

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. Acts 3.16.

You want the church to grow? Forget modern marketing techniques. Read this book. It's all here in the manual, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and it was *always* here! 120 believers in chap 1; 3000 in chap 2, 5000 in 4.4. How did *that* come about? It was, as we have seen, because they preached Jesus Christ. Jesus as risen Lord is the focus of their preaching. He's *also* the focus of their *living*. Jesus told his followers to love each other '*as I have loved you*'. He loved them in such a sacrificial way he even gave up his life on the Cross for them. Well, in *Acts 2* we read how 'they had all things in common'. They *shared*, sacrificially. Church growth comes about when you have Christ-centred *preaching*, and Christ-like *living*. And how is that possible? When you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Those first believers had been filled with the Spirit at Pentecost. They were Spirit-filled and they were prayerful. The challenge is, Are we?

By nature they were pretty feeble, weak people, like ourselves. Just look at pathetic Peter, who even denied *knowing* Jesus. No! they *became* strong, because the Spirit had come upon them and *changed* them. We also need the Spirit.

The transforming Holy Spirit given at Pentecost had made them *bold* for Christ. The Spirit had changed them from 'me'-focussed to being 'us'-focussed. The Spirit had brought about a sense of *community*. The Spirit had *also* made Jesus a living reality to them who was still doing powerful things among them. They actually *expected* miracles. Do we? Why not?

In *Acts* 3 we read the account of Peter and John going up to the Temple to pray when they meet the man crippled from birth. He has resigned himself to his fate as a beggar. He just wants money. Peter cannot give him what he *wants*, but he gives him what he *needs*, his future, 3.6-7...

We need to see this healing miracle in its context. Turn to p1068, to *John* 5.1ff. Jesus heals the man disabled for 38 years. He also sits at the edge of the pool called Bethesda, hoping that someone might carry him to the water. Jesus also gives him not what he *wants*, but what he *needs*, vv1-9...

Jesus is able to do this because he is *King*. He spoke of God's *kingdom*, God's reign over sin, illness, death, fear. Jesus once famously said words we should never forget, words to give *ourselves* confidence: 'I *have* overcome the world'.

If you flick forward in *John* to p1082, to 14.12 Jesus gives a promise that those who trust in him will do even *greater* things than he himself did, ... And in fulfilment of that promise of our Lord, that is precisely what Peter is doing now in the Temple by the Gate called Beautiful. And notice that Peter makes it very clear that this incredible healing miracle is not done in his own power, *Acts* 3.12... but in the name of Jesus Christ, v6..., v16...

Jesus is still able to heal people, because he is still alive. These disciples, once so full of fear and doubt like ourselves, actually saw and met the risen Christ, on the road to Emmaus, in the garden, on the lakeside, v15...

Please don't get me wrong. Scripture certainly does make it clear that all healing comes from God, and that Jesus, the

Great Physician is still healing people, often in miraculous ways. We could spend a lot of time now swapping accounts of incredible answers to prayers. But it is *not* true that all we have to do is invoke the saving name of Jesus, and, hey presto! you're healed. That would just be magic. We cannot manipulate God. He *can* heal, but sometimes it isn't his will. This isn't a cop-out. Jesus himself prayed in Gethsemane to be spared death and suffering. But God said No, because he had another saving purpose. St Paul prayed to be released from his famous 'thorn in the flesh'. God had other purposes. No! We cannot make God do what we want. That is just sorcery.

But though we accept God's sovereign will, we are still entitled to expect miracles. Why? Because Jesus has told us. 'Whoever has faith in me will do even greater things'.

You will be mightily relieved to know that I'm cutting short my sermon today, because I want Jeremy Clough to bring us up to date with the work of Harrogate Town Pastors. This *also* is about the living Lord Jesus doing wonderful things among us. Acts 3 is very evidence-based. Peter tells the crowd, 'You all *know* this man; you've seen the miracles with your own eyes': v9..., v16... By prayer and the Holy Spirit, the crime rate in Harrogate town centre has gone *down*, because of the Town Pastors. This *also* is evidence-based. There was even a full article in a newspaper last Sunday about a similar project in Sutton, south London. Jesus is still at work.

The challenge I want to leave you with today is this: do you really believe that? Who is Jesus for you? A good man, a wise teacher, or the living Lord still doing miracles?