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More Than He Bargained For - Part 1

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott carefully analyses the miraculous healing of the lame man recorded in Acts 3. John asks why that particular event was recorded and whether we should expect miraculous healing today.

Transcript

[Music] I have no doubt that the great God of Creation in his omnipotence in his great part and love did miraculously heal that 40 year old or more crippled. And further I have no doubt that the God of Creation is able to do the same thing today because he hasn't changed!

[Music] Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott. Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stot.

Whenever he preached his home church of all souls, Lang and Place, it was packed. During John Stott's centenary, we are bringing you some of his finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry.

[Music] Sickness and ill health are possibly the things that make us turn to God the most for help.

Whether we should expect miraculous healing or not has long been a matter of debate amongst Christians. The Bible has many examples of healing and John Stot will take us through the one recorded in the book of Acts chapter 3. Now the healing of the cripple at the beautiful gate of the temple must surely be one of the most dramatic stories in the whole of the New Testament let alone in the acts of the apostles. It was three o'clock we're told one afternoon.

Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer in order to engage in prayer. And as they arrived at the beautiful gate of the temple, probably the one that was made of Corinthian brass and was a huge structure 75 feet high. A well-known cripple was carried and deposited in his begging pitch at the foot of the beautiful gate.

Dr. Luke, whose medical interest in the story is immediately aroused, gives us a brief clinical history. It was a congenital case. The man had been a cripple from his birth.

He was now over 40 years old and he was so severely handicapped that he had to be carried everywhere by his friends and his family. He wasn't able to drag himself about even. He was totally incapacitated and helpless.

And as the apostles were about to pass him on their way up into the temple, he asked for some money, some bucksheesh. But Peter and John replied instead in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, "Get up and walk." And immediately were told his feet and his ankles were strengthened. He left to his feet and parted, running, parted, jumping with joy he entered into the temple with the apostles.

And his healing, his miraculous healing, caused an enormous stir in the whole of the city of Jerusalem. Well, that's the story. Briefly retold.

You know it, I imagine very well. But it raises questions in our mind, does it not? And the kind of questions that this story raises in my mind are these. Why did Luke record this story? What did he want his readers to learn from it? What lessons has it for us in our generation at the end of the 20th century? And these are very important questions to ask, not only of this passage, but indeed of every passage of Scripture.

And I think the study of Acts chapter 3, to which we're committed tonight, is an excellent essay in biblical hermeneutics. That is to say, in the science and art of interpreting the Bible. I want to suggest to you that there are three possible approaches to this story.

The first is to see it as an example of miraculous healing, and conclude that we too can heal congenital cripples and others just as Peter and John did in their day. The second approach is to regard it as an example of what I think I need to call development. That is to say that Peter and John had the wisdom to look beyond the immediate need of the man in his begging condition for some money, that what he really needed was health in order that in future he could give up begging and support himself.

That's a good example of the principle of development which goes beyond emergency aid and relief. And then thirdly we could say that it is an example of salvation, a picture of salvation, a salvation that is still available in our day through the strong name of Jesus in whose name the man was healed and saved. So we need to ask, I think, does Luke see the story primarily as a case of miraculous healing, a case of development, or a case of salvation? And I want to ask that we think about these three things in order to make up our own mind.

First, an example of miraculous healing. Now I'm very concerned not to be misunderstood. I personally believe that this miracle happened and happened exactly as Luke describes it.

I have noticed that I would ever attempt to explain it away or find alternative explanations for it. I have no doubt that the great God of creation in his omnipotence in his great part and love did miraculously heal that 40 year old or more crippled. And further I have no doubt that the God of creation is able to do the same thing today because he hasn't changed and maybe still does.

I refuse to be dismissed as a hardened skeptic or as being imprisoned in a western rationalistic mindset. Nevertheless, having said that, can it seriously be maintained that Luke records this story as a typical miraculous healing and that he intends us to understand it as a mandate to all Christian people to go and perform similar miracles in the orthopedic hospitals of the world? Can that be seriously maintained? Some do believe that miraculous healing should be performed frequently and regularly by all Christian people. I suppose there's no name today.

