

## Lesson 5: Acts 3 A Sign of Healing and Witness to Jesus Christ

### Introduction

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.” Acts begins with the Jerusalem Awakening, the amazingly, fruitful witness of the Apostles at the heart of Israel. This first section of Acts contains eight reports divided into two halves. The first half, the first four reports, are all positive.

The first two of those four were preparatory. We started with the commissioning of the disciples as witnesses and the ascension of Jesus into Heaven. We then read about the choice of a new apostle to replace Peter. With all the Apostles in place, Luke gives us two more reports about the successful witness of the Apostles that results in the birth and the growth of a new community. First, we have Pentecost, the miracle of tongues and a sermon by Peter. Then, we have a miracle of healing and another sermon by Peter.

This is what Jesus said must happen first. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.”

Peter is here again standing forward as our spokesman in this lesson. We will address the miracle first and then consider the sermon. The healing occurs in Acts 3:1-11.

### Sign of Healing (3:1-11)

<sup>1</sup> Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of prayer. <sup>2</sup> And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he *began* asking to receive alms. <sup>4</sup> But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” <sup>5</sup> And he *began* to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” <sup>7</sup> And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. <sup>8</sup> With a leap he stood upright and *began* to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God; <sup>10</sup> and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to *beg* alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. <sup>11</sup> While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.

#### *The Miracle*

In the summary of chapter 2, Luke told us, “Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.” Many wonders through all the Apostles. This is just one example of the wonders occurring in Jerusalem. After reading this account of a formerly lame man leaping in the Temple - and remember, this is just one wonder - many wonders were going on through all the Apostles and thousands are committing their lives to Jesus the Messiah and there is a change in the people, a seriousness about the Word and prayer, a joy in fellowship, a willingness to give up possessions to help those in need, a remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus through regularly celebrating the Lord’s supper in one of their homes. Remembering that that’s what’s going on, you can easily imagine the energy and awe affecting the people of Jerusalem at this time.

Similar to Jesus healing the blind man recorded in John 9, this lame man was so from birth. That magnifies the power of this miracle and ensures that this man would be recognizable by people in Jerusalem. He had been coming every day to the gate of the Temple for years. And he is there at prayer time, when people would be going in. The text says that it’s the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. That would be 3 in the afternoon, it’s the evening hour of prayer, and he’s stationed himself there as people are going in. If you live in a city with beggars and regularly pass by the places in your

city where beggars ask for money, you know what this is like. There is a man there with one leg always talking to himself, or a lady with a child rocking back and forth, and the guy with no legs sitting on a piece of cardboard. Some come and go, and you do not recognize those beggars. But there are always some in the same place, and they are fixtures in the city. They are as permanent as the fountains and the statue of the man on horseback. They're always there. The people of Jerusalem knew this man by sight. So, when the miracle happens, they know it's a miracle.

The miracle is a bold one. Peter does not quietly pray for the man as he walks by. He says, "Look at us! I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" Then, not even giving the man a chance to respond, Peter grabs his hand and pulls him up. And that's bold! You know, what if he is not healed? You pull him up, he falls back down. And everybody is looking because as you were going by the man, you spoke. You said, "Look at us!" Other people are looking, too. But the man doesn't fall back down. The man's ankles instantly become strong. And he immediately enters the Temple with Peter and John at this time of prayer, with all the people about. And he is praising, and he is jumping around. The miracle by Peter was public and bold. The affect on the man is public and jubilant. Can you imagine a man leaping in the Temple of the Jews and joyfully praising God at the solemn hour of prayer? I am not sure they had seen anything like this sense David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem, dancing and singing. And if you remember what happened then, you can imagine that most eyes in the Temple gave the man this judgmental, kind of scathing look, like David's wife did in his day. "Quiet down. You are being shameful. Show some respect. Recognize who you are. Recognize where you are." As their eyes drilled into this man, willing him to be silent, though; that moment of realization must have happened, when their eyes are judging him and, all of a sudden, their eyes grow big. "Isn't that? No, it can't be? That's the guy? How is he walking? How is he jumping?" And as they realize this great miracle because they recognize the guy, the crowd begins to gather and the enthusiasm spreads.

