

Sermon—May 8-9, 1999  
Powerful Encounters in  
The Book of Acts  
Acts 3

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## **Faith That Releases Miracles**

Last week we put on a conference here at the church for pastors and leaders from churches all over the United States. One of the aspects of the conference that we were putting on had to do with building buildings. We try to share with pastors off of our experience here at this church. This past fall in our building campaign--just some of the marvelous things that the Lord has done for the Columbus Vineyard. In the course of preparing for that particular session on building buildings, I had the opportunity to reread the materials that we put out for the building campaign and, in particular, the testimony booklet that we collected from you. It was filled with testimonies regarding what Jesus did in different peoples' lives.

Now before I continue in the series that I've been doing in the book of Acts, where we'll be reading today of a miracle of healing—physical healing, I thought I might read to you from our own book of miracles, our testimony booklet, just 2 or 3 testimonies of peoples' healings by way of encouragement. You see, I believe that the book of Acts is continuing to be written in our day. As I told you when I started the series on Powerful Encounters in the Book of Acts, the book of Acts is about the acts of the Holy Spirit, the acts of God. It's interesting, if you read the book of Acts, it seems to end suddenly—it doesn't have a wrap-up, a conclusion. And I've often wondered if, in God's wisdom, he inspired Luke, the author of Acts to write it in such

a fashion that it's demanded more, with stories continuing to be written all over the world until Christ returns.

Our own book of Acts contained a story from the wife of a physician here, Jeannie Keseg, who wrote, "My husband Dave and I were married in 1976 but were never able to have children. Both he and I had medical problems that inhibited my ability to conceive and carry a baby to term. Because we wanted children, we decided to adopt. In 1984 we adopted a baby girl and 4 years later, a baby boy. Although we were content with our 2 children, we also desired to have more. During my quiet time one morning I believe the Lord told me he would give us more children but I wasn't sure how he would do it. We remained open to adoption but also began infertility treatments. After one year, though, I still was not pregnant. We continued to trust the Lord."

"In 1994 we built a new house. Because Dave and I were convinced the Lord would give us more children, we designed a nursery for our new home. In the spring of 1994 Vineyard hosted a healing conference with John Wimber" (who was the founder of the Vineyard and our late president. John went to be with the Lord about a year and a half ago). "At one of the sessions, John called forward for prayer couples who were having difficulty getting pregnant. Even though I wasn't there at the time, Dave went forward and within 2 months I discovered I was pregnant. I was 37 and Dave was 41. The chances of this just happening are impossible. We tried everything medically possible without any success and by then, I had only one

working fallopian tube. God himself intervened and performed a miracle. In April 1995 our son was born and then in January 1998, our little girl. I have 2 precious reminders that our God is a God of miracles.”

Another woman wrote that when she came to the church she had the herpes virus that caused her to get sick every month and have horrible sores. She’d get a red streak up her arm and blood poisoning. In any case, one Sunday evening she came to the church. One of our pastors prayed for her and since that time 7 years ago she has been completely delivered from the outbreaks of this herpes virus. Totally healed!

Cathy and Charley Borden wrote a testimony regarding their son, Sean, who was born in March of 1995. Unfortunately Sean was born with a metabolic problem in which his body was unable to produce an enzyme necessary to metabolize fat for energy. For 2 year Sean had a series of metabolic crises in which his condition became increasingly unstable. His parents write that “an average day with Sean included tube feedings, aerosols, numerous medications, frequently an I.V. Sean told us one evening that he had visited God’s house and God wasn’t home because 2 people died and he had to go get them and bring them to his house. God told Sean the next time he came he would be in the window and say ‘come in, Sean.’ We felt like God was preparing us and Sean for what the doctor’s said was inevitable—Sean’s premature death.

Sean has had nearly hundreds of metabolic attacks. We spend a lot of time praying and thanking God for preparing Sean for his death and asking God to give us the strength to get through it. When our friends at Vineyard heard that Sean was unstable and in the hospital last week they surrounded us with prayers, meals, and support. My wife and I also chose to fast and pray for healing for Sean—either being disease free and pain free on earth or home in heaven. After Sean received prayer, a leading metabolic doctor called and said that he had lab results that he couldn't explain. The test confirmed the prior diagnosis of his fatal metabolic disease but now researchers repeated the tests several times and there was absolutely no sign of the disease in his body." They write, "we immediately knew that God had performed a miracle and that Sean was completely healed. We stopped Sean's tube feedings which up to that time he hadn't been able to survive more than 2 ½ hours without. Now he is happy, healthy, and shows no symptoms of the disease."

