

Easter morning

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] We're going to look at Acts chapter 3, mostly the last part of it. And so if you could have your Bibles open to Acts chapter 3, that would be a great help to you and to me.

Different contexts make us behave in different ways, don't they? Different churches have different styles. And this story from Acts chapter 3 takes place after someone has been jumping and leaping in church.

And that is not ordinary practice, is it, in any Presbyterian church I've ever been to? It begins in verse 11. We find that halfway through the story, there is a beggar who is clinging to the Apostle John and Peter.

And this beggar has created quite a stir in the temple courts. Here was a man who was crippled from birth. And each day, this guy would be carried to the temple and he would beg for money. He is the very picture of misery. And one day, about seven or eight weeks after Jesus had been raised from the dead, this guy is sitting at the gate and he got much more than he bargained for.

[1 : 11] Peter and John come along and Peter says to him, I don't have any silver, I don't have any gold, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.

You knew the chorus, I hope. We loved it when I was a little boy. And he went walking and leaping and praising God. He begins to spring around the temple courts and to praise God.

And this guy yells right there in the temple courts. And as he clings to Peter and John, I think he's clinging to them. Because if he doesn't hold on to them, he's going to go springing off somewhere else.

And the crowd rushes in. They know this man. They've heard the noise. And they see who it is. And some of the people have even thrown change into his little tin as they enter the chapel.

But now he is in the temple. But now he is leaping and whooping. And so as the crowd begins to gather, Peter begins to preach to them.

[2 : 16] And he wants to explain to them what is going on. And he says to them that this lovely and stunning miracle is not only a result of the resurrection, but it shows them something of the nature and the reality of the resurrection.

He says to the people listening, he says, it wasn't because John and I are particularly pious or powerful. This man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, who was killed a couple of weeks ago, but is very much alive and active. And now, in fact, this healing, he says, gives you a picture of what the resurrection does.

And so it's very, very important for us on this unusual Easter day, because the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not a one-off event way back in history.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is not a curious oddity. It's not a freak. Nor is the resurrection a happy ending, a lucky occurrence for Jesus.

[3 : 24] It is the beginning of something. It is the beginning of something that opens the door that concerns every single one of us. And if you take the Bible and you read it from the beginning to the end, and I hope you will, I really hope you would, you'll find that God promises from the first pages of the Bible that there will come a day when he will restore and renew, and God will heal this world.

And he will bring complete health and healing, both spiritually and physically, both personally for his people and cosmically, to the whole world, to all those who follow his Son.

And this miracle is a preview of that healing. And so I just want to give you two words, two words this morning, that describe the effect of the miracle, or the effect of the resurrection for us.

One is in the future, and one is in the present. So the first word is restoration. Can you look down at verse 21? And this is in the future.

Verse 21 of Acts chapter 3. He was raised from the dead. He is in heaven now, and he must remain in heaven, verse 21, until the time comes for the restoring of all things.

[4 : 56] Until the time comes, Jesus is in heaven. Jesus is in heaven. Until that time when God will restore everything he's promised through his holy prophets. The restoration of this man, in Acts 3, points to the time when God will restore everything.

And that is why it is a very Jesus-like miracle, isn't it? Did you notice that? The guy was lame, lame from birth. His feet, his ankles, his calf muscles, his thigh muscles, had never, ever been used. And it is beyond human capacity to fix. It needs, doesn't it, God the creator. And the miracle that the risen Jesus, the name of the risen Jesus, that miracle brings instantaneous, complete healing. And it is done as a demonstration that the resurrection has started something. And you know, I hope that the person who wrote the book of Acts was a medical doctor.

He was Dr. Luke. And he uses no fewer than five medical terms to describe this complete healing. The man gets up. He doesn't stumble around.

[6 : 18] He doesn't need a walking frame. He does not need six months of physiotherapy. He runs. And he praises God. And that is exactly what the prophet Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus, prophesied about this great day of restoration.

He says, then the eyes of the blind will be opened. The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. They will leap like a deer, the lame. And the mute tongue will shout for joy.

Waters will gush forth in the wilderness and streams of the desert. And this miracle, the healing of this guy, is a sign that God has already begun the restoration in the resurrection.

