

# The Miracle and the Message (Part 1)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>1</sup> Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. <sup>2</sup> And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. <sup>4</sup> And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" <sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup> And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and 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 recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1–10)

### The Miracle and the Message (Part 1)

- A. I'm titling this sermon [The Miracle and the Message \(Part 1\)](#).
1. It's Part 1 because today we're really only going to deal with the miracle. That's what [vv. 1-10](#) outline for us in particular.
  2. The story continues though, as you may have noticed, and really carries on through the end of the chapter and beyond. And that's where things shift to this idea of the message. That's when we'll get to Part 2 or 3 or whatever.
- B. But I labeled the sermons this way because I want to make plain for us up front this connection between miracle and message—between good deed, if you will, and good news; between the physical help and the spiritual, eternal significance.
- C. You see churches, it seems to me, can fall off on either side of this.
1. Some get so enamored with the miracle—that's all they're after. Just heal my body. Do something flashy. Or show me the money. Meet my immediate need.
    - a. And in all that, they lose the message . . . the gospel.
  2. Other churches, of course, put aside concern for miracle and even meeting physical needs and all this, and instead make it all about the message.
    - a. If I could put it bluntly: they want to save your soul from hell, but they won't serve you a bowl of soup.

- D. Don't you see, the miracle and the message have always gone together. The good deed and the good news. The showing and the sharing.
  - 1. It was this way all throughout Jesus' ministry. He would heal and then he would preach. He would meet the physical need and then he would speak into the spiritual significance (cf. [Matt. 4:23](#)).
  - 2. And it's no different now for these apostles of his. Or for you and I.
  
- E. And so today we're going to consider the miracle in particular. Next time we'll look more into what Peter has to say about it all.
  - 1. But now, as we consider the miracle here, there are three "men" I want to introduce you to, as it were: (1) The Man in the Dirt; (2) The Man on a Mission; and (3) The Man from Nazareth.

## (1) The Man in the Dirt

### Four Layers

- A. As we begin here, I just want you to see this man, the recipient of this miracle, as he's presented to us particularly in [v. 2](#) of our text.
  
- B. If we read the verse carefully, we detect with every new word or phrase another layer to the hardship and the suffering he would have had to endure. So I wanted to bring those layers out for us to consider briefly.
  - 1. I want us to see this man.
  - 2. But, more than that, I want us to see ourselves in him.
  
- C. I've got four layers for us to consider . . .

### Layer #1: "Lame"

- A. First, we're told that he is "[a man lame . . .](#)" ([v. 2](#)). He's crippled in some way—and we later find out must have somehow involved his "[his feet and ankles](#)" ([v. 7](#)). He couldn't move. He couldn't walk.
  
- B. Imagine the challenges this would create for him . . .
  - 1. All of life is just a weary task. You can't do anything. You can't go anywhere.
  - 2. Think of the struggles you would have with God. "Why? Why would you make me this way? Why me? Why not another?"
    - a. And, of course, if you know anything about the way the Jews viewed these sorts of things in that day, you know they'd have been ready to supply an answer for him, just like Job's friends. "It must have been you, bro. Must have been sin." They often drew a hard line between suffering and sin.

- b. So, you remember what the disciples asked of Jesus in [John 9](#) concerning that man born blind: “[Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?](#)” (v. 2). “Surely someone’s guilty here. We all know suffering indicates sin.”
  - 3. So, then, on top of the everyday struggle just to get by physically, there was likely this emotional and spiritual turmoil—an internal cocktail of guilt and doubt and despair. “God’s against me. He must be.”
- C. Have you ever felt like that? Like you’re going through what you’re going through because God is done with you? You don’t know what you did, but you’re sure you did something, and it’s over.
- 1. Listen, we can learn from this story: God sees you. He loves you. And he’s not done.

