

“Mighty Works Of God”

Acts 3:1-26

Series: Book of Acts [#3]

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Theme: **God Performs His Mighty Works Through Faithful Believers.**

Introduction

This is our third week in the book of Acts. So far in chapter 1 we looked at “*Getting Ready And Counting Down*” for the birthday, the beginning of the church. Then in chapter 2, we saw the record of Pentecost, “*Happy Birthday!*”, the church is born.

Now here in chapter 3, we see the beginning of the church’s ministry and witness in the world. The groundwork for this in chapter 2 showed us that the church is powerful because the Holy Spirit lives within each believer, instructing, directing, and empowering us. We saw the beginning of the powerful witness and life of the church.

As the focus moves to the church’s work in the world we see God performing His mighty works through the church. Our focus for chapter 3 is on the “*The Mighty Works Of God.*” God performs His mighty works through the church, collectively and individually. God always does His work sovereignly—that is, in His way and time. Chapter 3 teaches us that to be channels of His mighty works, we must be faithful. *God performs His mighty works through faithful believers.*

One thing we need to note is that God does not give us the Holy Spirit and His power and perform His works through us to draw attention to ourselves or make us look better. Some years ago a mechanic bought an old, worse-for wear VW van just in time for his family’s annual two-week summer camping trip. He inspected it and left it basically the way it was, rust and all, except for one thing—the engine. He replaced the small 4 cylinder engine with a more powerful air-cooled 6 cylinder engine.

On the trip the van rolled along like the other VW vans on the flat stretches, but on the hills there was no comparison. He buzzed by the others. At one rest stop a man who had noticed this asked, “What do you have in that thing?” The mechanic proudly showed off the 6 cylinder engine. On the surface, you couldn’t see the difference, the source of the van’s power.

In a way, that is how it is with faithful believers. The faithful believer goes through the same kinds of everyday routines and extraordinary challenges that other people do. But as they go through them, and also minister to others by God’s power, people notice something different and wonder, “What has he or she got? Why, how are they different?” It’s not on the surface, but they sense a difference.

God performs His mighty works through all faithful believers, not just a select few. While in a much different setting and distant time, chapter 3, shows us examples and principles of how God does this. Let’s start with ...

The Example Of A Miraculous Healing.

The example begins with Peter and John going to the temple to pray at the afternoon 3:00 p.m. time of prayer. “An interesting thing happened on the way to the temple” that day. Verse 2,

“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.”

This man had a real and serious physical need. He had a birth defect which resulted in his not being able to walk or even stand. Later, in 4:22, Luke tells us he was over 40 years old. His only way to survive was to beg. Giving *alms*, or money to the poor, was an ingrained Jewish tradition. In fact, the apocryphal book of Tobit, written perhaps in the 2nd century B.C., asserted that “...almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.”

So, being in a place to catch people on their way into the temple to pray was a great location.

When he saw Peter and John he began to ask for alms. When Peter and John responded by looking at him intently, and then Peter telling him, “Look at us!”, the man expected he would receive some money, perhaps a large gift (4-5). But that was not to be. Peter went on to say, “I do not possess silver and gold...” (6). In other words, “I don’t have any money with me.”

I wonder what went through the lame man’s mind in that split second? Did he begin to think, “What do they have in mind, then?” Or, “Why are they wasting my time if they don’t have any money?” We aren’t told, and he didn’t have much time to think because Peter went right on to say, “but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!”

Then Peter reached out, took him by his right hand and raised him up., and “immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened.” Here Dr. Luke, the physician, gives a clear description of a clear demonstration of God’s mighty work. This man was healed immediately. Instantly he stood up, walked and jumped around.

Children go through a process of learning how to stand, take those first steps on their own, then walk, and eventually run. People who have been ill or injured and not mobile sometimes have to learn how to stand and walk again. Not so with God’s work. This man was healed immediately and completely.

The response to this mighty work was also instantaneous. The man who had been lame, praised God (3:8). The people standing around, who recognized this man and knew he really was unable to walk, “were filled with wonder and amazement” (10) and also praised

God (9). *God performs His mighty works through faithful believers.* Christ, through Peter, performed this mighty work to meet the man's physical need.

That's the first example. Let's move to a second one.

