

The Restoration of All Things

Acts 3:1-26

I want to welcome you this morning to Summit Christian Fellowship. If you don't have a Bible with you this morning just put your hand up and one of the ushers will bring you a Bible that you can follow along with.

Wednesday of this past week I worked a job with Dave R. and we were out in Union, WA. Anyway, we were driving back from the job and of course we were coming along 16 and as we got close to the I-5 interchange things slowed to a crawl. Oh great, stuck in traffic. Anyway, we slowly move along and lo and behold there's been a four or five car rear ender. Well, I guess that area sort of from the Tacoma dome down past the Emerald Queen is a bad area for these kind of accidents and I used to think it was just the high volume traffic, but I figured out that not it. You know what it is? Have you seen the billboards down there? I mean one after another you have the Tacoma Dome ads, then what's playing at the Emerald Queen, then two or three other video billboards along there. So I'm sure these people were driving along, paying attention then glanced up at the board - "What!? Randy Travis at the EQC? Hold on what's the date on that? Crash!"

Signs, of course, are meant to draw our attention elsewhere. I'm sure Stan can tell you more than I can about signs, but there is an entire science behind sign design. Signs aren't meant to draw attention to themselves, they point us in a direction.

This passage that we're looking at this morning is all about a sign followed by a sermon. And this is actually a pattern we're going to see throughout the book of Acts. We can look back in Chapter 2 and see it. A miracle happens - tongues of fire rest on the disciples and we see them declaring the praises of God in all these languages - and soon after a message is preached telling us what the miracle points to.

As we see this sign here in Acts 3, and the other signs throughout the book of Acts, if we only look at the sign not what it is pointing to we'll end up crashing. This morning I want to give you a paradigm, a framework, by which to understand not only what this particular miracle is about, but on an even broader scale, for us to see what it is that God is doing in this world and what he wants to do through his people. We're going to look at Peter's message, especially at what he says in vv. 19-21 and see four directions this miracle is pointing us. This sign - this healing of a man born lame - points us backward and forward, it points us upward, and it points us outward. But first let's take a quick look back at this story:

Story Context

- Early Christians as a Jewish sect.
- Beggars in China
- John and Peter know this guy, so does everyone else
- Crowd is amazed x3 words

Where does this sign point us?

1. The miracle points us **backward and forward**.

*Actually, we could say that it points us forward **by** pointing us backward.*

As Peter addresses this crowd that has gathered in Solomon's collonade, as he explains to them what is happening, what they have seen, and he is constantly pointing them backward to the Jewish scriptures - to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - to Moses and Samuel and the prophets.

But I want us to begin by going back even farther than Peter does in his sermon just for a moment. I want us to go all the way back to the beginning. Why was this man born lame? On a broader scale, I'm asking this huge question of why it is that we have suffering in our world? How is it that just this week we've had tornadoes destroy towns and bridges collapse into rivers? We look around us in our own lives and in the newspaper and on the internet and you don't have to be a Christian to see that this world is broken. That is something at its very core that is wrong with our world. Things are not the way they are supposed to be. William Butler Yeats, the well-know Irish poet, who was far from a Christian, wrote in his famous poem *The Second Coming*:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Things fall apart. What Yeats was saying without even recognizing it is that we live in a world broken by sin. And I don't just means sins, just small moral failures. I mean that at the core of the world there is a problem deeper than any of us could imagine. When man disobeyed God in the garden, when we turned our back on our creator, our relationship with God was utterly broken. And that brokenness was part of the curse that brought brokenness in every other relationship we know. Brokenness in our relationships with each other - we see war and greed and divorce and racism and oppression - brokenness in our relationship with self - mental illness, depression - and brokenness in our relationship to creation - our bodies break down, cancer and disease cause sickness and death. The backstory on the forty plus years of suffering this lame man has lived is a broken world. Things fall apart.

