

On Purpose

- 1. The purpose of God's power/miracles**
- 2. The overall purpose of Jesus**
- 3. Our purpose and the purpose of our suffering**

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

There are many stories in the Bible that have a similar storyline. We heard two of them today—the story of Jesus healing the deaf and mute man and the story of Peter and John healing the lame beggar. There was a person with a disability, like blindness or deafness or lameness. The person came into contact with Jesus or his Apostles and was miraculously healed. They praised God and the crowds that saw it were amazed at what happened.

They are amazing stories no doubt, demonstrating Jesus' power over human frailty! But we might read these stories now and have a hard time pulling out the meaning or "takeaway" for us and our spiritual lives. An over-simplified takeaway could be something like, "Jesus had power to heal them, so I know he has power to heal me or my loved one." Or it could even come out a little snarkier. "Sure glad Jesus did that for them, I wish he'd do it for my daughter, Josie! Where do I sign her up? She's got cerebral palsy and can't walk or talk. He's got the power, but I keep waiting and nothing keeps happening."

Well, maybe that's just me, but maybe that's one valuable lesson these stories teach us: that the world doesn't actually revolve around just me and my concerns, and Jesus isn't my personal genie in a bottle to grant me 3 wishes. There's a whole world of people suffering and struggling with different things whom God hasn't healed, and only a pretty small number that he did heal. So when he does miraculously heal someone, there must be a specific purpose God is accomplishing. So these stories teach us a great deal about purpose—about God's purposes and the purpose of his power and our purpose and about the purpose of things in this life we don't like so much, like disabilities and suffering.

Today our worship theme announced, that "Followers of Jesus see the true purpose of his power", and so we're going to spend time focusing **on purpose**—on understanding the *1) purpose of*

his power and miracles, but we're also going to remind ourselves of 2) *Jesus' overall purpose*, which will shed light on 3) *our purpose and the purpose of our suffering or disabilities*.

Now as each healing story has its own slightly different details, there are sometimes multiple purposes being served. They all seem to have this in common that what prompted the miracle is someone with an ailment seeking help and compassion. So at their very heart, the healings were the compassionate response of Jesus and his apostles to someone who was afflicted. In the Gospel Lesson, people brought a deaf and mute man and begged Jesus to heal him. In our sermon text from Acts 3, a man who was lame from birth was sitting at the gate of the temple seeking charity from those walking into worship. Begging had probably been the man's whole adult existence. With no way to work to support himself, he was totally dependent on the goodwill of the worshippers at the temple. And now today, he gets a whole lot more than he was asking for. As Peter and John told him to look at them, he probably expected a coin or two, not what Peter says next. **“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”** (Acts 3:6).

The lame man had probably dreamed of this moment his whole life, now his feet and ankles instantly become strong, and he jumps to his feet and starts walking. He is experiencing the wonderful compassion of Jesus and his people who have just transformed his life, and now runs into the temple with them to praise God. But this miracle was not only for him, it was also for everyone who witnessed the transformation. Now they saw the man, who had been lame from birth, who had never walked in his life, from one second to the next start walking and jumping and praising God. And whose name had the miracle been done in? **“In the name of Jesus Christ!”** Peter proclaims multiples times to the onlookers, **“Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?...The God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus!”** (12,13) **It is by the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...that this man stands before you healed. (4:10).**

The miracles performed by Jesus and his apostles not only showed compassion, but they testified to Jesus' identity as the Messiah and his authority as the Son of God. For one thing, it was blatantly obvious that the things they were doing could only be done by God's power, and when the apostles did them, they expressly denied the credit. They gave the credit to Jesus! So these miracles lay to rest for us any foolish notion that Jesus is only some wise teacher or a compassionate man with good morals. The miracles he performed verify his claim as the Son of God.

The signs he performed also fulfill the prophecies given about the Messiah. You heard some of those prophecies in our First Reading today from Isaiah 35. **“Your God will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.”** (Is. 35:5,6). Well Jesus is checking off all those boxes! In today's gospel, he healed the mute and deaf man. In John 9, Jesus heals the man born blind. In the sermon text, Peter and John heal the lame man who leaps for joy like a deer. These were the signs of the Messiah!

Now as nice of a benefit as it would be if Jesus would come to us and heal all our infirmities like he healed them, we have to remember that Jesus came to do God's will, not ours, and our biggest problem is not physical aches and defects, but the consequences of our sin. The miracles Jesus was doing were serving the even more important purpose of letting the world know who he was—the Savior who had come to save his people from their sin. If you think about it, that purpose of revealing his identity was far more important than just healing everyone, because people with disabilities who believe in Jesus will go to heaven, but people whose bodies work okay and don't believe in Jesus will go to hell.