## Layer #2: “From Birth”

- A. We go on to read that he is not just “[a man lame](#)” he is “[a man lame from birth . . .](#)” (v. 2).
- 1. Not only was he unable walk now, he had never walked. He’s watching little kids pass him up in terms of development and ability.
    - a. I was talking to a young mom in our church the other day and her boy has just started to walk. What an amazing thing, and a cause for celebration.
    - b. But this man knew nothing of it. He has been crippled from birth.
- B. And we’re told later in [Acts 4:22](#) that he’s “[more than forty years old.](#)” That’s a long time to be writhing like a worm in the dirt.
- 1. Certainly this little detail accents the sheer wonder and impossibility of the miracle that’s about to take place.
  - 2. But it also accents the hopelessness of it all for him at this point.
    - a. You’ve got to think that maybe you have hope something could change early on you know. Maybe we can get tests; we can get him to the right doctor; we can do some physical therapy; maybe God will heal him if we pray and we fast and all this.
    - b. But years of this, decades of this, and you’re done. There is no more room for hope in your heart. It would be too painful to even let that in just to be letdown again.
      - i. So there settles in your heart a sort calm and cool disposition of despondency. It’s not going to change. It’s just the way it is.
- C. Have you ever felt like that? Like it hurts too much to hope—because it’s been this way for so long?
- 1. Look, it’s clear this guy didn’t have any clue what was coming.
    - a. We’re told in [v. 5](#) that he was “[expecting to receive something from them,](#)” but, it certainly wasn’t this.

b. He was hoping for some pocket change, something to get him through the day. He had no idea what God in grace would do for him.

i. And, so often, neither do we.

D. But you see here's the good news: God has no problem letting himself in through the backdoor. He loves to throw his kids surprise parties. He gives us never less than what we expect, but always more.

1. We come to him, wanting him to make our lives a little better, a little more comfortable—just throw a few coins our way.
2. But he wants to sweep us up into his love and fill us with joy unshakeable. He wants to change everything!

### Layer #3: "Carried"

A. We keep reading: "And a man lame from birth was being carried . . ." (v. 2).

1. There's not much to say here. I think you get it. This is a grown man being carried like a baby in front of all these people.

a. Imagine the embarrassment, the shame. You feel so helpless, like such a burden. I struggle to ask for help, because it's admitting I can't do it, it's embarrassing. But that was this man's whole life.

B. Have you ever felt like that? Like you're burden to everyone around you? Like they'd all be happier and better off if you just left?

1. There's gospel for you here. You're not a burden to Jesus. He'll put you around his shoulder. He'll lift you up.

### Layer #4: "Laid Daily at the Gate"

A. We're told next that "they laid [him] daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate . . ." (v. 2).

1. He's on the ground near the temple. Here's why I say this is a "man in the dirt." It's humbling, it's pathetic. He's no more dignified than a doormat.

2. But it gets worse. You see, he's not just on the ground. He's also outside the gate.

B. Now scholars disagree at this point over a couple of things . . .

1. For one, they're not sure exactly which gate this is.

a. It's likely the gate that marked the transition from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women in the temple.

- i. So he was out with the Gentiles at this point and begging for change from the Jews that would be passing through that gate and going deeper into the temple precincts there.
  - 2. Secondly, there is some confusion as to whether a crippled person like this man here would even be allowed past this gate to go deeper in. Even if he was a Jew, he still needed to be outside in some way, because he was deemed blemished, unclean, unholy, like a leper or something like this.
    - a. It seems this is likely the case and many commentators conclude as such (cf. [Lev. 21:17-20](#); [2 Sam. 5:8](#)).
    - b. But regardless we know for certain that such people were among the social and religious outcasts in Israel (cf. [Luke 7:22](#); [14:13, 21](#)).
      - i. So, in one way or another, there were walls up. And this man is on the outside, laying in the dirt.
- C. And again I ask: have you ever felt like that? Like you're on the outside. Like you don't belong. Like you're a pariah, a loser, a doormat in the dust.
  - 1. Listen, in Jesus, God's coming for you—and he's going to throw open that gate and bring you in close. Hang on.

## (2) The Man on a Mission

### Two Lessons

- A. With this I'm thinking of Peter in particular because he's the one foregrounded in our story (even though he's technically here with John). And I want to consider the role he plays in all of this.
  - 1. I think we learn from him what it looks like to be on mission for Jesus. There are two lessons I want to bring out for us from this . . .

