

I

Temple prayers were mainstay activities in Jewish life. Every day at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM devout Jews went to the Temple to praise God and offer prayers. Two newly minted Christian apostles, Peter and John, keep up with this discipline and head out to attend the 3:00 session. Acts 3:1-10 tells us what happens:

Peter Preaches at Pentecost

When Peter and John arrive at the Temple, they experience a common scenario, i.e., the poor begging for alms. In this case, a 40-year-old congenitally crippled man that never took a step in his life. Having street smarts, however, his friends strategically place him at the Gate of Beautiful because Jewish law demanded giving alms to the poor and what better place to score than at the Temple Court where people feel obligated to be generous? Peter and John look like easy marks so the crippled man asks for a donation. He is disappointed however when Peter says, “We’re in ministry, so we don’t have no silver and gold” (lol). “However, we do have something far better.” “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk!” Peter then extends his hand. As the crippled man latches on, he instantly feels energy and strength surging through his legs. For the first time in his condemned and disabled life, he can stand on his two feet! Joyously, he begins to walk, leap, and praise God. The people that have known this guy for years are filled with “wonder and amazement” (v10).

Question 1: What Are Miracles?

This initial miracle done by the Church in the Book of Acts begs three questions. The first is, “What are miracles?” My definition: “A miracle is a divine intervention into the natural order of things, particularly a reversal of disease, decay, and death.” By design they are rare, and their overarching purpose is not only to alleviate suffering but to highlight the power and compassion of God. They are one of the tools Jesus uses to give us “Life and life to the full” (John 10:10). Furthermore, miracles usually precipitate something new God is about to do in history. The 10 Plagues on Egypt, the myriad of miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, and even the early Methodist Movement and Azusa Street Revivals, are evidence of this phenomenon. Lastly, miracles are more prevalent in frontier missions than in places where the Gospel is already established.

Question 2: Why Didn’t Jesus Heal Him?

Our second question is why didn’t Jesus heal our “Gate of Beautiful” guy? As a devout Jew, he, like Peter and John, routinely went to the Temple at the designated times for prayer. It’s logical to assume he crossed paths with him at some point. It’s not like Jesus didn’t have the where-with-all to heal him. Previously, at Solomon’s Portico, he healed a man that was crippled for over 38 years (John 5:1-17). Both Solomon’s Portico and the Gate of Beautiful were situated on the Eastern side of Temple and were connected. So why not heal our “Gate of Beautiful” guy? I believe the best answer is what we have been repeating in our “Supernatural Church” series. The Church is to continue Jesus’ ministry the same manner as Jesus i.e., under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Assuming Jesus often passed on this guy tells us that his plan all along was to give his church the opportunity to heal him. And this they did. Peter and John took to this healing opportunity like a bear to honey.

Question 3: Why Aren’t Miracles Common Today?

[SLIDE 10] The third question is, “Why aren’t miracles common today?” If we sing Jesus is “The way maker, miracle worker,” and is the “Same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). And if

we hold to the promise of James 5:15, “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well” then why don’t we see more miracles?

In the history of the Church the pendulum on this question has swung each way. Some believe miracles ended with the apostolic era while others say they are for today and that it’s God’s will to heal every time in every place if we have enough faith and no known sin in our lives.

In Scripture there’s no clear-cut pattern or formula, however. Often, Jesus healed out of grace/mercy. The classic case is when a man asked Jesus to heal his demonically tortured son. Jesus asked the father, “Do you believe I can do it?” The man answered, “I believe but help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). So, Jesus helped his unbelief by healing his son.

Other times, he demanded more faith before a miracle. When the Roman Centurion asked Jesus to heal his sick servant Jesus promised to swing by his house and do it. The Centurion objected, “No need, just say the word and he will be healed.” Jesus responded that he had never seen such impressive faith. He then sent the word, and the servant was healed (Luke 7:1-10). Likewise, it was the “great faith” of the Syrophoenician woman that moved Jesus to heal her sick daughter (Mark 7:24-30).

Personal and Pastoral Experience with Miracles

Regarding praying for miracles I have had mixed results. I have prayed for folks with what I thought was great faith, but they remained sick and even died. Some of the greatest men of God in history, e.g., the Apostle Paul repeatedly prayed for a personal healing and never got it. Charles Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers” suffered such deep and dark depression that he couldn’t get out of bed for weeks. One of the sweetest and godliest people I have ever known was my cousin David. He loved the Lord more than all of us in this room combined. At the age of 15 he was diagnosed with brain cancer. After eight agonizing years he passed away at 73 lbs. (it literally ate him to the bone). My sustained prayers and ardent faith over that eight-year period yielded no healing for him.

When I was 17, I was stricken with advanced rheumatic fever that destroyed my heart valves and landed me on a transplant list. After this devastating diagnosis, my mother, along with her church prayer group, prayed and I was instantly healed. My team of doctors, although baffled, certified it as a medical miracle. Mom, however, wouldn’t let them off the hook so easily. She scolded them, “The great physician has healed my son.” “Something you all couldn’t do.” They reluctantly agreed.

In my first year of ministry a woman named Becky came up for prayer at the end of a service. She had a malignant tumor growing in her neck that had metastasized throughout her lymph system and organs. Her prognosis, six months to live. When she came to the altar, I anointed her with oil. While praying the James 5:15 prayer of faith, she collapsed under the power of God. When she came to however, the tumor was still visible. I was crushed. The next day, she and her husband were driving

to Cleveland Clinic to have it removed and start radiation and chemotherapy. Later that evening Becky called with an update. Speaking faster than an overcaffeinated origami artist she said,

On the way to Cleveland Clinic, I felt an itching sensation in my throat and when I went to scratch it the lump was gone. I wanted to come straight home and show you, but my husband said if it's a miracle your doctors will verify it. So, I spent all day long being poked and prodded, giving blood samples, taking scans, and having lymph nodes removed. Try as they might, they couldn't find one cell of cancer.

Praise God!

Conclusion: What Miracle Do You Need?

Not that I would ever recommend it, but if you never play the lottery chances are you will never win the lottery. Likewise, if we never pray for miracles, big and small, chances are we won't experience them and thus, will never become a supernatural church. We got nothing to lose here. If miracles don't happen, we will still trust in God's sustain grace and infinite wisdom. If they do, there will be far more people around here, "walking, leaping, and praising God," spiritually, emotionally, and even physically!

As we go to Communion, let's pray you receive one.