

Unexpected miracles - Acts 3: 1 - 20

This is a story familiar to many of us, especially those of us who have grown up in church and have been to Sunday school, there is even a song about it.

This morning I would like us to try to look beyond the familiar to hear what God is saying to us in this moment.

There is so much in this chapter and my time is limited so I have just picked out a few things that I feel God would want to draw to our attention this morning.

I have entitled my message unexpected miracles because God often meets us in the unexpected, His ways are not our ways, but even when we don't understand, we can trust and be assured that His ways are much better.

Our reading begins with a man who is lame from birth begging to earn his keep. Being lame was just how it was, he would never have expected a day when he was able to walk although I am sure he dreamed of that day.

The man shares an immediate need with Peter and John, he needed money to live.

But God knows us all so intimately that he knew his heart, his dreams and He often fulfils our needs in ways beyond what we allow ourselves to imagine, beyond our limited scope of vision. It's amazing and reassuring that God is not limited by us.

Just before lockdown we ran an Alpha Course at New Life Church, six unchurched people came along and actually all came to faith which was incredible and so exciting! On the Holy Spirit day five of the participants had a real and tangible encounter with God but one lady didn't. She brought it up a few times, it was difficult for her.

Our second last session covered the subject was healing, 'Does God heal today?' At the end of session, I asked everyone if anyone would like prayer, the lady I mentioned came forward & two of us prayed for her.

She is quite a young lady (in her 30's) but has had a problem with painful hips for many years, she was diagnosed with a condition that involves fluid getting trapped in her joints and she does a job where she has to stand a lot of the day.

After we prayed, she had a surprised look on her face, she said that she could feel heat in her hips and the heat was increasing and the pain was decreasing. It was incredible and beautiful; God had met her in an unexpected miracle.

Not all miracles are big and flashy, some miracles are more low-key, God reveals himself in deeper ways too, sometimes He simply meets us in the sadness, in the loneliness, the anxiety, the fear. Things we may be experiencing right now. It's no less of a miracle to have peace and to be held by God when the world around rages like a storm. No circumstance or person is able to limit God.

The fact that God does unexpected miracles seems to suggest that we need to be more expectant, be more aware of Him and to be present. Live in each moment, not thinking ahead or living in the past. God may be doing miracles in our lives now or He may want to do miracles through us like He did with Peter and John.

The disciples of Jesus knew him so intimately and personally, yet they saw a need to continue to learn and stay close. One of the major words that I feel has come out of this time of lockdown is a Call to Holiness, a call for believers to go deeper, to get to know God more closely, more intimately, to recognise His works, know His heart. When we think about relationship a good example is our relationship with family or close friends.

With someone we know really well, we can sense how they feel by just looking in their eyes. We can pick up their mood by their voice. We know their hopes & dreams, likes & dislikes, how to make them smile, what would make them sad, how to best express our love. We can only know this by spending lots of time and being present, being invested in that person and the relationship.

When we understand someone, we are in a better place to communicate their heart, speak on their behalf and translate them to people around.

Jesus translates God for us and we are called to translate Him to others. I think the time is coming for us to be bolder and more outspoken about this amazing saviour of ours.

To do this we not only need to know who God is but who we are too. If we allow ourselves to be open, as we get closer to God, we usually become more aware of our weaknesses as well as our strengths. Recognising our weaknesses is not comfortable, but it is a gift because without this we cannot grow and develop in holiness. God is so gracious, he walks this journey with us, surrounding us with love, helping us through.

I've just been reading through the book of John again, and one of my favourite scriptures is John 15, where Jesus describes himself as the true vine. He asks for us to abide in Him, to dwell in Him, this is the only way to live well. 15:8 says... Abide in my love - keep my commandments. Bear much fruit & become my disciples

Going back to our story in Acts, God brought so many people to faith that day through the living testimony of Peter and John, through their faith, their boldness and their relationship with God. They followed God's leading and it changed so many lives, not just the life of the lame man, but the lives of those who believed as a result of this miracle and Peter's anointed words. We are called to live like this.

Peter spoke openly and honestly to the crowd who were amazed by the healing. He gave an explanation, but he didn't sugar-coat the message. Pick up in verse 12...

"You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14 But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead."

Many who became followers of Jesus that day would have been in the crowd shouting for his death, in a way responsible. As a new believer, how do you get over something like that? Imagine the moment that the penny dropped, and they realised who Jesus was, and then a few minutes later they proclaimed Him LORD, the realisation must have been so painful, I can only imagine how they must have felt.

If we are honest, we have all done things that come against God and yet His ways are not our ways and if our intentions are good, sometimes our mistakes may be part of the overall plan. God is never taken by surprise, but it's complicated.

In v17 Peter helps the crowd by explaining that although they had a part in it, it was part of God's bigger plan, he says... "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer".

Any forgiveness is difficult but self-forgiveness is tough, but it is so important because not doing it can hold us back. No matter what we have done, we can experience God's forgiveness immediately but sometimes it's very hard to forgive ourselves. It's a process of letting go and allowing God into those difficult places. We need to do it and I would encourage you to reflect today or over the next few days to see if there is anything you need to deal with, ask the Holy Spirit to show you.

In verse 9-10, Peter uses the word repent. He says Repent so that the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord may come. Repent is such a big word, it has layers and although it does involve admitting being wrong, being sorry, the meaning includes having a complete change of heart, to think different way, to do an about-turn, in scripture it generally means turning from our own ways and seeking God.

Most of the crowd and the religious leaders probably felt that they were serving God by calling for the death of Jesus and as it turned out, they were, but not in the way they thought. God was doing something extremely unexpected.

We are currently living in a time and situation that was unexpected, a time of upheaval, a time of change, difficulty and uncertainty, but what is God saying here? What is He doing,

where is He moving? Where does He want to bring change? Are there things that we are doing in His name that are no longer in-tune?

The reward of seeking God, giving Him full control and admitting our weaknesses before Him, is a time of refreshing. Peter speaks about this in verse 19... 19 Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

In my experience a Godly heart change, whether it be coming to faith, admitting our weaknesses, practicing forgiveness or a daily recommitment, leads to us being refreshed, renewed, given fresh purpose, fresh energy, fresh vision and peace.

In conclusion, at the beginning of this story, we spoke about the miraculous healing of the lame man, how God saw his heart and unexpectedly answered his dreams, what are our dreams? ...And are we expectant?

Self-forgiveness, are there things you need to forgive yourself for, give to God and let go? We can never know what's coming but if we know God well, know ourselves well and are prepared to be changed and challenged then we will always be ready. We'll be ready at any given moment to move with the Spirit and we'll live from a place of expectancy, rest and refreshment.

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