Here's their conclusion. "We knew that God could perform miracles but we never imagined that we would be blessed to live one."

A miracle! We shouldn't use that word lightly as Christians; we shouldn't. We're not talking about the miracle of not running out of gas before we get to the gas station or the miracle of finding our favorite video still available at the video store. Not a miracle when we can fit into an old pair of jeans. We're talking about some unmistakable intervention by God that goes beyond any kind of natural explanation. When God interrupts the flow of cause and events, God breaks in from the outside.

He breaks the chain of A to B to C in a way so unmistakable that it just points to Him. And he gets all the glory! A miracle, where God raises up a marriage that is absolutely dead. A couple has lost all hope. The only answer seem to be a divorce or a separation. We're already preparing for life without our mate and then God breaks in. A miracle—a relationship that's been unhealed for years, maybe decades. A person has refused to acknowledge his sins of abuse; he's been in denial for decades, he's lied. Bitterness has hardened and callused our heart. A parent, a brother, a stepparent, a grandparent, a friend, a former pastor, suddenly comes back into your life completely changed. They're no longer hard; they're soft. They're no longer in denial or lying—they're humble. They're asking forgiveness—a miracle.

Something happens in your own soul. You discover you want a relationship where you didn't want one before—a miracle. Doctors say you can't have children, your child has chronic ear infections and needs to go in for an operation. You have an orthopedic problem, curvature in your spine or something wrong with your hip and wholly apart from medical intervention, you're healed.

Racial reconciliation takes place in a formerly segregated community or church. A white racist father-in-law embraces his African-American son-in-law—a miracle. Your child is healed; your spouse is healed—a miracle. Your child has walked away from God. They've gotten themselves involved in drugs; they've gotten involved with people who are dragging them down a path of destruction. They seem locked into rebellion, maybe they're living with somebody outside of marriage. You call out

to God and then there is a miracle. The prodigal returns home. There's a change that's taking place in their life; God has broken through.

Today as we look at the story in Acts chapter 3, how many of you need a miracle? An intervention from God? Something that breaks the mechanical chain of cause and effect. Something that unmistakably goes beyond natural explanation. Something beyond our capacities, psychologically and emotionally and physically.

Today I'm going to talk about miracles and the title for my message is "Faith that Releases Miracles." We'll be looking at Act chapter 3, "Faith that Releases Miracles." Let's pray.

If you have a Bible, I'd like you to turn to Acts, chapter 3, beginning in verse 1:

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled 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. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, 'silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand,

he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they 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."

Let me give you the setting of this extraordinary miracle. It says in verse 1 that "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon." Apparently the apostles continued to live as observant Jews. They made daily visits to the temple which would have been the habit of observant Jews living in Jerusalem. There were three prayer services a day at the Jewish temple and observant Jews would try to go to at least one of them. There was one at 9 am, one at noon and one at 3 p.m. Sacrifices were offered at the morning and afternoon prayer services. Here we find Peter and John going up to the temple at 3 p.m. They encounter, it says in verse 2, "a man crippled from birth who was being carried to the temple gate Beautiful where he was going everyday to beg from those going into the temple courts."

Now let me give you a picture of the temple that this miracle occurred in. First of all, there was the outer courts of the temple, often called the court of the Gentiles where business was conducted and Gentiles who believed in God were called "God fearers" were allowed to stand. It was from the court of the gentiles that Jesus put out the

money changers. After climbing steps from the court of the gentiles, you would walk through one of nine gates that went into the court of Jewish women. On each of the 9 gates that went into the court of women, there were signs posted in Latin and in Greek that no gentile was to enter those gates on the penalty of death.