So the bigger purpose of Jesus' miracles points to the ultimate purpose for which he had come. The purpose of the mission that brought him from heaven to earth was more than just to heal people's physical defects, it was to bring spiritual healing and reverse the curse of sin that was rotting everyone's soul from the inside out. The prophet Isaiah had foretold the Messiah's true purpose long before, which Jesus knew was about him. **"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted."** (Isaiah 61:1). The good news he came to proclaim in his office as Prophet was founded on the work he was going to do as Priest. The very reason he had come was to offer himself as the lamb who takes away the sin of the world, his life for ours, that we might have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10).

So the purpose of the miracles done by Jesus and in his name *1) reveal him as Messiah*. The Bible specifies the purpose of Jesus the Messiah, **2) to save his people from sin, to preach the good news, and bring them life**. That helps us understand why Jesus wasn't going to spend every waking minute of his life and ministry on earth doing nothing but healing people. His work as the Savior from sin superseded being simply the healer of bodies. Sometimes, when he did heal, he would even order people not to tell anyone so that it wouldn't get so crowded that he couldn't preach anymore or go from place to place. One time Jesus, who had already spent the day healing, basically ditched the crowd of more people looking to be healed. **"Let's go somewhere else... so I can preach. That is why I have come."** (Mark 1:38).

That shows us that as painful as a person's disease or disability is, Jesus may leave them with it *on purpose* because something more important is going on behind the scenes. He might not heal you because he has a greater purpose at work that he is accomplishing. That's a hard truth to for us to stomach, that God would let us suffer through something even while he has the power to prevent it. The devil tries to use that truth to tear apart a person's faith with one word--why? Why would God allow that? For what purpose? Finally, today we want to spend some time understanding **3) our purpose and the purpose of our suffering or disabilities**.

The man in our text who was lame from birth had maybe spent his whole life wondering what his purpose was, and what the purpose of his legs not working was. Was it just for him to sit and beg? No, on that day, the purposes for him and his disability were revealed. First, his disability afforded Peter and John with the opportunity to help him and show love to him. Second, his disability was the opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in his life, this time through a miracle. And finally, his disability provided the opportunity of a lifetime for the spread of the gospel.

Realize what happened that day after the miracle. Everyone knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that this guy had been lame from birth and now **"they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."** (Acts 3:10). Now Peter and John are getting to preach that it was the power of Jesus that did it, not to mention Peter also preaches some of the most convicting law and convincing gospel in the Holy Bible. **"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man who you see and know was made strong... Repent, then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."** (Acts 3:15,19)

I don't know everything that you're going through, dear believer, but I do know that God has a purpose for you and every affliction that comes upon you, whether it's to call you back to himself and teach you to rely on him, or for you to testify about the hope that you have or to be an example of one who suffers well with your eyes on Christ. The trouble is that it's much easier to see those purposes in hindsight than it is while you're going through them. When I'm going through them, pretty much all I want to do is scream at the heavens and call God on the carpet to answer for himself. But, God doesn't

answer to us. Instead, he calls us to be still and to wait on him and his compassion and his gracious purposes.

So while your trying to be still, try replacing your screaming with this, the words of King David in Psalm 139, words that are true for every believer whether they can walk or talk or see, or whether they have cancer or are dying. They are words of faith for when our physical sight can't help us make sense of anything. **“You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained from me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God” (Psalm 139:13-17).**

Way back at the beginning, I said something like, “Wouldn’t it be nice if Jesus would just heal our daughter Josie the way that he healed people in the Bible.” In these years since she’s been born, we’ve come to think about that differently. We certainly wouldn’t stop him from miraculously healing her, but we realize that God knit her together fearfully and wonderfully, *on purpose* for the purposes she is serving. She was not hidden from him on the day her brain injury occurred. He saw her unformed body. He knew the exact Josie that she is and ordained the days of her life just so—every hospital visit and every doctor, nurse, and therapist who have heard the word of God because of her. He knew that she would be a witness as I baptized one of the kids she was in the NICU with. He knew that she would inspire her congregation to help with Miracle League and Jesus Cares. He knew that this past Thursday she would go off to special needs preschool in Appleton as his three and half year-old missionary. Lord God your works and your purposes are wonderful. I didn’t always know it, but I’m coming to know it full well. Amen.