### Lesson #1: The Missionary's Availability

- A. For this, look back up at [v. 1](#). Luke tells us that all this happened while "[Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.](#)"
  - 1. The "[ninth hour](#)" was 3:00pm. It was the time of the evening sacrifice.
    - a. As you can read about in [Exod. 29:38-46](#), day by day, Israel was to sacrifice one lamb in the morning and one lamb in the evening on the altar there in the temple (or tabernacle).
      - i. It was to be a regular burnt offering throughout all their generations as a perennial reminder that, as a sinner, you can only approach a holy God and have relationship with him through sacrifice. Substitutionary atonement.



1. Is this how you walk around your neighborhood, your workplace, the grocery store—like Jesus may have someone for you to love on here?
  - a. You may have a lot of other things going on, you may be hanging with your Christian buddies, you may have an agenda—things you need to do, places you’ve got to get to—but are you willing to set all that aside if God is moving otherwise? Are you available?

## Lesson #2: The Missionary’s Resources

- A. When you are confronted with a need or a problem, are you like me, where you immediately look within, to yourself, and consider: do I have what it takes for this, to meet the need to rise to the moment? That’s my tendency for sure.
  1. So we hit issues in ministry or whatever, and I’m tempted to run first to the whiteboard, you know. “Let’s brainstorm, let’s map this out, let’s make a plan, let’s try to fix this.”
    - a. But I’m looking at my own resources, what I have in and of myself.
- B. And what I love is Peter doesn’t do this. He’s not looking at what he has in and of himself here. He’s looking at what he has in Jesus.
  1. If he was trying to meet the need in his own strength, he would have pulled out his pockets, and when nothing but lint fell to the floor, he would have just said: “Man, I’m sorry, ‘I have no silver and gold.’ I don’t have the resources to help.”
  2. But he doesn’t stop there. He knows he might not have that, but he does have Jesus. So he goes on “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (v. 6). You see it, right? It’s not about me and my ability. It’s about him.
- C. A lot of times what stops us, I think, from wading into the fray and trying to engage our neighbor or our coworker or that family member or whoever isn’t just that we’re too busy or distracted or unavailable—it’s that we think we don’t have what it takes.
  1. We aren’t smart enough, we aren’t good enough, rich enough, strong enough.
  2. But if you know Jesus, listen: that’s enough.
- D. It’s no secret. That’s what Peter knew: “Honestly, I’m a loser. I’m a coward. I denied my Savior three times. I put my foot in my mouth more times than I can count. I don’t have the smarts. I don’t have the strength. I don’t have the wealth. I don’t have gold or silver. Oh but I have Jesus. So, in his name, get up and walk.”
  1. This is why, later when Peter and John are on trial before the Jewish leaders, we read this in Acts 4:13: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” “This isn’t from them. It couldn’t be. It’s from him.”

- E. I recently heard another pastor say this, and I think it's true. It may sound crazy, but do you want to know what God's plan is for reaching your neighbors and coworkers and family and friends for Jesus? It's you. You're the plan.
1. He's not going to call in Charles Spurgeon or Jonathan Edwards or C.S. Lewis. Those dudes are dead. This isn't their day. This is your day.
  2. He didn't put John Piper or Alistair Begg or Francis Chan or whoever your favorite preacher is in your neighborhood. He put you there. And it's not because those other dudes were already booked. You're not second string. You're not J.V. You're not Plan B. You're it. You're the plan.
    - a. And it's not because you're awesome. It's because he is . . . and you know him.

### (3) The Man from Nazareth

- A. So let's talk about this Man from Nazareth. Peter says: ["In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"](#) (v. 6). And the dude just gets up.
- B. Now, just to be clear, Peter is not invoking some magic spell here. Like as long as you say "in the name of Jesus" when you pray good stuff will happen. That's not what this is. This is not Hogwarts.
1. This is calling on the power and presence of the one who is truly alive and active here among us. He's moving now. He's at work now. He's here now. And we can talk and engage and request his help . . . right now.