But back to Peter's sermon. Peter is reminding his listeners, these Jews who knew their Scriptures well, that the Old Testament writers recognized the ugliness and evil of sin and its results and were constantly pointing toward the future, to a day when God would restore all things. In v. 21 Peter calls it the "*time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouths of his holy prophets long ago.*" What was this "time"? The OT writers were saying that there would be a Day, a cataclysmic moment, the Day of the Lord, a day when the Kingdom of God, God's rule and reign, would break into this evil and broken age we live in. When God would judge the world and destroy all his enemies, when he would destroy all oppression and injustice, and redeem his people, give them new hearts and restore them fully to himself, when brokenness and decay would be done away with and when he would set the world to rights. This was Israel's hope.

Now here is Peter explaining to these people that what they have just seen - this man lame from birth and now restored to perfect health - and he's says to them - "*This is what God*

foretold through his prophets! *This* is what God was saying, what God was speaking to us so long ago. All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after proclaimed these days!" This healing, *this* is that! I'm sure as Peter was preaching the worlds of the prophet Isaiah weren't far from his mind. Isaiah 35 says this in talking about "that Day":

Is. 35:5-6

*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;"*

Peter is saying, "This is that!"

There is a huge parallel here with Acts chapter 2 here. Here, in Acts 3, there is a miracle and Peter points the people backward and says - this is that. This is The Day! What does Peter do in Ch. 2? He points them to the book of Joel and says - this is that! That Day that Joel was talking about? That day when God was going to pour out his Spirit, when God was going to form a new covenant with his people and begin remaking the world - that day is today!

Peter is clear that something has fundamentally changed. There is some way that the healing of this lame man is a fulfillment of all the OT promises. As he says in v. 24, "*All the prophets have proclaimed these days.*" This that you are seeing is that which was proclaimed then. But for most people listening to Peter preach - "this" that they saw didn't exactly look like "that".

Do you remember the question Jesus's disciples asked him before his ascension? "Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Even after 40 days spent with the resurrected Jesus, his disciples still didn't completely understand how God was fulfilling his OT promises. Most 1st cent. Jews would have seen in the OT prophets promises a political kingdom where all of Israel's physical enemies were destroyed or subdued and the nation lived in peace and prosperity.

There is a mystery in Peter's proclamation that "today" is what the Bible calls "The Day". In biblical terms a mystery is something that has always been a part of God's plan but has only just been revealed. The mystery of the Kingdom of God, is that in an unexpected way God is fulfilling all his promises in two parts in a way that isn't limited to one nation or ethnic group but brings the reality of his rule and reign, the blessings of the future day of restoration, the times of refreshing that Peter is talking about in v. 20, into this world right now. Theologians call this the Already and Not Yet of the Kingdom. The blessings and realities of the future Kingdom, the future age, have already arrived in part in this age. God's kingdom rule has been inaugurated, but not yet consummated.

If this is the case then Peter is saying that what the crowd has seen is what they never expected - the blessings that were supposed to be reserved for "that day" only, but now they are coming in a partial but very real way into this evil and broken age. They are getting a foretaste of the age to come.

I want to bring a little aside for some of you. For some of you this whole concept of the restoration of all things, the Kingdom of God, the age to come, may be new. Is he just talking

about heaven? Yes and No. For many of us growing up we have only thought of heaven as this place out there somewhere that our souls will go to spend eternity. But that is actually not the picture that the Bible gives. The Bible says that eternity is going to be spent in a very physical experience, in fact an even deeper physical sensory experience, in renewed and restored heavens and earth that is all God originally intended it to be. This is one of the greatest hopes of Christianity and we need to get out of any sense that eternity will be spent getting our angel wings and singing with harps on top of clouds. Eternity will be spent on a very real earth reigning with Christ and enjoying him and all the very physical blessings of his kingdom forever!

Vinoth Ramachandra quote.

What Peter is telling us is that this miracle - a lame and broken man healed and restored to full health - is points us to the very real physical redemption that awaits those who trust Jesus. It shows us a foretaste, a preview of coming attractions, that brings the realities of God's restoration of all things to us in part now, and points us forward to the day when God will act to end sin and suffering and death forever.

2. This miracle points us **upward**.

Secondly, this miracle, this sign, points us upward. It points us to Jesus. This is the heart of Peter's message. Look at Peter and John's immediate response to this crowd. v. 12:

"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power and piety we have made him walk?"

They're saying - this miracle doesn't point to us, it doesn't say anything about us - it says something about Jesus.