So you have this outer court of gentiles, a court for Jewish women that probably contained the treasury, the temple treasury, and then gates that went in further to the court of Israel where Jewish men would gather to worship. And, then further gates that led to the court for the priests and the Levites. And it was in this third court that the actual temple structure stood, the temple being divided between 2 compartments, between the holy place and the holy of holies. Four different courts before you got to the temple and the temple itself would be divided between the holy place and the holy of holies. What do you think all of this communicated? It was all designed to communicate that people are cut off from God. Wall after wall after wall, barrier after barrier, signed posted—keep away on penalty of death.

The New Testament writers announce “good news in Jesus.” A part of that good news had to do with our access to God through the crucified body of Christ. No longer do we have a series of walls and barred gates and signs saying “keep out from the presence of God.” The New Testament writers say “now that we have a great high priest that has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us draw near with confidence.” You’re not cut off. The walls of partition separating Jews and



gentiles and men and women have been broken down. Anyone who desires can come near to God through his son Jesus.

It was probably there at the gate between the court of the gentiles and the court of women that this crippled man sat begging. And it says “when he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘look at us’. So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.

There a story of a person literally being lifted out of a wheelchair after being paralyzed—I don’t know if he was a quadriplegic or a paraplegic but after being paralyzed for many years, this fellow was instantly healed. A miracle was released in this man’s body. Unmistakably God.

A story is told about the medieval Catholic Church: on one occasion the great medieval scholar Thomas Aquinas went into to see the Pope, Pope Innocent II, and the Pope was sitting at this large table counting money. He was reaching into this box, this treasure chest of gold and when the Pope turned to Thomas Aquinas, he said “Well, Thomas, the church can no longer say ‘silver or gold have we none.’” Thomas Aquinas responded, “That is true, Holy Father, but neither can she say any longer, ‘rise and walk.’”

There does seem to be some connection between the church's prosperity and the church's capacity to work miracles. It does seem that our prosperity does our dependence upon Almighty God; that in times of great need and poverty the church becomes purified and it sees more of God's miraculous power. It is an undeniable scriptural truth that the poor in the world, James 2 verse 5 says, "the poor in the world are rich in faith." And it is appropriate that we as a prosperous pray "Lord, help us not to rely on our prosperity or to become secure and smug in our wealth. Help us, Oh God, to rely on you and to depend on you."

Well what is it that released this healing miracle? It certainly wasn't Peter's great prayer. When people hear of a miracle, an undeniable miracle, a miracle of the healing of infertility or the healing of a fatally ill child, the healing of someone from Hodgkin's or from cancer. They often believe that there must be some technique, some human formula that produced the miracle. Over centuries, the church has developed special prayers, special rites, special rituals to pray or to perform for different kinds of problems. Many people believe that you have to travel to special places: to Lourdes, or to Fatima or to, perhaps, to Toronto, Canada. We don't see Peter performing some special ritual or special rites, praying a specially written prayer for this occasion. Peter's prayer, if you could call it that, was relatively brief, it was a simple prayer of command, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Now I would suggest that most of us do not know how to pray biblical prayers for healing or for miracles. We often pray precisely in the way that Jesus told us not to pray. Jesus in Matthew 6, verse 7 tells his followers “not to pray like the gentiles do who believe that they would be heard for their many words.” Is it not the case that we fall into the trap of not believing that God will release a miracle through a lengthy prayer of ours; that if we pray longer or harder or more intensely then a miracle will come. I can’t tell you how many times people have prayed for me a prayer that was well-meaning, it was meant to make me feel good, but it wasn’t biblical prayer to God. Have you ever heard a prayer that goes like this, “Oh, Lord, Rich your servant is in need. He’s done so much good for others. He constantly labors. He’s such a godly person.” You know, when somebody prays like that for me, internally I feel worse. I think, “Oh, God, help me. You know that I’m not worthy of anything.” The longer they go on about my holiness, as I stand before God, the more unholy I feel. By the end of one of these prayers that pumps me up before God I feel like falling on my face, you know, beating on my chest saying “God have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Do you know how to pray biblical prayers? Many people pray prayers as if God awarded us a miracle on the basis of our worthiness rather than simply as an act of his grace. Do not remind God of the recipient’s goodness or worthiness. None of us deserve anything at the hands of God. We don’t earn miracles. God’s answers to prayers are acts of his grace, his loving kindness. And when you pray, you do not have to go into a lengthy prayer informing God of the specifics of the medical

diagnosis. God knows better than the physician precisely what the medical condition is and what caused it. I often find it amusing when I listen to somebody pray a prayer that's informing God—"well, as you know, Lord, Joe seems to have cracked the upper portion of his tibia when he slipped skiing last Wednesday. There appears to be some collateral ligament damage, swelling around the knee, arterial involvement." You don't need to inform God.