The Example Of A Powerful Message.

Peter preached and began by correcting their outlook. Peter and John, with the man who God healed hanging on to them, made their way to an outer area around the temple. The people who saw the miracle ran after them.

Peter's opening words to them were, "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?" (12). The crowd wondered what kind of super spiritual men these were. But Peter would have none of that. He said, "He wasn't healed by our power! God didn't heal him because John and I are special, bigger than life, more devout and holier than everyone else. Don't look at us!"

You see, the people were focused on Peter, the channel, rather than God, the Source. People are no different today. Many Christians look not so much for examples to follow, but bigger than life heroes to whom they can give their praise, with whom they can identify and gain certainty and confidence. On the other side of this, any time you hear someone accepting praise for what God has done, polishing their image and accomplishments, you *know* they are off track.

After this Peter and John did not set out on a *healing crusade*. God directed them and performed this miracle through them, but they didn't let it become their focus. They weren't sidetracked. When we get to chapter 8 we will meet a man named Simon who wanted to be a big man in the church by paying Peter and John so he could have the kind of power he thought they had. Peter told him he had no part in this ministry, and should repent before God judged him.

After Peter corrected their outlook, he directed their focus. He pointed them to Jesus, to God. Look at verse 13, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus..." Again, verse 16, "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."

He also directed their focus to their own sin. Go to the middle of verse 13,

"... Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses."

Some might think Peter was a bit hard on those people. But they needed to face their problems—including their sin of rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and demanding that He

be put to death.

Having corrected their outlook and directed their focus, Peter then appealed for their repentance. He has given them a straightforward, no compromise analysis of where they are spiritually, and now he appealed to them tenderly and truthfully.

We see the tenderness in verse 17, “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.” He did not excuse their sinful action. Neither did he respond with resentment and anger— which could be understandable from one who was a committed disciple, and loved Jesus as he did.

The truthfulness is evident back in verse 13, again,

“... Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.”

Then verses 17-18,

“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”

And then came the invitation. Verse 19, “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;” He called them to *repent*. As we saw in chapter 2, this means to change your mind, change what you think and believe about Jesus and yourselves. He called them to *return*. The meaning is similar to *repent*. Turn around and come back; do an about face.

And then, at the end of the message, verse 26, “For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” With this strong call for repentance there is also a promise. He tells them, in line with Old Testament prophecy, that Jesus will return from heaven and rule over Israel (20-21). But the promise also is two-edged. Verses 22-26 make it clear that one’s response to Christ determines his or her destiny.

That’s was Peter’s message. Now let’s note the results. Not everyone liked it.

“As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.” (4:1-3)

The Sadducees generally were rich men who were philosophical about faith. They denied

the resurrection of the body and controlled the priesthood. Their opposition is what one would expect from them.

But some, many, accepted the message, repented and placed their faith in Jesus, 4:4,

“But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”

The total number of believers now was about 5,000 men *plus* an unstated number of women. So the church in the very early days went from 120 to 3,000 to perhaps around 10,000. This certainly was “*A Mighty Work Of God.*” And, *God performs His mighty works through faithful believers.* This brings us to our last example.

The Example Of A Faithful Believer.

The picture and truths of being a faithful believer we find in this chapter are not exhaustive, but certainly give us some of the critical essentials. First, Peter and John and all faithful believers minister in the name of Christ.

Peter and John were not ministering in their own power or ability. Peter made it crystal clear that this healing was not something he and John did because of who and what they were. Go to verse 12 once more, “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?”

Rather, as he said when he spoke to the man who was lame in verse 6, “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene— walk!” This was done “in the name of Jesus Christ.” As you may know, to the people of that day the phrase “the name of” spoke of that person’s character and ability, of who and what they were.

He also made it clear God did not work through them because of some special piety or godliness. I’m thankful Peter didn’t stop with “it’s not by our own power,” but God moved him to add that it wasn’t by their own piety or godliness either. Peter and John *were* special in that Jesus chose them as His disciples and they were now apostles. But by no stretch of logic or imagination was this great work accomplished because of who *they* were, but because of who *Christ* is!”

They were faithful to God’s call and leading in this situation. They were faithful representatives of Christ as they ministered in His name.