Later in Acts, pagans will attribute miraculous works directly to Paul or Barnabas. This Jewish man was better prepared by his world view to understand the source of power that healed him. He does not bow before Peter and John. He immediately begins leaping about the Temple giving praise to God. The healing immediately, even through the one healed, points us to the Healer.

#### *The Miracle as a Sign*

Now, this story of healing brings up our persistent Acts question. It's the challenge of Biblical narrative. Is this healing simply descriptive or is it prescriptive? Is Luke reporting on this wonder to indicate that something exceptional and special is going on in Jerusalem, he's just describing it, or is he suggesting that such healing should be the model for how we do evangelism? Is he simply describing the events around the birth of the Church or prescribing the norm for all Christian communities? Do we need to be doing what Peter and John were doing?

Rather than waiting for more of the miracles of Acts, I will go ahead and address the issue of healing now, whether it's prescriptive or descriptive. We will continue to see miracles of healing through Acts. The miracles are not going to be recorded in connection with every church planted. Not all evangelism is going to include the miraculous. But just because Luke does not mention healing that does not necessarily mean healing is not happening. So that's not necessarily conclusive.

I am not going to take the time now for a systematic view of Scripture on the subject of healing. So, I know when I'm done, there are going to be questions left. But since we do encounter a lot of miracles in Acts, even if I'm not going to give you a whole systematic run through the Scripture, I'm going to go ahead and explain my position, so that you know where I am coming from. I do believe that God heals today. I also believe that the gift of healing of the kind possessed by the Apostles is not the norm for Christian community and is not a necessary component of evangelism. I believe Luke is describing something exceptional, not prescribing the norm for our communities. Though, as I said, I do believe God heals today.

I will start my explanation with the emphasis I believe Luke recognizes with this particular healing of the lame man. So, how does this healing fit what Peter is getting ready to say? Peter is going to mention in the following speech the second coming of Jesus Christ. And he is going to use a particular word to do that. He is going to say that Jesus Christ will return when it is time for the restoration of all things. That phrase, “restoration of all things,” connects us back to the first verses of Acts in 1:6 when the disciples asked, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” The reference to restoration here and the restoration in chapter 1, it creates kind of bookends on this initial section of Acts, there first four reports.

Jesus responded to the disciples in chapter 1 that it was not for them to know the time of restoration. Their role was to wait in faith for the coming of the Holy Spirit and then to be his witnesses. With the sermon we are getting ready to hear, Peter seems to have matured in his understanding since that original question in two ways. One, he now understands the restoration as something that happens when Jesus comes back. It is not happening now. And two, he frames the restoration, not in the limited terms of restoration of kingdom to Israel - that was the original question - but now Peter calls it, the restoration of all things. Jesus is much bigger than Israel. He is going to put everything to right, everywhere. The restoration of all things is a reference to the new Heaven and new Earth, to universal restoration.

Peter understands that the current awakening in Jerusalem, though wonderful and exciting and important and valuable, is not the end goal. We look ahead to the coming of Jesus, the second coming, for restoration. The healing of the lame man is not proof of a current restoration, it is a sign of a future restoration. That’s what I believe Luke is doing here. He is giving us this healing miracle as a sign of future restoration.

Luke likes the phrase, “signs and wonders.” He uses the word, “sign,” ten times through Acts in connection with miracles. He is using it in the same way as John did in his Gospel. The miracles of the Apostles, just like the miracles of Jesus, point us to spiritual truth about Jesus and about his Kingdom. That is what a sign does. It provides information. So, the miracles aren’t just acts of power. They are acts of power with information pointing us to something.

The healing of the lame man is a sign of the restoration to come. It is not the restoration. It is a limited physical restoration of the man’s leg muscles. That’s true. But this man will still die. He is healed in this body, but he is not made new. He can experience a spiritual rebirth now through faith in Jesus. That kind of restoration is available now. But He must wait for the restoration of a glorified body. He must wait for his sin to be completely removed. He must wait to be made truly whole. And we all must wait.