You don't need to beg God. As if God was a stingy person whose pity you had to invoke by getting on your hands and knees and begging. You know, our prayers reveal our thoughts about God. When someone is begging God, what is their image of God, that he's Ebenezer Scrooge? That he's the orphanage keeper in Charles Dickens' *Oliver* that we have to come before him trembling and, you know, "please sir, can I have some more." We pray unbiblically when we beg.

And we pray unbiblically and unworthy of God when we beat around the bush. You note that Peter didn't say, "regarding the crippled man, Lord, help him to accept his position knowing that he is loved by you, knowing that you have his best in mind, and whatsoever occurs in the future whether you heal him or not, grant him the serenity to accept it and the perseverance to move on." So often instead of being direct with God, praying to him the way that Jesus has instructed us to pray. Ask! Seek! Knock! People beat around the bush, they believe they'll be heard for their many words. They believe that God first needs to be flattered for 25 minutes. We

have to whip ourselves up into an emotional frenzy before we'll obtain something from the Lord.

You know, there was a quality to Jesus' prayers that is almost wholly lacking in the prayers of most of his followers. Jesus' prayers were simple. He knew who he was talking to. There was great intimacy. The first person that we have a record of in Judaism who addressed God simply as "Abba"—father, daddy. Simplicity and intimacy and directness in the prayers. Much of the prayer time that Jesus spent with God was him listening to the father, not speaking; just getting in touch with the heart of the father. Friends, train yourselves to stop talking so much when you pray and especially when you pray for another. Train yourselves to not pray prayers of flattery regarding the person you're praying for, whatever their position is in the church. Train yourselves to stop informing God as if he is ignorant or begging God as if he is stingy. Or flattering God or beating around the bush as if God doesn't know what you need ahead of time. Train yourselves to be brief and direct and to incline your heart to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Most of Jesus' prayers were very short; they were prayers like, "Walk," "See."

It wasn't because of their great prayers that a miracle was released and it wasn't because of their "great persons." We read in versus 11 and 12 "While the beggar held on to Peter and John all the people were astonished and came running to them in a place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them, "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power

or godliness we had made this man walk.” If God doesn’t release miracles through special prayers, we almost always believe that the reason a miracle occurred was because of a special person. Well there must be something about the person that prayed the prayer. They are specially and uniquely in touch with God. Those folks always associate a miracle with the instrument of the miracle. We stare at the person who did it. Instead of saying this person is just an instrument, a tool—it’s not the axe that cut the tree down. It’s the person who wielded the axe. It’s not the man or woman who accomplished the healing, it’s the God who wielded the man or the woman. Peter does what all men and women of faith do; he deflects the glory away from himself. He points the glory to God. Let me tell you where the credit is due. It’s not because I’m uniquely powerful, he says, or uniquely holy. Do you have to be a special person for a miracle to be released through you and your prayers? Most of you would say, “yes.”

But, I want you to see something; turn with me for just a moment to Hebrews, Chapter 11 and I want you to look with me to verse 32 where the author is running down the list of what we call the heroes of faith and the author of Hebrews says, “Now what more shall I say. I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah.” And he mentions David and Samuel who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gained what was promised, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned into strength and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

You know what I love about this list of the folks through whom God released miracles? These four guys at the beginning: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah? There have never been 4 less likely people in all the world through whom God would work a miracle than these 4. Go back and read their stories in the book of Judges because we disqualify ourselves from among the company of people who would see the miraculous. We say, "I'm not powerful enough, I'm not holy enough, not me." Read their stories, see what kinds of extraordinary results can come through ordinary people who just believe a little bit. Who just dare to believe a little bit in a miracle-working God.

