

The Restorer of Everything

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 January 2020

Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Acts chapter 3, starting at verse 1, and it's on page 1094 of the Church Bibles.

That's Acts chapter 3, starting at verse 1. One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful. Where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, look at us. So the man gave him his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

[1 : 08] He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful.

And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

When Peter saw this, he said to them, fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

[2 : 16] We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

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.

Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you, even Jesus.

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.

You must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people. Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days.

[3 : 27] And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, Through your offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, so the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000.

This is the word of the Lord. In your Bibles to Acts chapter 3, that was read to us just a moment ago. Page 1094 in the Bibles in front of you.

And as you're doing that, let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for a new year and the prospect it holds out to us. And we thank you for your living word.

[4 : 34] And we pray now that you would please help us to understand your word. Give us soft hearts and open ears that we might receive it and respond in the right way to it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're at the turn of the year. And I don't know about you, but I think certainly with me, the turn of the year kind of makes you think back over the year that's passed.

I wonder what the year that's passed has brought to you and what the year ahead holds. Perhaps you've had joy this year, a wedding, a new birth, a new job, a new start in life, something new and exciting.

Perhaps it's not been so positive for you, a trauma, a year of relational difficulty of one sort or another, a year of illness. Perhaps you've experienced grief or bereavement.

Perhaps you've become just more aware of your own weakness and your own mortality. And as the passing of a year kind of makes us reflect back, so it also makes us look forward.

[5 : 44] What will the year ahead hold for me? Will it be better, more hopeful? Maybe we can see hopeful things ahead. Maybe it'll be worse. Maybe we know that there are things that are going to be difficult in the year ahead, unavoidable things.

Or maybe just more of the same. You know that feeling? More of the same. The somewhat mundane ticking over of time, the days, the weeks, the months.

Doing the same stuff again. Not quite sure what's going to happen, but, well, just more of the same. Well, let me say, wherever you are on the scale this morning of joy or sadness about the year past, or optimism or non-optimism about the year ahead, this is just a great morning to be here.

Because we're looking at a miracle this morning that, if we grasp the significance of it, sheds amazing perspective on the age in which we now live.

And if we understand it, I think it will give challenge to the complacent, and comfort to the burdened, and hope to the hopeless, and significance to the ordinary things of life.

[7 : 00] So, please, Bible's open. Acts chapter 3. This is a story in two parts. There's a miraculous sign, and there's a speech that follows it.

We read at the end of chapter 2 that the apostles did many miraculous signs in Jerusalem. But interestingly, this is the only one that happens in Jerusalem which is dealt with in any detail in the book of Acts.

And it's accompanied by a speech. And so we're going to look at this in two parts. First the sign, then the speech. Now, most of our time today is going to be spent on the speech.

So for the purposes of this morning, I just want to look at two contrasts in the way this miracle is described. Two amazing contrasts. One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

Now, a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

[8 : 09] The first amazing contrast in this miracle is the contrast between the place and the person. Places and labels are very important in this section.

Verse 1, we're at the temple in Jerusalem. And in particular, verse 2, at the gate called Beautiful in the temple in Jerusalem. And if you look at verse 10, the gate called Beautiful is mentioned again at the end of this miracle.

So in the picture that's being painted here, the backdrop is the temple and the gate called Beautiful. Now, folks, this is a very, very great building.

The temple built by Herod the Great and still being worked on at the time this miracle occurred was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

And in this grandest possible of settings, we're standing in front of the Beautiful Gate, noted for its beauty. We're talking here then about the major tourist attraction of the city, an iconic building.

[9 : 17] Think Buckingham Palace, Houses of Parliament, Edinburgh Castle, Eiffel Tower, except bigger than any of those. And yet, as we imagine this grand scene, and no doubt the crowds of people flocking in to see this as they did day by day, or coming to worship at the temple, and looking at the amazing building and the beautiful gate, the camera zooms in on the bit that is not surprisingly left out of the tourist brochures.

The beggar. He's in the foreground in this picture. A man lame from birth, which means not only can he not walk, but his legs are undeveloped.

Not the sort of legs that could ever do anything. He's in the beautiful gate. We're met with an ugly scene.

