saying one day that restoration and that renewal will come.

So God is moving history forwards and onwards to when all deformity, all disease, all disaster, all destruction, all decay, all death will be gone forever.

and there will be ultimate healing and ultimate restoration. All things will be made new because all sin will be dealt with and God is promising to renew and restore the creation to what it should be.

And isn't that why the message of Jesus is such good news? Because it tells us that this world which we know is not right or good and we want to be better, Christianity says that the suffering, the pain, the decay and the death of this world aren't the end of the story.

[19 : 55] Because what we get here is a foretaste of what is coming in the new creation. The restoration, the renewal of this man's legs, of his life is pointing to the renewal and the restoration of all things.

If you've read *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien, you'll know that in the final volume, *The Return of the King*, the hobbit, Sam Ganji, thought everything was lost but he wakes up and he discovers that all of his friends are around him and he sees Gandalf, the great wizard and he cries out.

He says, Gandalf, I thought you were dead but then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?

A great shadow has departed, said Gandalf. And so can you see what this passage is saying to us? It's saying that because of Jesus, the answer is yes, everything sad is going to come untrue.

And the great shadow that is cast over our world right now because of sin will ultimately depart for good when Jesus comes again.

[21 : 11] And so in this remarkable way, God is going to right all wrongs. He is going to restore everything. And we can be sure of this when we look back and see through the death and resurrection of Jesus and incidents like the healing of this man that God is working everything out.

He's restoring and renewing. And so Jesus, God's Messiah, the Holy and Righteous One, came to live on this earth, to live the perfect life in our place.

And then he suffered and died in our place so that we can be forgiven. And he did this to destroy sin, which is the problem, without destroying us.

And he is the author of life, the one whom God raised from the dead. And so when we repent by turning from our sin and turning to God in faith, then we receive this everlasting life, everlasting life so that we are fit for the new creation that is coming, so that we can be part of the perfect world, the world we all want, paradise.

paradise. And atheism, and secularism, and humanism, and in fact, any other ism, can't promise, let alone deliver, on the world we all want.

[22 : 41] And so even if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian believer, then surely you've got to wish that Christianity is true. Because there is the greatest hope for our world and for our lives.

Every other worldview leaves us in hopelessness and despair. Basically telling us that this world appeared from nowhere, it is going nowhere, and so it means nothing.

What kind of good news is that for getting up in the morning and getting on with your life? Not at all.

This passage is saying only Jesus can transform our lives for this world and for the better.

And that's why Christianity is good news. It's the news that our world needs because God is at work restoring individual lives like yours and mine right now, and one day he will restore everything.

And so what happens in the meantime between now in this broken world and then when the world will be restored? Well, Peter tells us in his sermon, his urgent call is to repent.

[23 : 46] And so the question is, well, have you done that yet? Peter says that Jesus is God's great prophet spoken of by Moses. And what Moses said when this prophet comes, Moses said, make sure you listen to him.

And Peter says, he has come and his name is Jesus. So listen to him. And so if you don't listen to Jesus, then you put yourself in great danger by cutting yourself off from God's people and from God's blessing.

That's what Peter is saying here. Peter says that Jesus came from the family of Abraham, verse 24 and 25. And remember what God promised Abraham, that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring, through his family.

And it is through Jesus that the ultimate blessing comes to us and to our world. And that's why we must turn from our sin and repentance and turn with faith in Jesus.

Because if we don't, what we do is we write ourselves out of God's great story. And it's a story where we will live happily ever after.

[25 : 03] And you don't want to cut yourself out of that story with such a happy ending. And so the call is to repent of your sin and turn to God.

And I don't know what you have done. You may be full of guilt and shame because of the way you've lived and the things you've done. But whatever you've done, the promise here is that your sins, Peter says, will be wiped out, completely wiped out.

And you will know refreshment from the Lord. Isn't that wonderful? And if you have already repented of your sin and turned to God, how should you live?

Well, trust in God and wait for God to keep his promise. Hold on to him. Keep your faith in Jesus. even though this life is and will continue to be difficult. And again, I don't know what you're coping with right now.

[26 : 08] Perhaps it's a painful body or an anxious mind or a broken or difficult relationship. Keep trusting in God because this sin-sick world full of pain and full of suffering will come to an end.

and God promises to restore and renew all things. And the healing of the lame beggar points us to that reality.

And so let's enjoy the restoration of our broken relationship with God through Jesus right now. Let's enjoy it and let's urge those without hope to turn to God and to find refreshment, to find that soul-satisfying life.

that comes through knowing Jesus and knowing that he has everything in control. And as we enjoy this life, let's look forward together to the world we all want. God promises it's coming and it's going to be amazing. mother in her and