### Two Disambiguators?

- A. But I wanted to bring your attention to the fullness of this name Peter ascribes to Jesus here. It's actually very peculiar, and very interesting. ["In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . ."](#) (v. 6).
1. When you do a quick search in the NT, you'll find, he's elsewhere called ["Jesus Christ"](#) many times of course.
  2. And likewise he's often called Jesus ["of Nazareth"](#) as you would expect.
  3. But the only time in all the NT when he's referred to as both together ["Jesus Christ of Nazareth"](#) is here in this narrative concerning the miracle with this man in the dirt (first here in v. 6 and then again later in [Acts 4:10](#)).
    - a. Now you might say: "Who cares? I don't get it."
    - b. But I happen to think it's really important. You see, I think it holds the clue as to how Jesus works miracles in the first place and what they're all about . . .
- B. Technically these words ["Christ"](#) and ["of Nazareth"](#) are both what we might refer to as "disambiguators". They are used by people to remove ambiguity.
1. There were many people in and around Israel named Jesus in his day, and the Jews didn't have last names—so how do we know which Jesus you're referring to? It's ambiguous, until you use disambiguator.



- a. But here's the thing, you don't need two. Jesus "Christ" would have been enough certainly. Oh, this is the Jesus whom many are claiming was and is the Messiah. I see. It's no longer ambiguous.
  - b. So why add to his name not just Jesus "Christ" but Jesus Christ "of Nazareth"? We already know who you're talking about Peter.
- C. At first glance, it would appear to be a redundancy. But it's not!
- 1. Don't you see? The disambiguators emphasize different things concerning Jesus. And both are radically significant, especially for this man in the dirt (and anyone in here who's there with him) . . .

### Disambiguator #1: "Christ"

- A. On the one hand, "Christ" emphasizes Jesus' exaltation. It identifies Jesus as the "Messiah" or "Anointed One."
  - 1. As one commentator puts it: it's "the name which belongs to Jesus by virtue of his resurrection and glorification."
    - a. This is why Peter, after making the case for Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand, says: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).
- B. He's the Christ. It's "the name of Jesus Christ." There's power in it. Here's one with strength and authority to heal your feet with word.

### Disambiguator #2: "Of Nazareth"

- A. But, on the other hand now, "of Nazareth" emphasizes precisely the opposite.
  - 1. The former speaks to his strength and his power.
  - 2. This now speaks to his humanity, his weakness, his humility, his willingness to get in the dirt with us, with this man in front of Peter.
- B. "Nazareth." It was the town where Jesus grew up. God became man and walked among us.
  - 1. He's not just up there somewhere, exalted and removed, high and lifted up. He's right here. He's in your neighborhood. He's come to help.
- C. And beyond all this, it would seem Nazareth had a less than stellar reputation among the Jews.
  - 1. So you remember when Philip is telling Nathanael about Jesus, Nathanael wonders out loud: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).
    - a. If God is going to become man, why not at least have him touch down in some more notable city.

- i. It would be like “Jesus Christ of Fresno” or Bakersfield or something like that. Nobody wants that.
  - ii. Give him Santa Barbara or San Francisco or San Diego.
- D. But don’t you see? This is why I say Jesus doesn’t just come to earth, he gets in the dirt, he moves towards us in our mess.

## Culminating in the Cross

- A. And, of course, we know it’s all going to culminate in the cross. That’s where this whole “of Nazareth” momentum is going.
  - 1. “<sup>6</sup> [T]hough he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).
- B. So before he ever goes up, he’s going down and down and down. But why?
  - 1. Well, here’s where we get to what I’d call the miracle underneath all miracles.
    - a. Job’s friends, and Jesus’ disciples, when they see suffering and directly link it to sin and God’s judgment, in one sense they’re off, as I mentioned.
    - b. But, in another sense, in a more general sense, they’re right. This life is hard. Things are broken. There’s a curse hanging over creation. Why? Because of sin.
      - i. Because, as a whole, humanity has hardened their heart against God and left the Creator for the creation. “I don’t want you, but I want your stuff.” And we broke it. We made a mess of it. We cut ourselves off from the source of life, so of course we’re experiencing suffering and death. And we deserve God’s judgment.
  - 2. But Jesus comes down and he steps in between. He takes our junk, so we can have his salvation.
- C. All the different layers we talked about earlier, the stuff that man in the dirt was experiencing—this man from Nazareth would experience all that and more in his place on the cross.
  - 1. He wasn’t born lame, but he was made such, you could say at the cross, as they beat, and maimed, and ultimately nailed him immobile to the beams.
  - 2. And, while he himself wasn’t personally carried it would seem, you remember at one point he was so beat up, so drained of vitality, that he couldn’t even carry his own cross up that hill. To keep things moving along, they had to enlist another to carry it for him (Matt. 27:32).
  - 3. And where did they take him? Well they took him outside the gate (cf. Heb. 13:12). Not just outside the temple, but outside the city, where the filthy and the unclean and the cursed things go.