A man who knows just what it's like to be on the difficult side of life in this world, and not get much help, as the crowds stream by, and nobody really pays any attention to him.

And he doesn't really expect to be paid attention to, does he? Give me some money, he says to Peter and John. And they focus their gaze on him, and only then does he really pay them any attention. He's a man of very low expectations at the start of this encounter.

[10 : 43] Just looking for enough money for today, and the next day, and so on, as he's always done. Beautiful place, ugly scene.

That's the first contrast. The second contrast is between before and after. Here's a man, misshapen since birth, who, verse 7, look at it, instantly has proper legs again.

Here's a man who used to be carried around by people, who, verse 8, jumps and walks around on his own. Here's a man who used to be put in places by people and left there. Now he goes walking and jumping into the temple.

He used to beg from people just to survive. Now he praises God. In the space of 10 seconds worth of conversation, everything has changed for this person.

Forever, in the beautiful place, in this ugly scene, a magnificent thing breaks in. So these two contrasts start off this story.

[11 : 54] Beautiful, ugly, before, after. What's being brought out here, folks? Well this. The temple may be glorious looking. It is glorious looking. But it's not as good as it looks.

And now something much more glorious has arrived. And this man's instant transformation is a sign of the glorious new thing that's arrived.

And what that meant for these people back then and what it means for us now. Now in this book, signs and speeches go together. And where you get them together, the speeches explain the signs. So what I'm going to do for the rest of our time together is simply going to ask this question. What's the significance of this miracle, this miraculous sign? And to answer that, we're going to look at the speech.

For the speech explains the sign. And I'm going to make one big point and then bring out three implications. Now this is a very rich speech.

[12 : 59] I wonder if you, I wonder if you struggled to follow this speech as we went through it. It's quite detailed and dense, isn't it? Annie, my wife, was reading this earlier on today and said, at this point I began to tune out.

It's quite hard to follow this speech. It's very rich. It's full of Old Testament ideas. And we don't have time to explore them all. But perhaps most significant of them and scattered all the way through this passage is the use of language from the book of Isaiah.

So I want to keep your finger in Acts chapter 3 for a moment and turn back to the book of Isaiah. You'll find that on page 741 in the Bibles in front of you.

Isaiah chapter 52, page 741. Let me set the scene. Isaiah the prophet, writing 800 odd years before this temple miracle, looks forward to a special servant of God who will change the world.

He describes in chapter 52 and 53, a righteous servant, one who will be despised and rejected by his generation, who will suffer bearing the sins of others, who will be killed as though he were a wicked man, and yet God will use his suffering so that through his death, people's sins will be taken away, people's wounds will be healed.

[14 : 34] He will make many people righteous people in God's sight. And most importantly, a servant who, because of his great serving work, will himself be rescued from death and lifted up by God and highly exalted and honored throughout the nations.

Let me just show you that last point. Isaiah 52, the start of this great song about God's servant. Look at verse 13. See, my servant will act wisely.

He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. And look at verse 15. He will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

His impact will be international. And then right on to the end of the speech. Look at chapter 53 and verse 13. Sorry, verse 12.

The speech finishes with God saying, therefore, I will give him a portion among the great. I will make him a great one and he will divide the spoils with the strong.

[15:50] The image there is of military victory. So, back to Acts chapter 3, please. Here we have then at the beginning and the end of this speech a strong statement that God is going to raise up this great servant.

God is going to make him a great one and grant him victory and success. Acts chapter 3 absolutely oozes Isaiah 53.

For in this speech, Jesus is described as the one who's been rejected, disowned, killed, the one who's made it possible for sins to be wiped out.

And especially, look at where it starts, verse 13. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant, Jesus.

That's exactly the way Isaiah 52 starts. God has glorified his servant. And it ends on exactly the same note of worldwide impact.

[17:01] Look at the end of chapter 3. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways and he's going to send him elsewhere to the rest of the world.

So that worldwide impact is there in this speech as well. So folks, like the passage in Isaiah, this speech begins and ends with God's servant being raised up, glorified, and honored in the world. And Isaiah 53 is woven all the way through this passage. If you want some bedtime reading this evening, just compare and contrast Isaiah 53 and Acts chapter 3 and look for how many similarities in language you can find there.