What I've left out until now is that the Day of the Lord, the restoration of all things, spoken about by the prophets was inextricably linked with the coming of the Messiah. The coming of the Kingdom depends on the coming of the King. So when Jesus began his public ministry the Bible says that he went about preaching, "*Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.*" Do you remember the text Jesus used for his first sermon in Luke 4?

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me - to proclaim good news to the poor...liberty to the captives...recovery of sight to the blind... to set at liberty those who are oppressed... to proclaim the year (the time) of the Lord's favor."

Jesus reads Isaiah 61, a passage specifically about that coming day of the Lord - and what does he say? "*Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" In John 8 Jesus talks about Abraham and says that Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. What day was Abraham looking forward to? The Day of the Lord. What Jesus is saying throughout the gospels is that that Day, THE DAY, is my day! What Jesus is saying, and what Peter is now announcing, is that in Jesus, in the King's arrival the Kingdom has arrived.

In his coming Jesus inaugurates his Kingdom rule and brings the times of refreshing that are a foretaste of the future day of restoration. We probably don't even recognize that this is

exactly what we sing in one of our favorite Christmas Carols, Joy to the World. Isaac Watts was a good theologian!

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

But Jesus ultimately does this in a way that no one expected the Messiah to do - through a bloody death on a Roman cross.

You see - the blessings of the restoration - God's great work on that day of bringing his kingdom, of setting things to rights - it is dependent on the repair of our greatest area of brokenness.

This story of the Risen Christ's healing of this man born lame reminds me of another story of Jesus healing a lame man. Do you remember the paralytic who was brought to Jesus? The room was full where Jesus was preaching so this man's friends climbed up on the roof, cut out a hole, and let the man down with ropes. What did Jesus say to the man? He looked past his presenting problem to his deepest need - "man, your sins are forgiven, but so that you may know the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins - rise and walk." Jesus confirms his authority to declare this Kingdom blessing by healing this man.

Peter's sermon points us to the fact that there is a brokenness in us that goes much deeper than we ever thought. Look what he says - "you delivered over and denied Jesus.... you denied the Holy and Righteous One... you killed the Author of Life... It was you! You pierced the Lord of Glory!" You killed Jesus - your sin, your rebellion, your treason against the King." Peter tells us that it is only in repentance, in recognizing that the greatest cause of our brokenness is not our life circumstances, not what others have done to us, not the way our parents raised us - in repentance lies the way to times of refreshing.

This was all a part of God's plan, that his Christ, his Messiah, would suffer and die on a bloody Roman cross. That he would live the life that we should have lived and die the death that we deserved to die to reconcile and call a new community to himself. Then God raised Jesus from the grave proving his victory over sin and death and Satan.

Jesus dealt with our sin, with our brokenness, with the brokenness of this evil world, with the effects of the curse by becoming a curse for us. He took on himself all the realities of our broken world, that we might experience all the realities of his perfect world. Do you see this substitution at the cross?

*Jesus was all anguish that I might be all joy,
Cast off that I might be brought in,
trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend,
surrendered to hell's worst that I might attain heaven's best,
stripped that I might be clothed,
wounded that I might be healed,
athirst that I might drink,
tormented that I might be comforted,
made a shame that I might inherit glory,
entered darkness that I might have eternal light,*

*My Savior wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes,
groaned that I might have endless song,
endured all pain that I might have unfading health,
bore a thorned crown that I might have a glory-diadem,
bowed his head that I might uplift mine,
experienced reproach that I might receive welcome,
closed his eyes in death that I might gaze on unclouded brightness,
expired that I might for ever live.*

There is a scene in Tolkien's Return of the King after Sam and Frodo have destroyed the ring of power and Sam encounters Gandalf for the first time after he thought Gandalf had died.

"Gandalf! I thought you were dead! Does this mean everything sad is going to come untrue? 'A great Shadow has departed,' said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land;

Jesus death and resurrection does mean for us that one day everything sad is going to come untrue. But until that day a foretaste of the realities of Jesus's future kingdom have penetrated this age and we can experience a preview what what's to come.

3. This miracle points us **outward**.

If Jesus's arrival inaugurated his Kingdom and his return will consummate it - what does this mean for us today?

