

Miracle of Mac

Last week in our Supernatural Series I mentioned a miracle I experienced in my first year of ministry. A woman named Becky came to the altar with a rare and aggressive form of throat cancer that was raging through her body. She was given six months to live. We anointed her with oil and prayed but it wasn't until a day later, while she was on her way to Cleveland Clinic for surgery and treatments, that she felt a tickle in her throat and was healed. As you can imagine, news of what happened spread faster than greased lightning and church attendance doubled within two weeks. This healing from 1990 has been dubbed, "The Miracle of Harrison County" and is still talked about to this day.

As much as we are amazed by miracles their aftermaths are just as important. Today we look at the aftermath of the miracle we visited last week, when the lead apostles, Peter and John, healed the crippled man at the Gate of Beautiful at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Miracle Aftermath One: Praise God

After the crippled man is healed, he runs around "walking, leaping, and praising God." He did so spontaneously and enthusiastically, and his actions tell us that the very first miracle aftermath is to Praise God. We praise God not only to demonstrate our thanksgiving to him but to directly attach the miracle to the Miracle Maker and not to blind random chance, good fortune, Lady Luck, or favorable circumstances. You know what puts my meters in the red? When good things happen and Christians attribute it to luck. We are not lucky, we are blessed. You know what flings me to the ground and balls me up into the fetal position? When Christians say they are lucky and blessed in the same sentence. For the sake of my mental health, I now issue a permanent pastoral ban on the word "luck" on all church property and premises. God, and God alone, deserves all the fame, credit, and praise for all the good he does for us.

Miracle Aftermath Two: Tell Others

The second miracle aftermath is to tell others. The healed man was quick to tell others what happened to him. We tell others not only to expand the fame of God but to live out our identity as his witnesses. We tell others so that they might come to put their faith and hope in him. You might say, "I never experienced a miracle, I got nothing to tell others." I've heard many Christians say this so here is how I usually respond.

The physical universe is a miracle. Your biological existence and consciousness are a miracle. That God, or anyone else loves you, is a miracle. Your salvation in Christ is a miracle, and by far, the greatest one of all.

The greatest miracle is not the divine reversal of the processes of disease, decay, and death, but that God has reconciled us to himself and saved us, through his Son, from a horribly hot eternity apart from him. And he did so through the means of "grace and faith," and not on merit, performance, or good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). If God did nothing else but save us in the way he did, we would still have truckloads of stuff to tell others. Amen?

Miracle Aftermath III: Explain Please

Miracles are attention grabbers. A large crowd gathers because they wonder how a life-long mobility challenged man is now doing the “Lido Shuffle” and the Michael Jackson moonwalk. It’s one thing to share our experience, quite another to explain our faith. “Explain It” is the third miracle aftermath. Peter knows miracles need explaining so he gets his preach on. Speaking from the opulent venue called Solomon’s Portico, he addresses the crowd first with a question (Acts 3:12-23)

12 Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.

If I were sitting in the pew that day I would answer, “Because miracles are as surprising as they are rare.” But should we really be surprised when the Lord God Almighty shows off and displays his power? Peter, unlike many of today’s “superstar” preachers, adds an important disclaimer. “We didn’t do this; God did to glorify Jesus.” The glory of Jesus is always the primary goal of miracles! Peter must have checked his notes from his first sermon because he repeats what he previously said back in Acts 2:23

13 You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life...

Twice he tells the crowd, “You killed him.” Twice he tells the crowd, “You disowned him.” Once he tells the crowd, “You traded him for a career criminal.” Why lay such heavy conviction on a crowd of seekers? Aren’t we supposed to water down the message, so they’ll come back for more? Peter lays it on thick because sinners don’t ask for forgiveness until they know they need to be forgiven. Most people believe they’re ok and God is ok with them (ask?). The irony of the Gospel is that God loves everyone but he’s not ok with everyone. If he were, Jesus would not have to die. Although not everyone in the crowd was at Jesus’ show trial on Good Friday, the Scriptures are clear that every sinner is complicit in the greatest crime of history: the disowning and killing of Jesus. Now that’s one big Matza Ball size dent in our relationship with God.

In v17 however, Peter brings the grace. “Now I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.” This phrase reminds us of what Jesus said on the Cross, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 24:23) and God’s explanation to Jonah for why God did not rain hell, fire, and brimstone down on the city of Nineveh, “They cannot tell their right hand from their left (Jonah 4:11).

Peter continues with the grace in v18, “This is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.” This sentence is an 800-year throwback to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:3-5.

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Although every sinner is complicit in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, God allowed it to happen to fulfill his plan of salvation. Peter concludes his miracle explanation with an urgent appeal:

Turn to God (v19). Turn from sin (v26).

Benefits of Turning

Peter promises that if we turn to God and from sin God will bless us with three monumental benefits: 1) Wipe away our sins, 2) Refresh us souls, and 3) Send Jesus to live in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17). I don't know about you but that's a sweet deal for Christ rejecting, Christ killing, hell-bent sinners like us.

Conclusion

Because of Peter's miracle explanation, 2000 more men were added to the Church that day. If you are keeping score at home that brings the total number of the early church up to 5000 men and 10000 women and children (Acts 4:4). Now that church growth we can all get behind!

If you have turned to God and embraced Jesus Christ as your Leader/Forgiver, you have already experienced the greatest miracle. Your "miracle aftermath" is simply to Praise God, Tell Others, and Explain It. If, on the other hand, you are part of the "unlucky" group that has yet to turn to God now is the best time to do so. For all the miracles that await you there is absolutely no good reason to delay. Let's pray for this miracle to happen to you right now.