Secondly, Peter and John and all faithful believers minister in the love of Christ. Peter and John displayed love toward the lame man. Peter could have told him, “You are here every day begging. This is a prime location. Don’t you have enough yet? Do you really need something from us? You know this is the hour of prayer. Let us go and pray in peace!”

But no, just as Christ had compassion on people in need, so did Peter and John. Luke tells us in his gospel, chapter 7, of a day when Christ saw a widow burying her only son. Jesus had compassion on her, and raised her son back to life.

Then, when Jesus toured the towns and villages, preaching and healing, Matthew 9 tells us,

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’” (9:36-38)

Love does not mean foolishly helping people continue in their sin, addictions or other problems. And yes, at times it can be tough to it sort through. Often we may not feel we have the time, or may not want to take the time to sort things through and make our response one of both love and truth. The bottom line for me personally is that when in doubt, *help!* Do so wisely, but *show* the love of Christ to people in need.

A faithful believer ministers in the name of Christ with the love of Christ, and also based on the word of God. As in his first sermon of the church age in chapter 2, Peter here again built his message on the Old Testament. He took direct statements from Genesis and Deuteronomy. He also made reference to the prophets, and built his comments on a solid framework of Old Testament truth.

How do we build our ministries today? This question applies to all ministry, not just to preaching and teaching. Sadly, sometimes it gets down to what is in, *what’s hot*; or, what has worked and is *working*; and sometimes we may do new and different things, or old and the same things just to do new and different things or old and the same things.

Faithful believers’ bottom line for all their ministry is the truth of God’s word.

Conclusion.

Let’s wrap this up with just a brief word about miracles. There is both confusion about and misrepresentation of God’s miracles. At another time we will look at this in some depth, but for today, note that:

- Miracles in the Bible are generally grouped around times when God was giving new revelation and/or moving in different ways.
- We believe the *gift* of healing, the gift of miracles, were temporary gifts at the beginning of the church to confirm that, yes indeed, the church *is* a work of God.
- Those who were given this gift exercised them as all the spiritual gifts are exercised, at will with God’s blessing and results.

God still heals today by His sovereign choice. Ten to fifteen years after the events of Acts 3, God directed James to write a letter. In it he touches on the subject of sickness and healing. In chapter 5 of his letter James asked the question, “Is anyone among you sick?” (14). If ill, his direction was not “Then he must call for *the ones with the gift of healing*,” but “Then he must call for *the elders of the church* and they are to pray over him, anointing him

with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith [i.e., the faith of the people praying, the elders] will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him” (14-15).

Other passages fill the picture out by adding the truths that prayers God answers are those that are in His will, and are from people not only of faith, but also living rightly with Him and others. As I said a moment ago, God still heals today by His sovereign choice.

Secondly, let’s dismiss some misconceptions. For example, misconceptions that God performs His mighty works through just a few, special people. You and I will be surprised on the day in heaven when Christ rewards us and all believers for our faithful works. We’ll be surprised by both who is and who is not greatly rewarded.

More specifically, let’s dismiss the misconception that God has not, will not perform mighty works through you. Forget about measuring the magnitude of what has done, is doing, or may do through you—leave that to Him! We don’t know the final outcome of our attitude and action of faithfulness to God in the present moment. In many cases, we won’t know until we get to heaven.

And also, let’s dismiss our misconceptions about what we think are and are not the real or most mighty works of God. When Christ rewards us and all believers, some of our ideas about what was truly a mighty work of God may be turned on their heads.

For example, what is the most mighty or the greater work of God—His healing someone, or using your life and words of witness to your family, friends and even strangers as part of the process of His bringing someone to faith, forgiving their sins and giving them life forever?

Again, what is the most mighty or the greater work of God—His blowing away obstacles and problems and swinging open doors of blessing and prosperity, or using your patient listening and loving encouragement to someone who really needs it as part of the process of His lifting them up, leading them onward in fellowship and service?

Thirdly, our key responsibility and focus is to be faithful to God and to serve Him faithfully. How are we doing? How are you doing? What was your relationship with Christ like this past week? Have you been actively ministering for Christ to your family, friends, other believers and those who do not know Him? As we are faithful, God *will* perform His mighty work through us—you have His word on it.

Let’s spend the next moments reflecting on this with God.

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