We are living in between the times, in the already and not yet. In between the inauguration and the consummation. The Bible actually calls this entire period between Jesus's resurrection and his return "the last days." And until Jesus returns we live as agents of the Kingdom. The Bible calls us ambassadors. We represent the realities of another world. Our lives now are signs that are a foretaste of and point toward to the reality of the future consummation of the restoration of all things.

One of the questions we've been asking as we look at the book of Acts is "What is it that made it possible for this tiny band of zealots in an outpost of the Roman Empire to transform the world?" As I was studying this week I was struck again by this reality in light of the nature of life in the early church.

Christianity's growth was explosive - 40 percent per decade for nearly three centuries. And yet, very early on after the book of Acts, Christians stopped engaging in public preaching because it was too dangerous. Early Christians didn't have mission boards or books on evangelism. After Nero's persecution in the mid-first century Christians closed their Sunday services to visitors. One of the roles of the deacons was to stand at the door of the house the church service was being held at and make sure that no unbaptized person, no lying informer, could come in. And yet the church grew. The Roman Empire officially labeled it a superstition. Prominent people scorned it. Neighbors discriminated against Christians and they were programs set to wipe them out, and yet the church grew. In viewing these facts church historian Alan Kreider couldn't help but observe that the church must have grown because "it was attractive. People were fascinated by it, drawn to it as a magnet."

There was something about the life of these Christians, lived out in ordinary everyday places outside the church walls that captivated those around them.

Chief among those things was the care evidenced by Christians for others. Christians, as agents of Kingdom restoration, reached out “far as the curse is found.” Where Christians saw brokenness and poverty they acted.

The Roman Emperor Julian said “nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of the Christians as their charity to strangers... the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but for ours as well.”

Where they saw sickness they reached out as well. During the second and third centuries two serious plagues swept through the urban centers of the Roman Empire. During a 15 year period, the first plague took the lives of between one fourth and one third of the population even claiming the life of the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. And during the plagues most healthy people just fled the cities and left the sick there to die, but it was the Christians who stayed and took care of them. And this is what one eyewitness account said about these Christians:

"Most Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty; never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead..."

As we live in this broken world as agents of gospel restoration there is a quality in our lives that speaks of the world to come. It's seen in the realities of the Kingdom in our life together as God's redeemed community. The church is an outpost of Kingdom life and a sign to the world pointing to the realities of God's rule and reign. *We love one another. We care about the hurting. We forgive unfairness. We live with uncommon character. We actively serve. We worship the King. We share our time and possessions. We give our all.*

As the Holy Spirit empowers and directs us our eyes open to see the brokenness of this world and we seek to be agents of restoration. As we encounter broken marriages and families. The sick. The poor. The oppressed. we announce the realities of God's restoring work through the cross. And just like for John and Peter - often this happens in everyday places with everyday people. This wasn't the first time Peter and John had been to the temple. They were going there on a regular basis, seeing this beggar everyday. But on that day, recognizing what God was doing around them, they acted - proclaiming the work of Jesus. As we are led and empowered by the Holy Spirit God uses us as agents of restoration in our everyday.

The already and not yet nature of the Kingdom gives us hope and expectation for God's action in this world yet tempers that with a recognition that the Kingdom will not fully come until Jesus returns. There are those out there who see the goal of Christianity being the social transformation of this world here and now. They believe the church's mission is to rid the world of poverty and oppression and injustice here and now. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who see this world going down the tubes, so why work for change? God is just going to rapture us out of here and burn the place anyway, isn't he? But the true nature of the Kingdom as already and not yet gives us a humble expectation that God is truly at work redeeming this world, though we won't see its full restoration until a future day.

I'll leave you with these words from George Ladd, a man who spent much of his life writing about the Bible's teaching on the Kingdom of God:

“This is what it means to be a Christian. It means to go about every day in the present evil Age living the life of heaven. It means that every local fellowship of God's people who have shared this life should live together and worship and serve together as those who enjoy a foretaste of heaven here on earth. This is what the fellowship of a Christian Church ought to be. May God help us to live the life of The Age to Come in the midst of an evil Age. God has already brought us into fellowship with Himself. This is the promise, the downpayment, the earnest, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, the life of The Age to Come. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom.”