

7. The First Miracle of Healing: Acts 3:1-12

Many things were happening rapidly to the early church—not the least of which was its rapid growth. In the previous chapter, Acts 2:41, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." In Acts 2:47, the number expanded even more: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This early growth of the church foreshadowed future growth and a period of favor with all the people.

This early church had exuberance for the Lord that fostered meetings in the temple courts every day (Acts 2:46). The events of chapter 3 unfold as Peter and John were going into the temple courts, as their practice was.

In the Name of Jesus, the Crippled Beggar Walks

Acts 3:1-4

3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled 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. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Peter and John going up to the temple and a man crippled from birth set the scene for the first healing miracle, the next gospel sermon, and a very large number of additional conversions, adding 5,000 members to the church. The temple to which they were going was commonly called Herod's Temple—a contemporary effort to rebuild Solomon's Temple.

The East Gate, commonly called the Beautiful Gate, was located on the East wall. It was through this gate that Peter and John were entering, and it was at this gate where the beggar was put each day. Since his cohorts carried him there each day, his ailment was conspicuous; and since he was so afflicted from birth, his affliction was apparent to all who passed by, day after day and year after year. The subjects of modern faith healing have ailments that are neither apparent nor conspicuous. Verse 4 makes clear that the power to perform the miracle is in the Holy Spirit, working through Peter and John, and not dependent in any way on the lame man. How often today are the failed miracles of false teachers blamed on the lack of faith in the subject and not on the lack of power in the performer of the miracle.

In summary, true miracles of healing cure conspicuous and apparent ailments with the healing power coming from the Holy Spirit via the one performing the miracle.

Acts 3:6-10

6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 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.

Not only is the illness of the crippled man conspicuous and apparent in its nature before the miracle, but the complete healing of the illness is evident to all who watch. The proof of this miracle, as being one from God, rests on the eyewitnesses who saw the man who "jumped to his feet and began to walk." They knew that the man that they saw was the one who used to sit begging. The result was that "they were filled with wonder and amazement."

What has happened here is what Jesus had said would happen, in Mark 16:17-18, "17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name . . . they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." In Mark 16:20, Luke recorded that these signs confirmed the word preached as the word of God, "20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." What will unfold is a miracle, confirming the word, and a gospel sermon so confirmed as God's word and directed at converting those listening.

The Hebrew writer certifies this exact purpose of miracles in Heb 2:3-4:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

In the modern world, one must pay close attention to how and to whom "signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit [were] distributed according to his will;" for there are many modern practices concerning miracles which lack any scriptural authority whatsoever. These practices are foreign to any expressed statements of the will of God in the New Testament.

The New Testament teaches that God distributed gifts of the Holy Spirit to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost in a way more powerful than to any other group. By the laying on the apostles' hands, God also extended less comprehensive gifts to members of the body, the church. Finally, God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to all penitent, baptized believers.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit Given to the Apostles

Of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given unto men, the apostles received the most comprehensive set. These comprehensive gifts came by the direction of the Lord before he ascended. He taught that these gifts were to be given only to the apostles. That these gifts are exclusively for the apostles is clear in Mark 16:14-20. Verse 14 shows that Jesus was instructing the apostles and not the general group of all Christians who were to follow: "14 Later Jesus appeared to the **Eleven** as they were eating." Verse 15 says, as Jesus gave the great commission: "He said to **them**." The antecedent of the pronoun *them* is *the Eleven* of verse 14. It is to the Eleven that he said in verses 17-18:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

In this passage, it is certain that the promise of these broad gifts was to the apostles. In verse 19, the *them* repeats the *they* of its antecedent: "19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to **them**, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God." Finally this very same Eleven followed the Lord's command: "20 Then **the disciples** went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

In Acts 1, Luke confirms that Jesus was instructing only the apostles The Lord promised only this Eleven that they should receive power from on high in Acts 1:2-5

. . . after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the **apostles** he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with **them**, he gave them this command: "Do not [you] leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days **you** will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

In the following verses, Acts 1:6-8, the pronouns and their antecedents stay the same. In verse 6, the antecedent to *they* is still *the apostles* of verse 2: "6 So when **they** met together, **they** asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'" In his response in verse 7, he identified exactly who would receive power of the Holy Spirit—*them* with the antecedent *the apostles*. In verse 7, the Lord also was definite as to whom this power of the Holy Spirit would descend and when it would ascend—*you* with the antecedent *the apostles* and *when the Holy Spirit comes on you*:

7 He said to them: "It is not for **you** to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But **you** will receive power **when the Holy Spirit comes on you**; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When the Spirit came on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 1:26-2:4, the antecedents and the pronouns make it certain upon whom this power came. Acts 1:26 sets the antecedent as the apostles: "26 Then **they** cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the **eleven apostles**." In Acts 2:1-4, the pronouns all refer to the apostles:

1 When the day of Pentecost came, **they** were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 **They** saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of **them**. 4 All of **them** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled **them**.