The fixing of those ankles and those feet, the strengthening of those muscles in that man's leg is a preview of the renewing of the whole creation. When even our bodies will be saved by the work of the resurrection.

And some of you may feel watching me this morning, this is just very naive. That you've given up hope that God is going to do anything significant in your life.

[7 : 35] And so you've taken things into your own hands. It's up to us, after all, leave me alone. Isn't it safer to remain lame at the gate and accept my limitations rather than raising my hopes and seeing them dashed?

And that is why we have to see that the resurrection of Jesus Christ comes from outside our world. The resurrection is God breaking in with the great restoration. It comes from outside of us, from God. Because every dream of human happiness, every utopian dream that this world has ever had comes from inside this world.

It's created by human beings and we all share in this deep corruption in ourselves. And so every utopian dream will only end in despair.

It takes what is eternal and incorruptible to break the chains of what is corruptible. And the healing of this man is not just an isolated incident, it is a sample of God's plan to renew and restore through the resurrection from the dead.

[8 : 53] This incident is a trailer for the movie of the world that is to come. And the word restoration is a medical word that Dr. Luke uses and it describes the full health and the full healing.

Because in the healing of this man, we get a small picture of the day when Christ will come and he will restore justice and he will restore truth and harmony and beauty and goodness to creation.

And so if you know the Bible at all, you will know that the Bible teaches that the world that we live in is sick. We are sick. Physicists call it entropy, don't they? You know, you buy a house and within a few weeks you've got to make repairs on it.

You put seeds in the ground in your garden and a few weeks later you're pulling weeds out. You live until 43 and things start falling apart. The world is not the way that God made it.

And we sense this, don't we? And our world is experiencing this at the moment and COVID-19 is teaching our world this. Our world is not as it was meant to be.

[10 : 14] We've experienced death in the past couple of weeks and there's something inside us which tells us this is not right. This is not how it should be. We know, don't we, there is a deep and profound disappointment in ourselves, in our families, the disharmony in our world that we create, the futility and the senselessness and the Bible is very, very realistic about this futility and this vanity and this disharmony and says there is a virus of decay and futility that all of us share together and at its root is a spiritual issue.

And it comes from and is caused by our rejection of God. We have a dislocation, we have a rupture in our relationship with God because of our rebellion against him.

But the Bible, the lovely story of the Bible goes and it shows that Jesus is going to establish and God is going to establish all the purposes of his blessing and there'll be complete and spiritual and physical renewal at the end of the day.

A day is coming when God will remove all evil and all disobedience and he will reverse the ravages of our rebellion against him and he will take away all frustration and injustice.

He will take away all sickness and all death and he has promised a creation that is marked by glory and not by corruption, by righteousness and not rebellion, by peace and not futility.

[12:08] And how do we know that God is going to do this? How do we know that God is going to pull this off? Because we've seen it in the resurrection where God breaks the chains of death and God begins something entirely new.

And that is why this restoration can only come through Jesus Christ. It's very interesting, isn't it?

How Peter turns and he points to the crowd and he involves them personally and you can be thankful that your preachers are not so direct.

Look at what he says in verse 13 to 15 of Acts 3. Do look down. Now this is the crowd who a couple of weeks before had cried out for his crucifixion.

He says in verse 13 he says the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and the God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate when he decided to release him but you denied the holy and righteous one and you asked for a murderer to be granted to you.

He says you didn't just deny Jesus you traded his life for a murderer's life and more than that can you see you killed verse 15 the author of life on a scale of 1 to 10 for oxymorons that is 100 isn't it?