*Should Miracles of Healing be the Norm?*

Now, this does not answer the question about whether these kinds of miracles are normative for all Christian communities. But it does help us frame the question. It helps us to understand something that Luke is doing here in Acts. The miracles performed by the Apostles are signs pointing us to Jesus and to the restoration Jesus will bring. So now, we come back to the question, “Are these signs something that happens under special circumstances or should we expect these signs to be happening among all Christian communities that are functioning as God intends?” You know, if you are doing things right, you are going to have people doing these kinds of miracles among you.

First, let me say, “I do not believe that God desires physical healing for all Christians. I hear that sometimes, and I must say I strongly, strongly disagree with that idea. That idea is a misunderstanding of a few passages like Isaiah 53:5, “by his scourging we are healed.” Everybody becomes sick and dies. If you avoid a fatal accident, murder, or capital punishment and if you don’t die in that way, you are going to become sick and die. Every apostle, every evangelist, every teacher, every faith healer that does not die in one of those ways, accident or murder, becomes sick and dies. Lazarus became sick and died, again. God does not always desire the healing of our mortal bodies. You know, ultimately, he is going to let all of our mortal bodies die, go unhealed. God desires to give

us new bodies that we will not grow sick or die, ever. That is part of the next age, the restoration. Faith in God does not always end in healing. It does always end in eternal life. Sometimes the glory of God is displayed as a witness through healing. Sometimes the glory of God is displayed as a witness through the character of the believer as they enter into death.

God is the one who chooses whether to heal our current bodies. When he does, he does so for a reason. Those reasons are God's reasons, and they are not always discernible.

So, we should not expect miraculous healing as a normative part of Christian community for this reason that God desires to heal all believers. But should we expect healing as a normative part of Christian community as a sign, a sign of awe to believers and a sign of evangelism to non-believers?

It is still a tricky question. In the Gospel of John, one of John's themes is the ineffectiveness of miraculous signs to bring about saving faith. Sometimes a miracle leads a person to eventual faith. But just as often in the Gospel of John, miracles lead people to false belief about Jesus. Miracles are not the key to evangelism. Still, should we see miracles as normative in faithful, Christian communities?

A big picture view of the Bible helps me come to my belief, to how I answer this question. To get some perspective, list the times in the Bible when the vast majority of miracles happened. Miracles are not recorded through the Biblical narrative. That is something people don't always consider. There are gaps of hundreds and thousands of years without the report of miracles among the people of God. So, when does the Bible record most of the miracles? And who does the miracles? You might want to pause this lesson right now and answer that question for yourself. There are three clusters when the vast majority of recorded miracles in the Bible are happening. Through whom do they happen?

The first cluster is with Moses and his disciple, Joshua. The second cluster is through Elijah and his disciple, Elisha. The third cluster is through Jesus and his disciples, mostly the Apostles, but also others like Stephen. Interestingly, Moses and Elijah are the two men who appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. We have Moses, who represents the Law, Elijah who represents the prophets, and Jesus who represents the New Covenant. I believe the clusters of miracles in the Bible match significant periods of salvation history when the Word of God was being written down for us, the Law through Moses and Joshua, the Prophets represented at their beginning by Elijah and Elisha, and the New Testament through Jesus and his disciples. The signs affirm the revelation.

We see a gap or lack of miracles from the beginning of the Bible to Moses, then from Moses to Elijah there's not a lot of miracles recorded, then from Elijah to Jesus not a lot of miracles recorded. That does not mean there are no miracles at all. But the clusters of miracles attached to those men accounts for the majority of recorded miracles, especially the miracles that come through a gift given to human beings. Each of these was gifted to do miracles in a way that is not the same as the community of faithful praying and trusting God for the miraculous. There is something else going on. When Moses rose his staff, the sea parted. When Elijah lay down on the boy, that boy rose from the dead. When Peter grabbed the lame man, he leaped up. So, there was a boldness that was part of their giftedness.