Now, the first part of this speech has a huge surprise in it. Now, I'm not sure if I can convey this. I need you to concentrate just for a minute. So, if you're tuning out, now's the time to give yourself a slap and concentrate just for a minute or two.

The great miracle has happened. Everyone is piling in to see what's going on. And the speech starts with what looks like a criticism.

[18:18] Look at verse 12. Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our power or godliness we'd made this man walk?

Why are you gazing at us as though there was something special about us? And then he takes the speech and here's the surprise. Then he takes the speech to something which is not the miracle to describe the significance of the miracle.

Look at verse 13. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate though he decided to let him go.

You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

And then we go back to the miracle. Verse 16. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. Now, here's the big point.

[19:26] The big point of this morning. Do you notice how the speech connects the miracle that's just happened with the resurrection of Jesus that happened a long way earlier?

Do you see that? The miracle is connected in the speech with the resurrection. Now, here's the question for this morning. What on earth is the connection between this miracle and the resurrection of Jesus?

20 seconds with your neighbor. What's the connection between this miracle and the resurrection of Jesus? 20 seconds with your neighbor. Talk please. Talk. Talk. Talk. Talk. Talk. Excellent.

That's 20 seconds. Let me ask you, did anybody get beyond it's a very powerful thing like the resurrection? Anybody get beyond that? I don't know about you, but I struggle.

I've beat my head against this question all week. What is the connection between this miracle and the resurrection of Jesus? Well, we're going to have a go at answering that question. Let me say three things that this speech reveals and Luke's readers needed to know.

[20 : 56] Three things that this speech reveals. Number one, the miracle is a sign of God's disagreement with the people of Israel.

Do you notice how in explaining the significance of the miracle, Peter focuses on what the people of Israel have done? Look at the words.

You handed him over. You disowned him and swapped him for a murderer. You killed the author of life.

And God disagrees with you. How does God show him that he's disagreed with him? He's raised him from the dead. Fellow Israelites, if you want to understand this miracle, says Peter, you need to understand that God has overturned the very wicked thing that you did.

And him and me, that's John and me, the ones you're gazing at in amazement, we are witnesses for God and against you.

[22 : 01] Witnesses that God has turned this wicked deed on its head. And it's been done in the temple, the place that was the heart of opposition to Jesus.

And it's been done in Jesus' name, this miracle. What have they done, these witnesses of Jesus who've just performed this miracle? What have they done? What's the significance of the miracle?

Well, they have very provocatively in the middle of the temple, the place that was the center of hostility to Jesus before his death, they have very provocatively done a miracle that has the reversal of resurrection stamped all over it.

You see, this miracle is a miracle of reversal, of beautiful from ugly, of before and after. It's a miracle of life-giving power and in that way it's like the life-giving power that God invested as he raised Jesus from the dead.

The miracle is a visible reminder, a visible sign that resurrection power is alive and well just as it was in the resurrection of Jesus back then and they've done it right in the middle of the temple.

[23 : 23] It's a very provocative thing to do. It's got the fingerprints of God all over it, this miracle, hasn't it? Takes the crippled man and suddenly, suddenly the legs are well and everything's changed.

What did that mean for those that heard this speech? Well, look at verse 17. They needed to turn round. Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders but this is how God fulfilled what he'd foretold through all the prophets saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out and that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. You did it ignorantly but you need to turn round.

Now, folks, it's a very gracious thing for God to have done this to bring this miracle to the temple. God doesn't say to these people, ha, you got it wrong.

What a wretched lot you are. God says, you got it wrong and my powerful miracle is a sign of reversal just as the miracle of Jesus' resurrection was.

[24 : 35] Why am I reminding you of that? So that you can turn round now and have your sins wiped out and be forgiven. You caused the sacrifice that results in sins being forgiven and I'm reminding you of that so that you can turn round and have your sins wiped out.

It's a very kind thing of God to have done that, isn't it? Now, folks, we're in a very different position from them. We were not personally instrumental in the death of Jesus as these people were. We weren't. And yet, the attributes of the people of God back then towards God are the same as shared by humanity towards God in general.