After the miracle of the healing of the crippled man in chapter three, the Jewish leaders knew that the power rested with the apostles; for when these leaders confronted the apostles, Peter and John, in Acts 4:5-7, they said "By what power or what name did **you** do this?"

Anyone, who contends today that they have these powers of the Holy Spirit conveyed to the apostles, would have to meet the qualifications of being an apostle and of being present on Pentecost when the power descended from on high.

[Emphasis in the scriptures in this section is added.]

The Spiritual Gifts Given Temporarily by the Laying on the Apostles' Hands

By the laying on the apostles' hands, God also extended less comprehensive gifts to members of the body. The only Christians, who received these gifts, received them only by the laying on of the apostles' hands. No one today can claim to have these gifts, since there are no apostles living to lay hands on people. Acts 8:12-17, makes clear that the apostles were necessary to impart the gifts. The narrative picks up in verses 12-13:

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

These Samaritans were baptized believers, including Simon, a sorcerer in his life before conversion to Christ. Since Simon had "practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people (Acts 8:9)," he knew the real miracles when he saw them; and therefore, he was amazed and followed Philip everywhere. In verses 14-17, it took the laying on of the apostles' hand to give spiritual gifts to these converts:

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them;

they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Simon knew the difference between the gifts imparted by the apostles and the power of the apostles to impart these gifts. That this measure of the Holy Spirit gave Christians miraculous powers is evident by Simon's response, which was to try to buy the ability to impart spiritual gifts to people. These spiritual gifts did not come with baptism, which was for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38) and which washed away their sins (Acts 16:22) and which saved them (1 Peter 3:21). In verse 17, it is evident that this measure of the Holy Spirit came by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Of course, when the apostles died, this measure of the Holy Spirit ceased to operate in the members of the church. 1 Cor 12 and 13 teach what these gifts to the early church were and when they passed away:

1 Cor 12:7-11 outlines the spiritual gifts given to the early church by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The early church without the completed New Testament needed these gifts for their development and protection:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Since the imparting of these gifts depended on the laying on of the apostles' hands, when the apostles' died, the impartation ceased. This period agrees with the statement by Paul in 1 Cor 13:8-10:

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Some argue that the perfection—the condition when the gifts would cease—comes when Christ who is perfect comes or when heaven which is perfect comes. However, in the context, 1 Cor 13:13 sets the limits of that which is perfect to within a world where faith, hope, and love remain past the time of passing on of the spiritual gifts: "13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." When Christ and/or heaven come, faith will give way to sight and knowledge; hope will be realized. In Rom 8:24, Paul said, "24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all." When Paul speaks about when perfection comes, he is speaking about a time when the church knows not in part but fully, according to 1 Cor 13:12: ". . . Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." The perfection is the perfect law of James 1:25: "25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does. "

With the completed revelation of God's will, the need for spiritual gifts passed away. Some today might say that if they could see a miracle, they would believe. The Lord forever refuted this idea in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:27-31:

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

In truth, people of the 21st century have all that they need in the scriptures left to them by the apostles and prophets inspired, as only they were, by the Holy Spirit. Paul summarizes the case in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Gift of the Holy Spirit Given to All Penitent, Baptized Believers

These notes have already discussed fully the gift of the Holy Spirit that comes to all penitent, baptized believers as promised in Acts 2:38-39:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

To summarize, this promise to all Christians is our guarantee of salvation.

Peter promised that those who repented and were baptized would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the very nature of this promise in Eph 1:13-14:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit, according to Rom 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Finally, the scriptures are equally emphatic about how the Spirit testifies with our spirit in Eph 6:17: "17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

All the People Were Astonished and Peter Begins Preaching

Acts 3:11-12

11 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, 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 happenings of this episode occur on Solomon's Colonnade—sometimes called Solomon's porch. Solomon's Colonnade was inside the East Gate. That all the people were astonished and came running, established the authenticity of the miracle. With the crowd excited, Peter begins his sermon. After he recognizes them as men of Israel, he asks two rhetorical questions that set the stage for his sermon in the following verses. Why were they surprised? After all, they had been witnesses of the miracles of Jesus and the demonstration of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Why did they think it was by the power or godliness of the apostles? This last question demonstrates that miracles and signs are never by the power of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.