[13:46] The author of life cannot be killed but in some fashion the Lord Jesus Christ who is the source of life who is the cause of life who is the resurrection and the life submitted himself to death but in raising Jesus from the dead God has overcome death and he signals in that resurrection the final restoration that he is going to bring at the end of time glorious and wonderful restoration that's our first word the first word about the resurrection of Jesus it's not just about Jesus it's that he's begun the full restoration of all things that he will come in the future well then what does the resurrection mean to us right now and here Peter gives us our second word and it is the word refreshing can you see that down in verse 19 look at verse 19 repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the

Lord literally times of refreshing that will come from the face of the Lord from the presence of the Lord the word means rest or relief or respite or refreshment and one of the reasons that the resurrection makes us so happy and Christians so happy it's not that it's pie in the sky when you die by and by if the resurrection was just future it would be enough wouldn't it it would be enough because it would ravish our future hopes but it's more than just future that Peter is saying that if we repent and we turn to God if we believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead God gives us the new life now God gives us the resurrection life now that we are brought into his presence before his face now and we receive times of refreshing from his presence now and you won't be surprised to know that this word is a medical word from Dr. Luke the refreshing word it is used for blowing cool air on a wound the healing cool air on a wound which would bring complete healing and then the word came to me not just physical healing but relief spiritual and emotional and psychological relief came to stand for those who lost hope and had lost strength and need fresh relief speaks of people who have come to an end of themselves and people who need rest and Peter is saying that in the resurrection the wind the breeze of refreshment blows to us from the presence of God himself so this huge cosmic restoration at the end of time which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus

Christ blows back into our lives now with this healing wind life giving healthful wind and this wind of refreshment blows into our lives as we turn to him I find it difficult to illustrate this you think of those boiling hot days in London you think of those days when there's there's just no air when you walk on the street and the street is shimmering and the pavement is boiling hot and then the dark clouds come over dark dark clouds and you feel that cold breeze and you know don't you the rain is about to bucket down and that first breeze which tells you the refreshing rain is coming and it's so refreshing and the life that

God gives us now is that first breeze of the restoration that he's going to give then Calvin says therefore our hearts would often be dismayed if we did not recall that the day of rest will come which will cool the fever of our troubles and bring an end to our miseries and so this morning if you have new desires in your heart new desires in your heart to love your neighbour to trust in Jesus to want to serve him above everything else you know you struggle you know you fail but that desire is there you find yourself coming to God at the end of your tether and praying our father in heaven take Jesus words come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest and that is a rest isn't it that's going to be ours forever wonderfully but he blows that rest into your heart today rest and refreshment from him or take that assurance that nothing can separate you from the love of

of Jesus Christ nothing no suffering no despair no disappointment no pain he will bring all who belong to him to his goodness and to his glory and that is a wind from the future blowing into our hearts now I hope that someday soon the prime minister or if he's not well enough the foreign secretary will stand on the doors of 10 Downing Street and he will announce won't he that this is over sort of and you can begin to meet together and so we in Ealing and all over the country will be impacted by an announcement made in Westminster at a certain amount of time it's the same now isn't it we are impacted today by an announcement on the steps of 10 Downing Street that is impacting us from a different time from a different place and yet we feel the impact of that decision made in government then and so it is for us this

[20 : 59] Easter Sunday peace has been made through the death of Jesus and the cross and the guarantee of full peace and restoration has happened through the resurrection of Jesus we are impacted directly by what happened 2000 years ago on that Easter Sunday morning but we wait we wait for the full enjoyment of that restoration the full enjoyment of relationships of everything but the fact that we know it is coming the fact that we look back to the resurrection changes everything for us now and the primary wind of refreshment that blows into our hearts in verse 19 can you see it it's that our sins can be wiped out repent turn again to God that your sins may be wiped out we've all turned aside from God we've all gone our own way we've all rejected

Jesus in a way and we need forgiveness and many of us know don't we that bone weariness and boredom and distractedness and disappointment with ourselves and we've tried all sorts of things while the death and the resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today is sufficient to wipe away our sins to take them as though they were written on a board and wash them clean and they are gone and this is where our restoration and our refreshing come together because the forgiveness of our sins is the final declaration of that day that Jesus will make about us but we know about it now and that is the future blowing into our hearts that is the assurance that Jesus gives and if you don't have that assurance ask him for it ask Jesus for it ask him and he will answer seek the Lord while he may be found turn to him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon in and so we rejoice you don't need to leap up and jump if you want to feel free but I do hope that your heart this day does a little bit of leaping in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because God has begun that full work of restoration of the world bringing his glory and his goodness and times of refreshing that come from his presence through repentance and faith and the forgiveness of sins and therefore we can say this morning that I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor power nor nothing in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God in the risen Christ
Jesus our Lord Amen