God reminds us through this story, though we're in a very different situation, of the need for forgiveness. He does not draw attention to our wrongdoings in order to say to us, ha, you got it wrong.

But rather, you need forgiveness, don't you? You can turn round. That's perhaps especially worth remembering at this time of year, don't you think?

[25 : 57] As you remember the year past and the years past and the life that's passed so far. Inevitably, that brings up for us memories of failures, of not being the sort of people we ought to have been, perhaps, of deliberate hostility to God, of deliberate indifference to what God has said.

God does not remind us of that in order to big himself up, but in order to urge us to avail ourselves of the forgiveness that Jesus holds out and have our sins wiped away.

This miracle, then, is a little sign of God's reversal of their verdict. Just as he reversed that in the resurrection.

So here's a resurrection-shaped miracle designed to remind them that he disagrees with them. Second, and more briefly, this miracle is a reassurance of restoration.

A reassurance that God is going to mend everything in the end. Notice verse 13. He starts with Abraham. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has glorified his servant Jesus.

[27 : 20] And notice verse 25. He goes back to Abraham again at the end of the speech. You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with our fathers. He said to Abraham, through your offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed.

Abraham, and God's promise to Abraham, is a promise that all the world will be blessed. And it's first spoken in Genesis chapter 12, and it comes in the context of world disaster.

In Genesis 1 to 11, we have the story of the gradual decline of the world from where it was first made. As God brings judgment on human sin and human sin increases.

By Genesis chapter 11, we have the world in which we live. A world of sickness and conflict and confusion and death. And into that world in chapter 12, God speaks a promise to Abraham.

A promise to bless the whole world. To put right what has gone wrong with the world at the beginning. It's a wonderfully kind thing to promise. It's completely undeserved.

[28 : 27] And the whole of the Bible story from Genesis chapter 12 onwards pushes forward to when's God going to do it? When's God going to do it? How's God going to do it? How's He going to bless the world?

How's He going to reverse the disaster? I'd like you to go back again to Isaiah to page 720 to Isaiah 35. Just very quickly. because it's absolutely pertinent to our passage today.

Isaiah is looking forward to the great rescue that God is going to bring. What is life going to be like? What's going to happen when God's great rescuer comes?

Isaiah 35 verse 5. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Now if ever there were a leaping and shouting miracle Acts 3 is the leaping and shouting miracle.

Walking and leaping and praising God. All of those things are there.

[29 : 35] Why are they there? Because this is a miracle that shows that the rescuer has arrived.

The one who can actually change the world in which we live.

And this little miracle done on a small scale is a kind of demonstration in small of the great power of the one who's been raised from the dead.

It's a great jumping miracle. miracle. God has in mind a restoration of everything. Look how it's referred to in verse 21.

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything. God is going to restore everything. And this miracle is a little foretaste of how God can do that.

How God can do that through the one he raised from the dead. Notice how instantaneous the miracle is. It's so easy for God to do. This miracle plants in the temple a little foretaste of what will be unrolled in the end everywhere for everyone who listens to and follows the words of Jesus.

[30 : 49] When Jesus returns transformation on a global scale is what the Bible envisages. let me ask you which parts of the dysfunction of the world have you been particularly aware of in this last year?

Which bits of the dysfunction of the world do you anticipate having to deal with yourself particularly in the year ahead? It might be ill health that you've been dealing with or anticipate dealing with.

it might be broken relationship it might be the hostility of others it might be the frustrations of work the traumas of family life the year ahead may look better for you or worse than the year that's

passed no doubt for some of us the year ahead will hold difficulties as yet completely unanticipated.

This weekend this day three years ago my best friend dropped dead suddenly out of the blue. I turned up at church and another friend told me that my best friend had just died just like that out of the blue we never know what time's going to bring to us do we?

