

Sermon #42  
Acts 3:1-10  
June 14, 2020 Title slide 1

## The Fellowship Empowered

It's been a long wait, but we are finally back together! It's really good to see each of you again. We are still not completely back to normal yet, and some ways we will be forever changed and never be the same. But it is good to see you all again in this sacred space. May God bless you all.

We are in a series of sermons on the book of Acts focusing on the fellowship, that is God's newly birthed church through the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which we highlighted two weeks ago. Then we looked at how the Fellowship of God's church began through a powerful, mighty wind of the Spirit. Last week we saw how that church lived and grew together as the Fellowship grew. Today, we look at a specific moment as the church, the Fellowship was empowered to do a specific, mighty miracle.

Reflect on a time in your life when you saw the powerful work of God's Holy Spirit. How did God show you his power? In our Wednesday night Bible study, Karen Myers shared about a trip to Lakeside summer camp when a semi crossed the medium and almost hit them head on. Somehow the cars came to an immediate stop and no driver applied their brakes and no brakes squealed. Ben Hoover spoke about seeing God's power overcome the voodoo witchdoctors in Haiti. Yes, God's power is far greater than that of the enemy. Rachel and I have seen God's Spirit overcome physical illnesses through a prayer team of missionaries anointing the door posts of our homes and church building. We've also seen other instances of God's healing both physically and spiritually throughout our ministry overseas and here in the States.

What have you seen God doing recently, even recently during the coronavirus lockdown? God never stops working. He keeps working even when we are not aware of his presence. What opportunities have you had? Encouraging phone calls, letters and cards sent and received. God's power is always at work in big ways and small ways, like a beautiful Sunday to worship God last week outdoors with his beautiful day and with white fluffy clouds over head and a gentle breeze blowing. We've seen more families waling outside in our neighborhood and have greeted them. We've talked with more people outside, seen more kids playing in the neighborhood, heard the birds sing, felt the powerful wind at our backs and in our faces. God's miracles are all around us.

The NT church depended on a power beyond themselves, a power that neither they nor any humans could ever achieve.

How was this power manifested on the day Peter and John went to the temple to pray? It is possible for all Christians everywhere to have the same power that Peter and John portrayed on that day? Can we heal sick people? Raise people from the dead? What does this story teach us about living in God's higher power?

Let's put ourselves in the story. It's sometime after the miraculous day of Pentecost. The time is approximately 3 p.m., the afternoon prayer time in the temple. Peter and John are still part of the Jewish heritage, so they continue with the set prayer and worship times in the temple.

At the same time, a lame man is carried to the temple gate called Beautiful to beg for alms. Luke tells us that he was put there every day to beg. He couldn't do this for himself. He couldn't ever walk anywhere by himself. He was not merely lame as in walking with a limp or a cane. He could not do anything for himself. Others always had to carry him around for his whole life. The only thing he could anticipate at the temple was that someone might be willing to give him a handout. And that would often be the case as the Jews saw him as an opportunity to gain merit by giving to a lame man.

So, the helpless man is placed at the temple entrance at the same moment Peter and John come up to the temple to pray. It looks as though Peter and John will simply go on past him without acknowledging him in anyway. Perhaps they did pass him by a number of times earlier. But on this day, the man takes the initiative to call out to Peter and John. He begins to ask them for a gift when Peter takes notice.

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- I. We must see the need.

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Peter saw the need and "looked straight at him" (TNIV) or "stared at him" (CEB) (v. 4). Yes, the word in Greek does mean to "Fix one's eyes on," "or look straight at," or "stare at someone."

It's sometimes easy to walk right by someone without noticing their needs or taking the time to ask them, "How are you doing?" and really mean it. We've all done that. But we've also taken the time to inquire how the person is doing and spend some time with them. I know how appreciative those in the nursing homes are to receive a phone call or a visit from someone in our congregation. They truly make mention of when someone came to see them, and they appreciated that. Our children and young people appreciated when adults take the time to listen to them. And those in need are glad when we can at least stop and talk to them and listen, even if we don't have anything to give at the moment.

So, Peter sees the need and looks intently at the lame man. He also puts his trust in a higher power, the Holy Spirit living within him.

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- II. Trust in a higher power.

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Peter tells the man, "Look at us," which the man does, expecting to receive something from them. But what he receives is much greater than what he expected. Peter now honestly responds, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (v. 6). Peter couldn't give what he didn't have. But the greatest thing he did have was to give the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter was willing to trust a God who is willing to heal and more than capable of healing. God cares for his people and is more than willing to heal them. Peter trusted in a God who goes beyond our own meager expectations to give us something far greater than we ever imagined. And he trusted in a God who is all powerful, beyond what we can think or imagine. He knew the reality of Psalm 62:15, that “power belongs to our God,” and psalm. 147:5 that declares, “Great is our God and mighty in power.”