Should we expect these kinds of miracles to end after the Apostles as these kinds of miracles ended after Moses and after Elijah? I believe so. It is hard to prove since the Bible ends with this first generation of Christians. If we had more Bible for several generations after Jesus, then we would have an authoritative answer to the question. We would see if there is a lesson of the miraculous giftedness. But we do not have that. The Bible ends with the generation that followed Jesus. So that makes it harder to answer this question.

I think there is indication that this kind of miraculous gifting was part of the first generation and not succeeding generations. For example, in Paul's early letter to the Corinthians, he includes in his list of gifts both miracles and healing. But then in his later letters to the Ephesians and Romans, he does

not mention miracles or healing in the gift lists. Why does he leave them out in those letters? I believe the gift of miracles faded after attesting to the Apostles' authoritative teaching, as recorded now in our New Testament.

This is one of those questions I have a firm belief on, yet I recognize it is a debatable question among Christians, so I'll leave it open for you to think about. I do want to make one last clarification. I said I believe in healing today, so I don't want to be misunderstood. Definitely, God heals! I am questioning the gift of healing of the type that Peter displays here. This healing does not follow a prayer session. It does not follow the whole community getting together and we hope that he is going to be healed, but he might not be healed, and if he does, we'll be excited, but if he doesn't, we'll trust God because it doesn't always happen. This healing doesn't even follow a statement of faith by the lame man. Peter grabs him and yanks him up, and he is healed. This is a miracle on demand of the kind we see with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. It is a special kind of healing gift. That is what I do not believe is normative today. I believe it is possible for God to gift someone in this way. God will do what God does. I do not believe it is God's plan to provide this gifting extensively through the Church age as normative for all of our Christian communities and for all of our evangelism.

I believe that some believers have a gift of faith and through their prayers people are healed. They may see fruitfulness in healing and so we see it as a gift of healing, but we make a distinction between the kind of healing Jesus did, and the kind of healing that Peter did, and the kind of healing that we tend to see today. And maybe I need to distinguish between a big "H" gift of Healing and a little "h" gift of healing, just like I did between a big "A", Apostle, and a little "a", apostle. The two types of healing gift are similar, but there is something very different about them.

The healing we see today is not automatic. We trust God's wisdom in his to heal or not, to leave a person with a thorn in the side or to take the thorn away, to remove the threat of death or to call a person home. We are trusting God in his goodness and wisdom. Sometimes he is going to heal miraculously and sometimes he is not.

My belief is that the kind of healing we see displayed in Acts by Peter and Paul, the bold acts of power that do not fail, that is another level of healing ability that affirms the Apostles, both in their verbal witness at the time and in their written witness that was recorded for us.

Let's move now to the witness that accompanied this miracle. The response of this crowd was the same as the response of the Pentecost crowd. Luke tells us, the people were full of wonder and amazement and they ran to see what was going on. As at Pentecost, Peter takes the opportunity afforded by the miracle to address the large crowd. His speech is recorded in Acts 3:12-26.

### **The Sermon (3:12-26)**

<sup>12</sup> But when Peter saw *this*, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" <sup>13</sup> "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, *the one* whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. <sup>14</sup> "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> but put to death the Prince of life, *the one* whom God raised from the dead, *a fact* to which we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> "And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. <sup>17</sup> "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. <sup>18</sup> "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. <sup>22</sup> "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR

BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. <sup>23</sup> 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' <sup>24</sup> "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days. <sup>25</sup> "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' <sup>26</sup> "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways."

That's good stuff. I'd love to hear more of Peter's sermons during these days. Luke has chosen quite selectively what teaching to include from the leaders of the early Christian church. With two sermons from Peter, we have the opportunity to learn about Peter's basic Gospel message, especially by paying attention to what he repeats in the two speeches, and also what he adds in this second one.