It's John Wimber. If you've heard him speak or if you've read his book's power, evangelism or power healing, as I have and also met him. It's a very fine Christian man.

But I noted in one of his books he writes about the vineyard fellowship from which he comes in California. The blind see, the lame walk, the death here and cancer is disappearing. I myself have challenged him about that phrase.

I said, John, do you really mean that? And he backed down from it. Cancer is not disappearing in California. And Maurice Sorula, of whom we've been reading or hearing on television, appears to be making similar claims today and getting himself into considerable trouble as a result.

Now in asking the question, does Luke intend us to understand this as a typical healing miracle which should be duplicated and reduplicated all around us today? Let us be very careful to understand what Luke Axlett describes as having happened. Would he be good enough to notice three things with me? A, the man's condition. He was not suffering from stress symptoms which could be relieved by psychosomatic means.

On the contrary, he had a very serious orthopedic condition. As we've already seen for 40 years and more, he had never walked. He couldn't even hobble about with the aid of a stick.

So totally handicapped was he that he was utterly dependent on other people to be carried everywhere. It was a very serious orthopedic disorder. Notice that, A, his condition.

B, notice his healing. It was by word only without any medical means. No orthopedic surgeon, no physiotherapist was called in.

Did you ever notice this? There was not even an anointing with oil, all a laying on a hands. There was not even a prayer. There was an apostolic command.

Get up and walk without any means at all but the bare word of apostolic authority. We're told that instantaneously and completely he was miraculously healed. So let's be clear about that.

The man's condition and the healing. Then see, notice the outcome. Not only was the crowd we read filled with wonder and amazement but the authorities who were hostile to the gospel themselves conceded, these are their words, a notable sign has been performed among us and we cannot deny it.

Now I'm very struck by those three things. The ABC, A, he had a very serious orthopedic condition. It wasn't a hysterical stress psychosomatic condition.

It was an organic condition. B, there were no gradual improvements through medical procedures. There was a healing without any medical means at all.

So there were no unsubstantiated claims on the contrary even the enemies of the gospel knew that it had taken place. Now I think if we're looking for miraculous healings today, we must be very clear about those three things that what we're looking for is exactly the same thing, same conditions, same kind of healing, same kind of recognition even by the press, the television, the medical authorities, the enemies of the gospel if you like. And in fact those who claim miraculous healings today should neither fair nor resist an open investigation of their claims.

I wonder if you know that at Lord, the famous Roman Catholic Healing Center, a medical bureau was established as long ago as 1878. And when claims of healing, miraculous healing of Lord have passed an initial screening by the medical bureau, they are referred to an international medical committee. So the claims to healing are taken very seriously by the Roman Catholic Church and a full empirical investigation is made.

Why don't evangelicals who claim the same thing, that is who claim miraculous healings? Why are they not willing for an impartial investigation to be made? I was very glad a few years ago that 12 scholars of full theological seminary in Pasadena, California, who were charged to investigate the signs and wonders course at their school of world mission wrote in their report these sensible words. Christian ministers ought to be ready always to subject any report of miraculous healing to objective, rigorous, and scientifically responsible testing. Christian ministers must remember that ministerial credibility is not measured by the sincerity of the credulous.

Credulity rises from a deep desire that something is true. Credibility on the other hand is earned by reliable and trustworthy testing. So you see it's absolutely right for us to gather for prayer on Tuesday night for healing because all healing is divine healing, but most of it is through the marvelous process is that God is built into the human body and through the marvelous medical and surgical and psychiatric means that are available to us today.

This is divine healing, but it is through means and we must be very cautious before we claim miraculous healing without means. I have I made that distinction clear. Now we move on to the second point.

Are we to regard this as an example of quote development? Peter called his healing a good deed which the new international version translates an act of kindness to the man who was a cripple from birth. Now notice what form that act of kindness took. The cripple asked for money.