You don't know what the year ahead is going to bring to you. This miracle is a sign that the restorer has arrived his restoration of everything in the end is just as certain as his resurrection from the dead just as certain so important then to keep listening to his words to keep believing his words for

he can do it so here's a miracle that's a visible sign of God's disagreement a miracle that's a reassurance of restoration in the end and third a miracle that's a great reminder of present

opportunity look at verse 24 indeed beginning with Samuel all the prophets who spoken have foretold these days and you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your

fathers he said to Abraham through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed now look at this carefully when God raised up his servant he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways here's a question when did God send Jesus to Israel well the stock answer to that would be

[33 : 30] Christmas exactly we've just done it you ought to remember that you know it was all about that wasn't it the arrival of the baby wasn't it well notice that that's not what verse 26 says when did God send Jesus to Israel after he had raised him up now isn't that a striking thing to say how did God send Jesus to Israel when he had raised him how did he do that well the answer is he sent God he sent Jesus to Israel through the apostles words and this miracle this is a book about the advance of the words of the apostles in the world and through the witnesses through the apostles and their message Jesus Jesus is sent first to Israel and then to the world that's what the book of Acts is all about just think how amazing that is folks it's hard for us to get our minds around how amazing this is once upon a time if you wanted to know anything about the true God you had to travel all the way to Jerusalem to the temple in Jerusalem for that was the earthly center of activity and of course as we've learned already it was a splendid looking building but not transformative for the visitor how easy

God has made it now to come into a transforming relationship with Jesus for Jesus comes to people in words isn't that an extraordinary idea people don't need to come to him he comes to them and my wife Annie became a Christian in the school changing room aged 12 when Becky Hubbard told her words about Jesus isn't that extraordinarily mundane and unspectacular I heard the message through a next door neighbor at university you might have heard the message about Jesus from family members over the dinner table ordinary words isn't that an extraordinary thing see God is not hiding God is not playing hard to get he's everywhere out there

Jesus is everywhere out there in his words ordinary words somebody told you that you needed forgiveness somebody told you that Jesus could provide the forgiveness you need such ordinary words a couple of sentences will do just about and those ordinary school changing room type words or family dinner table type words or late night cup of coffee with a mate type words those ordinary words brought Jesus to you and ushered you into a life that will end in total perfection for you and everything else when Jesus returns isn't that remarkable words in a changing room at school take you to perfected humanity in a perfected world that's extraordinary isn't it it's so easy such great riches so easily accessible what opportunities then life holds out to us in the year ahead opportunities to hear

Jesus words if we're not familiar with them opportunities to speak Jesus words to others opportunity through ordinary words being communicated for our own lives to be transformed and for the lives of others to be transformed forever to be perfectly the people that they were made to be let me summarize then our time is gone this miracle it's a sign of God's disagreement with the people of Israel a sign of life where the author of life was killed second it's a reassurance of restoration a little foretaste in the healing of this man of where everything is going in the end when Jesus returns and third a reminder of the opportunities of the age in which we live wonderfully before Jesus returns before everything will be straightened out there's the chance for ordinary people to get on side and it happens through ordinary words and that ought to bring challenge to the complacent it is not okay to remain indifferent or ignorant towards

Jesus and this ought to bring comfort to the burdened your sins can be forgiven that's why God tells us about them and hope to the hopeless the return of Jesus will change everything for you no matter how hard the year ahead is and significance to the mundane things in life for we can hear words of life and we can pass on words of life that will change everything for us and for everyone well let's pray together and ask that God would help us to grasp and to rejoice in his words I'm going to read a few verses from Isaiah 53 and then I'll pray we have in the temple a great miracle of reversal we read in Isaiah 52 of God raising and lifting up and highly exalting his savior let me read some words about him and his work he was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as his sheep before its shearers is silent so he didn't open his mouth by oppression and judgment he was taken away cut off from the land of the living assigned a grave for the wicked he was crushed for our iniquities wounded for our transgressions the punishment that brought us peace was on him by his wounds we are healed heavenly father we thought of many ideas in the last few minutes we thank you for this extraordinary miracle in the temple the few seconds of the passing on of words when this man changed from being crippled

forever to being alive forever and we thank you that this is a sign of all that you will do for the created order and for those who trust you and so we pray heavenly father that you would help us not to be complacent and comfortable in ignorance we pray that you would comfort us if we are burdened by our sins we pray that you would give us hope if life is making us despondent help us to look forward to the return of

[41 : 29] Jesus and in the meantime help us to hear and to pass on your words of life for we ask these things in Jesus name amen amen amen and Amen and Oh what especially cp of increased reading etc and other or San or or increased thereieu and ölj ir outra