4. And he was reduced to begging for alms, you could say. While hanging there, he asks for something, anything, to quench his thirst.
- D. Many are familiar with those devastating words Jesus cries out from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We just looked at them from Ps. 22 last week in fact. But I wonder if you know at what hour Jesus shrieked such things?
1. Matthew goes out of his way to tell us. It was the ninth hour. The hour of the evening offering. The hour of prayer. The very hour this crippled man’s feet are set to dancing.
    - a. Matt. 27:46: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”
- E. Why was God forsaking him? So that he would no longer have to forsake us. Jesus is the offering for sin that makes it possible for us to come back to God, back to wholeness, back to life.
1. Because, you see, he’s not just the man from “Nazareth”, he is also the “Christ.”
  2. He doesn’t just die under the curse for us at the cross, he overturns it in his resurrection.
  3. He is in the dirt with you and I, no doubt, but he is also in the heavenlies on the throne.

## Inaugurating the End-Time Restoration

- A. So when Peter calls on his name for the sake of this crippled man, we’re told that “immediately his feet and ankles were made strong” (v. 7).
- B. And it’s not just his body that was healed. His heart was as well. The issue underneath the issue was dealt with. Again, there’s a miracle underneath the miracle. His sin was forgiven. He could have relationship with God. That’s why we see he doesn’t just run off and get on with his life. No.
1. Where does he go?
    - a. Luke tells us that he “entered the temple with them [Peter and John] . . .” (v. 8). He could come in. He doesn’t have to stay outside the gate any longer. He was being brought near by grace. (One has to wonder if the very first thing he saw as he entered was the evening sacrifice being offered.)
  2. And what is he doing in there?
    - a. Again, Luke tells us that he’s “walking and leaping and praising God” (v. 8).
- C. The word translated “leaping” in v. 8 there, it’s quite uncommon, it only shows up a handful of times. And Luke’s use of it here forges a direct link with its use in Isa. 35:6 LXX.
1. It’s a messianic prophecy. Isaiah is talking about the new world that the Messiah will eventually usher in, the end-time restoration of all things (cf. Acts 3: 21). Here’s what he says in context: “<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup>Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with

vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; <sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert . . . .<sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:3–6, 10).

- D. So listen: This lame man leaping like a deer in the house of God is a trumpet blast, an announcement, as it were, that the end-time restoration has begun in Jesus. It’s a picture and a prophetic sign pointing us towards the new creation that’s coming in full upon his return.

## Two Closing Exhortations

- A. I’ve just got two exhortations for us now as we close . . .

### Exhortation #1: Come to Him

- A. Don’t you want this restoration? Don’t you long for that? We’re all like this cripple in the dirt in one way or another. We want things to change. We want help and hope. We want forgiveness and healing. We want things to be made new.
1. Listen, don’t settle for silver and gold solutions that get you through for a little while maybe but let you down in the end.
  2. Come to Jesus. He’ll put you back together.

### Exhortation #2: Go to Them

- A. Peter and John have been changed by Jesus. He met them in the dirt. That’s why they don’t hesitate to do the same with this guy. They’ve been there.
- B. If you noticed, they don’t just pray for this guy from a distance . . . they meet him in the dirt. They don’t just say, “Be warm and be filled” . . . they serve him some soup. They don’t just call on Jesus to bless him . . . they extend their hand of blessing as well. Did you catch that?
1. “<sup>6</sup> But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong” (Acts 3:6-7).
    - a. It’s the supernatural and the natural. It’s the miraculous and the everyday means of grace. It’s the power of Christ and the hand of Peter. And these things always go together. Both help open people up to the gospel message.
- C. So there are people in your life who need you to bring the love of God to them. Who are the people you know that are just struggling in the dirt right now?
1. Pray for them, sure. Ask God to do the miracle.
  2. But then roll up your sleeves and get in the dirt with them as well.
    - a. It’s what Jesus does. It’s what his people do. Go to them.