Consider Gideon in Judges chapter 6. The Mideonites have run over the land, Gideon is hiding, sneaking out at night to eat a little bit of barley and runs back into his cave. An angel comes to this fearful, timid, weakling of a man who is among the poorest of the poor in the whole country. This angel greets him and says "Hail, Gideon, though man of valor." And Gideon's reaction is so wonderful. He says, "Excuse me?" "Moi." "Are you talking to me?" "Is there someone standing behind me? Who are you addressing? You want me to do something extraordinary?" Everything about the story of Gideon is a story about how God can use the least, the absolute last, the person who is absolutely nothing in the sight of man. It wasn't that Gideon was so great; he believed in a great God.

And what do we make of Barak who won't go off to battle unless a woman comes with him and he gets shored up. What about Samson who his whole life struggled with sexual sin and sexual bondage? Was ever a man more unworthy of being a vehicle of God's miraculous power than Samson? Yes, you sin. God knows of your sin and desires to release you and break your bondage without in any way approving of sin in your life. God can still work through you to release a miracle.

And Jephthah? Has there ever been anybody more on the outskirts of the faith community than Jephthah? He was the son of a prostitute, he ran in a street gang. He was an outcast in his society, a nobody from nowhere, and God used him. Do you understand that the miracles that we read in the Bible are mainly performed through ordinary people. You know we have all of these folks in the Bible in the category of great saints—people unlike us, men and women of ever increasing faith. The book of James tells us in trying to encourage us to pray for the sick and belief for healing; that even Elijah who was one of the 2 or 3 greatest miracle workers in the old testament—Elijah. The book of James says that he was a man just like us. He prayed, simple, direct, intimate, prayers of faith and he saw great things happen. If I could just get this church—you who are sitting here today—if I could just get you to believe that God could use someone like you, little ordinary you to release his miraculous powers, there would be no stopping the church in terms of its influence in the community.



Because we'd have thousands of people regularly taking risks, thousands of people believing God for a miracle in their marriage, thousands of people believing God for miracles for their kids, praying for co-workers, trusting that God would speak to them as they went through the line at McDonalds, talking with people about Jesus at work. Believing that God would use our simple words and our simple stories to save. If I could just get you to believe that God would use you, God's kingdom would come in so much of a greater way in this community.

John Wimber who I've quoted before used to tell the story of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday from the perspective of the donkey upon whom Jesus rode. You remember the story: Jesus got on the donkey and rode on the donkey into Jerusalem and as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people along the roadway put down palm branches and their cloaks and garments and they bowed down as Jesus rode in and they said, "Hail to the King, save us, oh, Lord."

Well John Wimber used to tell the story from the perspective of the donkey. As the donkey is walking into Jerusalem, he sees these people putting palm branches before him and crying out "Save us, oh Lord. Hail to you King." And the donkey thinks to himself, "I didn't even know anybody knew me here. I haven't been here for years. I can't believe that everyone is calling me 'king.' This is incredible. I didn't realize my reputation had traveled this far." Well, the point is it's not you, donkey, it's who's on your back. And, if I might say this gently to those of you who

are sitting here. It's not you, donkeys, your holiness, your power—it's who's on your back. Miracles are worked by Jesus, not as a result of you.

Here's how Peter explains the miracle. In verse 12, he says, "Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us donkeys? As if by our power or godliness we made this man walk. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of our fathers has glorified his servant, Jesus. And then down in verse 16, "By faith in the name of Jesus this man whom you see and know is made strong." It is in Jesus' name. And the faith that comes through him that has given his complete healing to him as you can all see. Stop looking at the instrument, stop looking at the technique or the prayer. This miracle came about by Jesus' name.

The writer of these chapters stresses for us the power that is in the name of Jesus. Eight times in Act chapter 3, in Acts chapter 4, we read that the miracle that occurred was the result of faith in the name of Christ. Do you understand that names in the Bible speak of a person's authority, it's not just a label. Jesus—when we talk about faith in the name of Jesus, we mean faith in Jesus' authority. Faith in Jesus' power. Faith in all that Jesus is and can do. We use the name the same way today. A policeman might say "stop in the name of the law." He's coming with the authority of the law of the state. It's not coming in his own name, claiming something for himself. His badge makes him a representative of the state and it carries with him the power and authority of the government.