In both speeches Peter affirms that God has raised Jesus from the dead and that the Apostles are witnesses to the resurrection. He also affirms in both that God has glorified Jesus. In the first speech, the language Peter used was that God exalted Jesus. He also charges the Jews in both crowds with the death of Jesus. They bear primary responsibility rather than the Romans.

In this speech, Paul points out that Pilate had already decided to release Jesus before giving into the persistent pressure of the Jews. Peter indicates the irony of the sin that the crowd asked for the release of the murderer Barabbas so that they might see the Prince of Life put to death.

Having given witness to who Jesus is and charging the crowd with his death, Peter announces the connection between Jesus and the healed man. He says,

"And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."

How was this man healed? Peter indicates two crucial criteria. He is healed by faith. And he is healed by the name of Jesus. Let's be careful here. The name of Jesus is not a magical mantra. To pray in the name of Jesus is not simply saying the right words to the end of the prayer. You know, "Lord, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."

The name of Jesus is a way of identifying the person who is the object of the faith. To pray in his name is to make a request of the person Jesus according to who he has revealed himself to be. To pray in his name is an act of dependence on Jesus. We do not use the name of Jesus as a word of power to obtain what we will. That's magic. We pray in the name of Jesus as an act of submission to him as Lord, with the hope of seeing his will accomplished. Not my will be done, but your will be done. That is the point of prayer. Not a word of power, but a dependent relationship where we lift up our concerns and our requests and our desires to him in order to see his will accomplished.

It is not mention of the name of Jesus that has healed this man. It is trust in Jesus as he has revealed himself to be, which results in Jesus choosing to exert power to heal this man. Jesus does the healing as Peter walks in the power of the Spirit.

Now, the object of faith is clear in Peter's words. Jesus is the one we believe in. The one who has the faith is not so clear. Was it Peter's faith in the name of Jesus that resulted in the healing of this man or was it the man's faith in the name of Jesus that resulted in his healing?

The structure of Luke's Greek sentence leaves the question open. It's kind of ambiguous. It is not clear whose faith is he talking about. I lean towards the second, that it was the lame man's faith that resulted in his healing. But then it's interesting that Luke left out any hint of that in the healing story. Peter grabbed the man and pulled him up and he began leaping about. There is no indication of faith at all. There is hardly any time to have faith. But now here, Luke writes,

“And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Notice that last bit, “The faith which comes through Him (*that “him” is Jesus*) has given him (*I think that “him” is the lame man*) this perfect health.” The faith which comes through Jesus has given the lame man his perfect health. The lame man’s faith comes through Jesus. As Jesus says in John 6:65, “No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” Faith itself is a gift, or something that comes from God. Faith does have to believe in the name of Jesus according to how Jesus has revealed himself to be. Our faith needs to be in the true and right object. But faith is less a working of the mind to rationally figure out who Jesus is and more a seeing of the spirit granted by Jesus. Saving faith is seeing Jesus as he is. And though it needs to be based on who Jesus truly is, it does not take a seminary degree. It doesn’t take years and years of study to figure out who is Jesus so that I can have saving faith. It can happen in a blink of an eye, the grabbing of a wrist, to an uneducated man who has had no opportunity all his life but to sit and to beg. And he can see Jesus in an instance because faith is sight granted by Jesus.

Faith in the name of Jesus that leads to healing is precisely what Peter desires for the whole crowd. But not physical healing. Peter’s desire for all those present is spiritual healing. Having just boldly charged them with killing the Messiah, Peter goes on to build a little bridge between himself and his listeners. He speaks to them hard truth, but he is not trying to make it harder than it needs to be. He is being real, but he does want them to have life in Jesus. He wants them to accept what he is saying. And so, he acknowledges that even though they are complicit in killing Jesus, they were ignorant of the true nature of Jesus. “Brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.” He also adds that it was necessary for God’s plan of salvation. You did act wickedly but it really did need to happen.

