

Power to Heal

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[0 : 0 0] As I was preparing for this sermon, and as I was praying and trying to think through what it is that God wants us to see and hear as we come together this morning, there's one thing that just stuck out to me again and again and again, and that is that we need Jesus. I know it sounds really simple. We need Jesus. But I think it's incredibly important and incredibly powerful, because I realize that in my life, I rely on myself a lot. I rely on my power of thought and my wisdom and my strength a lot. And I've been reading the book of Acts a lot lately, and as I read through the book of Acts, there's one thing that sticks out to me again and again and again, and that is that they constantly, in the book of Acts, relied on Jesus. Again and again and again, the situation comes up, and things look dire and bleak, and rather than say, oh, let's have a strategy meeting and figure out how to deal with this, or rather than stress out, the church prays. They rely on God, and again and again and again, God comes through for them. And I was reflecting on it, and I realized, if you took the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit out of the book of Acts, it would be an incredibly boring book, because nothing would happen. There would be some people sitting in a room, the end. Everything that happens in the book of Acts, the gospel moving forward, people's lives being changed, happens through the power of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. And I just keep asking myself, if I took the power of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit out of my life and the ministry that I do, how different would that look on a day-to-day basis?

And there's a big part of me that's scared that it probably wouldn't look as different as it should. If you take Jesus and the Holy Spirit out of the book of Acts, things look wildly different. And the more I reflect on this, the more I'm aware of the fact that I need Jesus. So as we come together today, I want us to see Jesus. We have three really simple points. One, Jesus worked powerfully in the Bible. Two, Jesus wants to work powerfully in our world today.

And three, our proper response to Jesus' power is worship. So let's, as we start, take a minute to pray that God would reveal himself to us during our time together and that we would see Jesus during this time.

Father, we thank you that you are good. We thank you that you love us. We thank you that you are a powerful God who has sent Jesus into the world to work powerfully and who sent your Holy Spirit today to work powerfully in us. We pray, Holy Spirit, that you would open our eyes to see Jesus and his power and his beauty and to fall in love with him today. And in Jesus' name, amen. So first step, God worked powerfully in the Bible. We see that in this story. We see that in three ways. First, God worked powerfully to heal. The story starts off pretty simply, Peter and John heading into the temple, normal everyday life.

There's nothing special about this day. They're going to pray, which a good Jew would do pretty much every day if they were in the area. And as they're heading into the temple in the normal, everyday, mundane tasks of life, they come upon a lame beggar who's been lame from birth. He has never been able to walk. I'm sure that all of us have seen a situation like this at some point in our lives.

[3 : 5 2] I find that I often see them as I'm on the walkway heading into IFC, beggars out there just asking for money. And this man looks up at Peter and John and he says, money, please. And they get his attention and they tell him, look at us. He looks up at them and they say, we have no silver and gold, but what we do have, we give to you. In the name of Jesus, stand up and walk. And the man climbs up to his feet and the passage says that he starts walking and leaping and praising God. God works powerfully to heal this man. As the man starts walking and leaping and praising God, crowds start to gather because they recognize this man. He's the man who sat out front his entire life, never able to walk. And the crowds gather together to see what's happening. And as they do, Peter steps up and starts to preach to them.

And as Peter starts to preach to the crowds, we see God's power to transform. See, if you were here at Easter, you would have heard another story about Peter. You would have heard a story about Peter failing and failing miserably. It was the night when Jesus was betrayed and arrested. And Peter, who had been his follower and friend for three plus years, is sitting there watching everything happen. And he has person after person walk up to him and say, you're friends with him, right?

You know this Jesus guy. And again and again, three times, Peter says, no, no, I swear, I have never seen this man in my life. And when he realizes what he has done, that he has failed, that he has denied Jesus, he runs away in shame, in guilt. And this same Peter who failed miserably to stand up for Jesus in the hour of Jesus' greatest need is the same Peter who's standing here preaching to this crowd. Something happened in his life that's transformed him. Because even though it's the same person, he's not the same person. There's something radically different about him.

And it's not just that he stands up and starts preaching. I mean, if you look at what he says in this sermon, this is one of the harshest sermons I've ever heard in my life. Peter stands up in front of the crowd and tells them, you killed God. There's no book on how to get people to come to your church that recommends talking to them that way. Peter gets up and he literally says to them, you asked to have a murderer released from prison so that you could kill the author of life. In the middle of a crowd that could easily become a mob, this can be a very dangerous thing to say. If you don't believe that, just flip a couple chapters over to Acts 7 and see what happens to Stephen when he says it.

Peter boldly speaks to the crowd about who Jesus is and about what Jesus has done and about how the crowd responded to Jesus. He confronts them, but he offers them hope as well. He says, you know, God foretold about this in the Old Testament. And God said that this was going to happen. And God wasn't caught off guard by it. In fact, it was part of his plan. And he raised up Jesus from the dead.