An ambassador would come in the name of the United States carrying with him the authority of the president or the authority of our country. When a Christian prays, they're praying in the name of Jesus, coming with the authority and power and as a representative of Jesus Christ. Praying at the end of your prayer, "In the name of Jesus" is not just a little add on. You're saying, "I'm bringing the authority of Christ into my situation because I'm Jesus' representative here. I'm Jesus' hands here, I'm his eyes, I'm his mouthpiece, I'm his ears. I come not in my own name based on my own authority, I come in his name. Why did this miracle occur? Because the authority of Jesus was present.

And Peter further explains this miracle as God's desire to glorify his servant, Jesus. Verse 13 "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus." Miracles occur to glorify Jesus, not to glorify us. God is not interested in, particularly, in making your or me look good. He doesn't do great things so that we would look good in the eyes of others. He does great things through us so that Jesus would look good in the eyes of others. That's why we must always point attention to Jesus. God does something great through you and somebody praises you, we say "thank you, that's very encouraging." And then we deflect glory to the Lord, saying God is very good, isn't he?" "Jesus has done something wonderful for you, hasn't he? Our Lord is merciful and he loves you, doesn't he?"

You know, when Peter says in verse 13 that “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant, Jesus,” I don’t think he’s simply saying that this miracle is an occasion for God to glorify Jesus, that God is using this miracle so that people would glorify Jesus. I think Peter is pointing to the cause of the miracle. It is the results of God glorifying his servant Jesus that miracles occur. In other words, as a direct result of Jesus being raised from the dead and ascending into heaven as a direct result of God clothing Jesus with glory, this miracle has happened. It is because of Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension that every power that comes against you can be defeated. Do you understand that whatever obstacle is in the way of you receiving a miracle, that obstacle can be put under the feet of Jesus who is resurrected from the dead and has ascended into heaven, is now Lord of the universe. Jesus’ glorification means he’s the conqueror. He’s defeated every power. And so here you are struggling in your marriage. Jesus can conquer that. You’re struggling with someone who is rebellious. Jesus can conquer that. You’re struggling with an illness in your life or the life of a loved one, Jesus can conquer that. You’re struggling because someone you care about is far from Christ and is unsaved. Jesus can conquer that. Jesus’ glorification means that Jesus shares the fruit of his victory over Satan and over sin and over death and over illness. Jesus shares the fruits of his victory with us who believe in him. That’s what Ephesians 4, verse 8 is all about, where it says, “That is why when he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

How does Peter explain the miracle? He explains the miracle as a result of faith in the name of Jesus and he explains the miracle as a result of Jesus' glorification. That when he ascended on high, he defeated every power that opposes his will and he gives gifts to men and women.

So how is it then that we see miracles released. Our part in the whole transaction is faith. Verse 16, '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.'

I want you to imagine this mother's day a relationship between a mother and a child which is very poor. It's not one of those mother-child relationships that we celebrate, but it's rather a hurtful relationship in which every time mom speaks, she says something critical, something hurtful, something damaging to her child's self esteem and her child's feelings. Every time mom speaks, it's a word of criticism like "Why can't you go on a diet? Why aren't you more successful? Why can't you be more like your brother? You've been such a disappointment." The child shares some good news and mom always discovers the flaw, always finds the fly in the ointment. Imagine every time you spoke with your mother you expected a level 2 response instead of a level 10. What if you decided that mom would never give you the compliment, the encouragement, the loving response that you want. What should you do? One helpful way to deal with disapproving parents is to lower your expectations. I guess this is the way my mother is and until God changes her I'm not

going to fret over it, I'll just lower my sights and instead of inspecting mom to give me a level 10 response, she'll always be a level 2.