“But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”

Those truths may soften the blow, but they do not let the people off the hook. We still don’t know how they’re going to respond. They must own their sin. They have to believe what Peter is saying and they have to respond. Peter says,

<sup>19</sup> “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;”

Peter uses again this word, “repent,” in his call for a response to the Gospel message just as he did in his first speech. As we pointed out in our last lesson, the word, “repent,” means, “change your mind.” They are to change their mind about who Jesus Christ is and who God is. God is the God of Jesus Christ. And this idea can imply a return, but Peter adds that directly this time, saying, “Repent and return.” We all like sheep have gone astray. We’ve turned away. We’ve wandered. A return is always a necessary step of faith. Change your mind about your sin and return to relationship with your heavenly Father. Just think of the prodigal son. You get, repent-return, right there.

As with the first speech, Peter again includes Good News. The Gospel of grace is not only an escape from punishment. It is also an entrance into real life. Peter says,

<sup>19</sup> “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away (*escape from punishment*), in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;”

And then Peter goes on to add an idea not included in the Pentecost sermon. Refreshment from the presence of the Lord is an idea for the here and now. “The Lord is my shepherd...he restores my soul.” You know, that happens now as I walk with God. And Peter is saying, “This will be true of you when you place your faith in Jesus.” The parallel idea in the first sermon was the experience of the promised Holy Spirit. Peter said, “If you will repent and be baptized, then the promise will be given to you.” You’ll experience the Holy Spirit. And the two go together, the Holy Spirit and this idea of

refreshment in the presence of the Lord. The Spirit of God pours out the love of the Father into our heart. He cries with your spirit, “Abba Father.” So, this refreshment experience of God is intertwined with being filled with the Spirit.

In this speech Peter adds a future element to the Good News. “Repent and return [so]

that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times.”

We place our faith in Jesus both to experience the abundant life he promises now and to experience the restoration of all things that he will bring when he comes back.

As in his earlier speech, Peter supports his claims with two Old Testament references. These are short quotes. Both are from prophets, supporting Peter’s assertion in the previous verse that God spoke about the time of restoration through his holy prophets from ancient times. The first is truly ancient times, reaching back 1500 years to Deuteronomy 18:15 and 19.

<sup>22</sup> “Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. <sup>23</sup> ‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’

Jews had come to expect the prophet like Moses referenced in Deuteronomy 18 to appear at the time of the Messiah. That’s why we read in John 1:21 scribes coming from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist whether he is the Prophet. They are expecting a prophet. The Baptist says, “No, I am not the Prophet.” Peter here affirms that Jesus is the Prophet like Moses. He was a covenant mediator. Other prophets pointed Israel back to the existing covenant. Moses doesn’t point people back to the Abrahamic covenant. Instead, Moses played the very special, rare role of mediating a new covenant between God and Israel. From the time of Moses, no prophet had mediated another new covenant for the whole people of God until Jesus. Jesus is the mediator Prophet of the New Covenant. He is the Prophet like Moses.

Peter’s words support his claim about Jesus, and also support his call to repentance, since rejection of the prophet like Moses means being cut off from the people of God. Well, if they’ve killed the Prophet, that’s a problem. They will be cut off. They need to repent and return.

Peter then claims that the prophets from Samuel on spoke of the days of the Messiah. In his last sermon he quoted Joel, one of the more recent prophets. Here he has just gone back before Samuel to Moses. In his second quote he is going to reach back into times more ancient still, another 500 years back to Abraham. These are our last verses, Acts 2:24-26,

<sup>24</sup> “And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days. <sup>25</sup> “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ <sup>26</sup> “For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.”

The promise to Abraham prophesies that in Abraham’s “seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That is Genesis 12:3. The word, “seed,” is a collective word. It can be taken as plural or as singular. All of a man’s descendants can be his seed or one descendant can be his seed. Peter’s follow-up statement refers to the seed in the singular. “God raised up his Servant and sent him to bless you...” The Servant is the seed of Abraham who blesses the nations of the earth, starting with Israel. Peter has already referred to Jesus in this speech as the Servant. Jesus is the Servant. Jesus is the seed. He will bless all the families of the earth. That blessing is beginning now in Jerusalem, first with the Jews.