Ultimately Peter and the disciples trust in the “name of Jesus Christ...” (v. 6). The name of Jesus is mentioned many times throughout the book of Acts as the answer to heal the sick (3:6, 16; 4:7,10), give miracles (4:30), and declare that sins are forgiven through salvation (4:12; 10:43). And in this passage, it is the name of Jesus of Nazareth that is invoked for healing. In John 1, Philip didn’t think that anything good could come out of Nazareth. Now Philip knows that the only name by which we can be healed definitely comes from Nazareth.

The name of Jesus is our healer as well. Years ago in college, a fellow student unfortunately took his own life in a moment of desperation. All through the campus that night and the next several weeks, there appeared to be this oppressive dark cloud over the whole student body. On the night of his death, several students in Rachel’s dorm slept together downstairs, but Rachel stayed up in her room alone. During the night she woke up and sensed a dark shadowy presence at the foot of her bed. The only thing she could do, the best thing she did, was to cry out loudly the name of Jesus. At that moment the dark shadow left her room for good.

When we are in trouble or sense an anxious moment, the best thing to do is to call out the name of Jesus Christ and the enemy will flee. We must trust in the higher power of God’s Spirit through the spoken name of Jesus Christ. And then we must put our faith into action, by taking the first bold step. For Rachel, it was being able to go back to sleep again and sleeping peacefully. For Peter, it was taking hold of this man by the right hand, his dominant hand, and helping him up. Thus, the lame man now puts his faith into action through Peter’s guidance.

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III. Put our faith into action.

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We must take the step of faith. The lame man “jumped to his feet and began to walk” (v. 8).

When Peter takes his hand, the lame man is helped up, and instantly his feet and ankles become strong. He jumps to his feet and begins to walk around. The continuous present tense of the verb indicates his on-going action of walking. The man had to rise up and take that first step. Then he went walking, leaping, and praising God. Notice that he praises God and not Peter or John, who were just the human connectors. God’s power healed a lame man who took a very bold action step. He had never been able to walk in his life and now he is walking and jumping for joy.

That might be like not ever playing the piano and all of a sudden being able to do so with ease and professional skill. Or like painting a breathtaking picture worth millions of dollars without ever having taken lessons or ever painting before. It would be like all of a sudden speaking in another language without ever having studied that language or building a ship without ever having boarded a ship.

Is it possible that any one of us as Christians could do that type of a miracle? Could it really happen still today through you and me? What type of faith do we have? How deep does God's Spirit abide in us and work through us? Maybe it's just a simple as believing and trusting our God to do something in and through us that we could not possibly do on our own.

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Are you ready to take a step of faith? Do we really believe Philippians 4:13, which tells us that we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens us"? God's people must rely solely on God. We can do so through prayer and his Word, the power of his Holy Spirit living in us.

Peter knew that it was not about money and silver, but rather the power of the Holy Spirit living in him.

The story is told of Thomas Aquinas who once called on Pope Innocent II. The Pope was counting out a large sum of money when he looked up and said, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Aquinas immediately replied, "Neither can she now say, 'Rise up and walk.'"

The way of Christian fellowship is not about our money or our own giftedness and abilities, as important as those things are; it is rather about the miraculous power of God to work in and through us and our complete trust in him.

Rev. Carolyn Moore, pastor of Mosaic Church in Georgia, wrote a recent study entitled, *The Supernatural*, at one point she asserts:

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"Christianity is not a faith with a few miracles sprinkled in for effect. Christianity is a *miracle* with some good stories thrown in. Miracles are the cornerstone of the Christian faith. To extract them from the gospel of Jesus Christ would be to extract the heart of God for the people he created" (*Supernatural*, p. 98).

In the same study, Carolyn shares a miraculous story from her own experience. She tells of a man who came to see her one day in her office and he was quite upset about something. His attacks were quite personal. She says that it might not have been her best pastoral moment as she herself became angry. But then she sensed the need to speak directly at his chest and speak directly to a demon. She kept speaking directly and boldly to him until it was gone. The guy became silent and never moved. Then he sank down in his chair as though he were almost lifeless. All the energy had gone out from him.

Then the man said, "It's gone. I feel absolutely no anger. I can't make myself angry with you now." They prayed again and then he left her office. He went out to his car in the parking lot and sat there for about a half hour. Then he drove home and slept for the rest of the day.

Do you think that Carolyn's experience is merely something that only a few Christians can participate in? Perhaps this type of power is just available for the elite few, only those gurus of higher spiritual faith? Or is this supernatural power available to every Christian who trusts in the power of God's Spirit working in them? I believe with Carolyn that this is the norm for all Christian living and not merely a few special cases. Carolyn concludes, "I believe Jesus longs to see his church acting as if he is a supernatural God and supernatural power is ours." Do you believe so, too?

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Conclusion:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do amazing accomplishments beyond what we can ever imagine? We can see miracles all the time, be refreshed by his Spirit all the time, and live triumphantly over all the power of the enemy, no matter in what form. How might God work through you today? Remember, the Church of Jesus Christ is a Fellowship empowered – empowered and filled by God's Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the Offering and special prayer for the anointing of God's Spirit

Benediction