The apostle gave him his health. Money would only have supported the cripple in his hand decap. Healing delivered him from his hand decap and enabled him to support himself.

Now that's the principle of development and we must still although we must still respond to emergencies, of course with relief and aid we are very concerned, more concerned to look beyond the immediate to the ultimate development which may help a community to become self-supporting. Thus to give you some examples it is good to feed the starving. It's even better to teach sound agricultural methods so that a whole village can learn to feed itself.

Again it's good to support unemployed young people but it's better to teach them a trade so that they can support themselves. Again it's good to care for the blind and the deaf and other handicap people but it's better to teach them skills so that they can learn to care for themselves. In each case you see long-term development is better than short-term aid.

Solving the problem is better than tinkering with it and giving people the dignity of independence by which they support themselves is better than perpetuating their dependence and so demeaning them. Peter and John saw this in their healing of the cripple. Now that he'd been healed he was fit and well again.

He now could give up his begging. He could earn his own living. With his health came independence and with independence came dignity.

There is the principle of development and it seems to me clearly taught in this passage. Now come to the third thing we move on from the example of miraculous healing and of development to an example or picture of salvation. There is no doubt that the cripple was physically healed.

His ankles were told and his feet were made strong. He actually got up physically. He walked, he ran, he jumped into the temple.

And Peter said to God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob has glorified his servant Jesus whom you crucified whom he raised from the dead and his name, the name of Jesus, has through faith in his name has made this man strong, physically strong and given him

perfect health. Now that's all clear. But I wonder if you've ever noticed this.

When the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, the leading Jewish council, Peter said to them, "If we are being examined today about a kind deed that was done to this cripple, by what means he has been saved." Did you ever notice, chapter 4, verse 9? Peter moves from his healing to his salvation. Then the id known to you that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he stands before you well. He goes back to healing.

Next verse 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved." How is it then that Peter slipped quite naturally from healing to salvation, back to healing again, onto salvation again? You ever ask yourself that question? It's not because salvation means healing. It doesn't. Salvation and healing are two quite different things.

It's not because salvation includes healing. So that if we've been saved, we can claim to be healed as well. We cannot.

Salvation is a promise to anybody who believes, but healing is not. So it isn't that salvation means healing, and it isn't that salvation includes healing. It is that salvation is illustrated by healing.

So the healing of the body is a readily recognizable picture of the salvation of the soul. And the biblical word for this idea is that healing is a same myon, a sign. I don't know if you started these two chapters, but the word comes twice, verse 16, chapter 4. "A notable sign has been performed among us." In verse 22, the man on whom the sign of healing, twice his healing is called a sign.

It had significance. And the very same word is used to the miracles of Jesus, particularly in the gospel of John. And John, by using this reference to the signs of Jesus, his miracles being significant, was anxious to show that they were not so much demonstrations of power as illustrations of truth.

They had theological significance. So when Jesus had fed the hungry with loaves and fishes, he said, "I am the bread of life." He who comes to me will never hunger. That's not the hunger of the body, but the soul.

And he who believes in me will never thirst. Again, he opened the eyes of a man born blind and said in the same context, "I am the light of the world." He who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. Then he resuscitated Lazarus, bringing him back to this life, and in the same context said, "I am the resurrection and the life." He who believes in me shall never die.

He who lives and believes in me will be raised after death. Now, this is not a spiritualized the miracles. The miracles actually took place on a physical realm.

They were physical phenomena, but they were also acted parables. They had theological significance. They indicated who Jesus was and what he was able to do in terms of our salvation.

Yes, miracles were physical phenomena as well as acted parables. John Stott will continue his message on miraculous healing at the same time next week. The Book of Acts is indeed the acts of the apostles, many of which were supernatural acts.

It's a dramatic book of the Bible, well worth studying. And you can do so with the help of John Stott's commentary entitled "The Message of Acts," part of the Bible speaks today commentary series. You'll see as our book recommendation this week when you visit our website, premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book wrote is to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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