[7 : 30] And through Jesus, he now offers you forgiveness. And he calls the crowd to repent, to turn to Jesus, and to trust in him. Peter, as he does this, is a totally transformed man. And what is it that happened that changed Peter from this coward to this bold, fierce preacher? He experienced the power of God to transform his life. He saw the resurrected Jesus, and he knew when he saw the resurrected Jesus that there was nothing that any person could do to him that God's power to restore and redeem could not overcome. He experienced failure, but he experienced forgiveness. And he knew that he was loved unconditionally despite his failure. And then, as we've talked about the past few weeks, he had the

Holy Spirit come and live inside of him so that God himself was guiding him in his day-to-day life. God worked powerfully to transform Peter from this coward to a bold, fierce preacher who was not afraid to stand up and declare God's truth in a very direct way to the crowd. And as Peter preaches, we see God's power in a third way in this story. We see God's power to save. It wasn't in today's scripture reading, but if you flip ahead four verses, it says in Acts 4.4, but many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about 5,000.

Now, there's some debate about whether 5,000 people believed in it this day, or whether after this day there were 5,000 total Christians. Either way, you're looking at 2,000 to 5,000 people who trusted in Jesus this one day from this one sermon. God works powerfully to save people right in this story. And if you're sitting here and you're thinking, yeah, that's cool, but they've obviously never met my friends or family or co-workers because that's not going to happen with them.

Remember, this is the crowd of people that killed Jesus. God works powerfully to transform their lives. Peter's not preaching to an easy crowd here. Peter is preaching to a crowd that not long before was an angry mob calling for the death of God.

And God works to save this crowd. God works to transform their lives. And if you're here today and you haven't trusted in Jesus, I don't know, maybe there are some of you who feel like I've just done too many things wrong for God to forgive me. This passage shows that that's not true. God reaches into the lives of several thousand of the people who killed Jesus, and he saves them and rescues them, and he offers you that same forgiveness here today. See, Peter tells them that it's actually through their greatest failure, through killing Jesus, that God has made a way for them to be forgiven because Jesus pays the price for all of their rebellion against God. And so in Acts 3, we see the incredible power of God at work in the Bible. We see his power to heal. We see his power

to transform. We see his power to save. And like I said, so often I just don't feel like I'm seeing that stuff happening in my life. Does anyone else feel that way? You don't need to put up your hands, but just think to yourself. My guess is there are a lot of us who feel that way.

And that brings us to point number two, that God wants to work powerfully in our lives today. He's not just the God of back then, and now we're on our own. The God from back then in this story is the same God today, and he wants to work powerfully in our lives today. So why is it that I, or maybe we, don't experience a lot of this stuff on a more regular basis? I believe it's largely because I, slash we, have faith that is way too small, and that's focused on the wrong things.

[12:02] You know, if you go throughout the New Testament, in the book of Acts, and the rest of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus is absolutely central to everything that the Christians believe and do.

If you look at, at verse 16, they say that his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. The faith that is through Jesus has given this man perfect health in the presence of you all. It's all about Jesus, and specifically about him being raised from the dead. And you see this over and over and over. If you go to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says it so clearly that he says, if Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead, then no one should believe in Christianity because it's a lie. And anyone who does believe in Christianity should be pitied because they're wasting their lives believing a lie. But he closes out the chapter by saying, but Christ has been raised from the dead, and therefore, we should be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, our labor is not in vain. Paul says the resurrection changes everything. The resurrection is the heart of what it means to be a Christian and where our power comes from as Christians. And even if you fast forward to the book of Revelation, that they're gathered around the throne of Jesus in heaven, and there's a crowd singing, worthy are you, for you were slain, and then implicitly, like, you rose again. And by your blood, you have ransomed for God a people from every language and nation and tribe and people. The death and resurrection of Jesus is not something in the New

Testament that they sort of celebrate at the beginning and then move on from, because they've made it to the point where they can rely on themselves. The death and resurrection of Jesus is absolutely central to everything in the entire Bible. It's huge. It's important. And you see it here in Acts 3 as well, that it's central for Peter and John and what they're doing. If you look at verse 18, it says, what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that as Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Here we see the cross, the importance of the cross, and how it shows that Jesus was actually part of God's plan all along from the Old Testament. In verse 19 and 20, it says, repent therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you Jesus. They say through Jesus that God offers you refreshing.

God offers you forgiveness. God has overcome the greatest enemy, sin and death, through Jesus. And then in verse 21, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. They say the resurrection is the proof that God's going to one day restore all things. What they believe about God and what they believe about who God is, is completely built around the resurrection of Jesus. And the major message of the New Testament is that the Jesus who is crucified and who rose again is now reigning over the universe and empowering the church to live for him through the Holy Spirit. Do you get what that means? It means the God who right here in Acts chapter 3 healed the lame man and transformed Peter's life and saved thousands of people in the crowd is the same exact God who's reigning over everything today. The same God. And he wants to work powerfully in our lives, in our lives, in your life, and in my life. He doesn't want us to be content with the mediocre. He wants to do powerful and amazing things in us and through us. And if I'm being honest, most days I don't wake up expecting God to do incredible things.