As with the quote from Moses, Peter uses the promise to Abraham both to teach about Jesus and to emphasize his call to repentance. The quote ends in this way, “For you first, God raised up His

Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.” This is who Jesus is. Turn from your wicked ways. Repent and return.

### Conclusion

Let’s conclude this lesson with a summary the basic Gospel message Peter has provided for us so far through his two speeches to crowds in Jerusalem. Here, quickly, seven elements.

- Jesus Christ was crucified by Pilate at the insistence of the Jews.
- God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
- God glorified Jesus Christ who sits at his right hand.
- Jesus Christ is the one foretold in the Old Testament writings as Messiah, Prophet and Lord.
- You are sinful, and if you are a member of this present generation, you are particularly guilty of participating in the death of the Messiah.
- Your right response is to repent and believe. Belief is rightly expressed through baptism in the name of Jesus.
- When you repent and believe, you will be forgiven of your sin and you will experience refreshment in relationship with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we can to that list that Peter and the Apostles claim to be eyewitnesses of the resurrection. He says, “We were witnesses to this.” That is going to end with them, so it is not an essential component of our Gospel. We do not claim to be eyewitnesses, though we do claim to base our witness on their eyewitness testimony. So far, Peter’s message has been exclusively to Jews in Jerusalem. For that reason, it will be interesting to compare with the Gospel preaching to come when this witness spreads out into Judea, Samaria, and beyond.

The call of the Gospel is a call to believe in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was asked by Galileans in John 6:28, “What must we do?”, Jesus responded, “Believe in him whom he has sent.” When the crowd at Pentecost asked, “What must we do?”, Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized.” Here Peter says, “Repent and return.” Peter’s words help us to think about the nature of true faith. He is not disagreeing with Jesus. And he is not adding something else that you have to do. What you have to do is, believe. We can express that by saying, “Believe and be baptized,” or we can express it by saying, “Repent and return.” Because saving faith involves a change of the mind about God and self, and a return to God.

In this speech, Peter’s charge was not, “Repent and believe,” but, “Repent and return.” But as we have noted, he set up faith as the main issue with his words about the healing of the lame man.

“And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

The implication set up by Peter is that just as this man was healed through faith in the name of Jesus, so you too can be healed spiritually through faith in the name of Jesus.

To believe in the name of Jesus is to believe in his true nature as he has revealed himself to be. Who is this Jesus? How does Peter describe Jesus? What names does Peter give to Jesus in his two speeches? Let’s end this lesson with that question. Saving faith is faith in the name of Jesus. How has Peter described Jesus? Peter has said, “He is the one foretold from ancient days, spoken of by Samuel and all the prophets. He is the Seed of Abraham. He is the Prophet like Moses. He is the Lord of David. He is the suffering Servant of Isaiah. He is the man Jesus the Nazarene. He is the Christ, Messiah. He is the Holy and Righteous One. He is the Prince of Life.”

This is his name, his nature. This is the Jesus we have believed in. This is the Jesus who has provided for our forgiveness and enabled refreshment in our relationship with God through faith in his name.

## Reflection questions

1. Read the healing of the lame man in Acts 3:1-11. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. In what way does the healing of the lame man serve as a sign? A sign to what?
3. Read Peter's speech in Acts 3:12-26. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
4. What new claims does this speech contribute to the Peter's witness of who Jesus is?
5. How does Peter's call for faith in the name of Jesus relate to his call to the crowd at Pentecost to repent and believe?
6. How does Peter's reference to the "restoration of all things" in 3:21 relate to the question the apostles asked about the restoration of the kingdom in 1:6? What is similar? What is different? What is being communicated about Jesus?
7. This story completes the first half of the first part of Acts. Luke as given us four stories: (1) the commission and ascension of Jesus, (2) the replacement of a 12<sup>th</sup> disciple, (3) Pentecost with Peter's sermon, and (4) the healing of the lame man with Peter's sermon. How do the two references to restoration of Israel and restoration of all things serve as a theme for these four stories?