[16:15] Most nights I go to bed and I put my head down on my pillow and I'm not really disappointed if I didn't see God do something amazing that day. On a typical night, I'm actually pretty content if nothing went catastrophically wrong that day. You know, on a normal Sunday, if I can come to church and we make it through the day with no one in the kids ministry breaking anything, no youth eating the snacks in the kitchen before church is dismissed, no parents complaining to me about anything, and no one messaging me in the afternoon saying I forgot to do something that I was really supposed to do, I count that as a win. That's a terribly low standard if the

God of the Bible is the God who is reigning in the world today. If God is really God, we should not just be content that we avoided catastrophe, we should be expecting Him to do amazing things in our lives today. But what's my problem? My problem is that far too often, I rely on my own power. And if I'm living life by my own power, it is a major accomplishment to make it through the day with no catastrophe happening. Because on my own, I'm pretty powerless to stop most of those things from happening. But if the God of the Bible is the God who is ruling over the universe today, if the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the God who is reigning in my life today, if the God who healed the lame man and transformed Peter and saved the crowds is the God who is reigning today, then how can I be content with such a small goal in life? How can I expect so little? Why don't I expect amazing? You know, the more I read through Acts, the more convinced I am that God wants to do incredible and amazing things in us and through us today. But that won't happen as long as we're relying on ourselves rather than Him. You know, Kevin talked last week about how the church in Acts devoted itself to prayer. He talked about prayer as a labor, like giving birth, that it's hard, it's difficult, but it brings forth life. And for the church in Acts, prayer was a way that they expressed their dependence on God over and over and over again as a part of their regular life. They expressed their reliance on the resurrected Christ through prayer. They expressed their reliance on the Holy Spirit through prayer. They spent huge amounts of time asking God to work in their world.

And then look what happens. God heals a lame man. God brings a crowd together and thousands of people trust in Him. And if I'm honest, I find it difficult to sit down and stay focused on prayer for 10 minutes in a row. My mind gets distracted and starts to wander. Maybe I'll make it through 10 minutes, but I'll get up and just feel like I don't know whether I was really focused that whole time. And it's a symptom of the fact that I rely on myself way too much. And I'm not relying on God. Because if I am living my life relying on God, then I'm going to be desperately pursuing Him in prayer all the time.

I'm going to be living my life with an awareness. I was hearing a pastor preach this week, and he was saying, you know, when we go to read our Bibles, we need to go with a desperation for God. He said, when you sit down to read your Bible, start out by praying, God, I need you. I'm going to die if you don't speak to me right now. How many of us actually believe that that's true? That we have this level of need for God in our lives? You know, I know that we have some people here who are amazing at praying and are prayer warriors. And if you tell them, hey, this is going on in my life, they will pray for you, and they will follow up and see how that's doing. But as a church, are we a church that is devoted to prayer? You know, if we have something that comes up, do we spend more time trying to solve the problems on our own or asking God to work? Do we spend more time stressing about how things are going to work out? Or do we get down on our knees and beg God to do something? When we gather on a Sunday or in our community groups or for various things throughout the week, do we expect the power of Jesus to be at work transforming lives? How dependent are we on prayer? How dependent are we on God?

[21 : 29] God. Because God is big. God wants to do amazing things. But as long as we're relying on ourselves rather than him, it doesn't typically happen. God obviously can work through that.

But if you look at the Bible, he much more often works when his people come to him and beg him, God, come work. You're big. Do big things in us and through us.

Prayer is how we express that reliance on God in the practical day-to-day of our lives. So we see God works powerfully in the Bible. God wants to work powerfully in our world today.

And third, the proper response of us to God's power is worship. I'm not talking about like standing up and singing songs, although that may be part of it. What I'm talking about is lives lived in proper response to what he's done. One of the things that really struck me as I read through this story this week is that in every part of this story, God's extravagant love leads to a response of extravagant worship. You look at the lame man. He's sitting there. He can't walk. God heals him. And how does he respond?

It says he was walking and leaping and praising God. God shows extravagant love by healing him. And the man responds with extravagant worship, praising God. With Peter, like we said, he was a failure. And yet God shows him extravagant love, forgiving him, restoring him. And how does Peter respond? Extravagant worship, boldly declaring to the crowds who Jesus is and their need for him.

[23 : 16] You look at the crowd. They killed Jesus. And yet God shows them extravagant love, offering them forgiveness and acceptance and restoration and refreshing. And how do they respond? Extravagant worship. They believe in him. And today, it should be the same pattern. We have a God who shows extravagant love and works powerfully to show extravagant love. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, God is offering you this extravagant love in your life today. Will you respond with believing? If you're here today and you are a Christian, God has already shown you his extravagant love? How are you expressing extravagant worship in your life today? Amen.