You know, people do this with God all the time. If they've been hurt a few times or gone through trials or experienced some lack of answers to prayer in the past, they start treating God as if he were a level 2 person. You know, I believe that one of the reasons many of us rarely see miracles released through our faith and our lives is because you have stopped expecting almost anything from God. You treat God the way somebody treats a poor parent. You just don't expect great things from God. Some of you might point to a stability in your Christian life; you say you don't understand why some Christians are up and down, you're always even. Friends, you know your stability may be because you rarely ask God for anything miraculous. You don't go through any highs or lows like the psalmists did because you relate to God not as a level 10 but as a level 2. You say, "Rich, why is faith so important in releasing miracles in the world? Why does God ask me for faith to believe him for a miracle in my marriage? To believe him for a miracle for my kid, to believe him for a miracle in my physical healing. Why is faith so important?

Because faith, first of all, pleases God. When you look at God as a level 10 person who could do level 10 things, you please God. It should be obvious to us why faith pleases God as Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." With faith you please God. It should be obvious to us why faith pleases God. All of

us are pleased when people trust us. And all of us find it really difficult to not be trusted.

Ever hear a teenager talk with their parents and the upset and the outrage when parents will say, “don’t do this.” And the teenager will say, “You don’t trust me.” To not trust a person is to insult their personality.

Now, of course, trust must be earned. But when we don’t trust someone, after they have earned our trust, we are insulting them. To not believe in God and to not believe in God for miracles insults God. Faith pleases God. It is about the only thing you can do for God, is believe in him.

And faith releases God’s power in this world. Faith releases God to do what he wants to do in this world. Turn with me to Mark 6. I want you to see this. Faith is a release point for God. It not only pleases God, but releases God.

In Mark 6 Jesus was in his hometown in Nazareth accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue and many who heard him were amazed. Where did this man get these things, they asked? What’s this wisdom that has been given him that he even does miracles? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son? And the brothers of James, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense to him.

Jesus said to them, “‘Only in his own hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.’ He could not do miracles there except lay hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”

The power of God was held back in Nazareth, why? The text tells us. Because of their lack of faith. Faith releases God to do what he wants to do. Have you noticed how often in performing a healing Jesus commends a person for believing in him? For example, in Matthew 8 when the Roman centurion is asking Jesus for a healing and clearly understands the nature of Jesus’ authority. In Matthew 8:10 it reads: “When Jesus heard this, when he heard the centurion’s words, he was astonished and said to those following him, ‘I will you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.’”

And then in verse 13 Jesus speaks to the centurion and says, “Go, it will be done just as you believed it would. And his servant was healed that very hour.”

Faith releases God to do what he wants to do. See, this is such a fundamental principle of the Christian life. I believe we don’t teach on faith enough. But understand that in the way that God had set up the universe, and the way that God has set up the kingdom of God, he has determined to work together with us in accomplishing his purposes. God is highly relational. And he has decided to not do everything by himself. He has designed life to be a cooperation between himself and us.



God could have healed the lame man totally apart from Peter but he didn't. He chose to use Peter's prayer and Peter's faith to bring about the miraculous healing. Oh, he could instantly feed us by himself, by just poof! Our stomachs are filled. Poof, no cholesterol, no calories. But he has us ask him for our daily bread and then we have to labor in the world to earn money and then we have to buy the food. And yet all the while we know that we would have no food if God didn't send the rain; if God didn't bring the sun up each day and so on. All the while we know that our food comes from God and yet we have to labor for our food. God has designed life to be a cooperation between us and God.

And God has designed the spread of the kingdom to be a cooperative effort between us and God. Oh, he could just instantly save people apart from anyone speaking the gospel message to a person, but he has chosen to work through ordinary people like you and me as we share the gospel. Here is a profound truth, friends. God will not save people apart from our witness. God did not entrust the Gospel to angels.

People will not learn about Jesus by reflecting on creation. Paul says it pleases God, through the foolishness of our preaching to save those who believe. It is by you and me sharing our faith that people come to know about Jesus and believe in him.

The Bible says that salvation in a person's life comes about not as simply a direct result of God's activity but as a result of God's cooperation. God works a miracle as you tell your story. God works a miracle as you share the story of Jesus. So it is that God has chosen to work miracles, not all by himself but to have miracles released in

the world through people who believe. It's all part of God's relational design to not work around us or in spite of us or without us, but through us. Faith releases the power of God.

In that way faith is very much like the clutch in a car. You know, as you release the clutch, the power of the engine kicks in. If you're driving a sports car, you release the clutch and the engine engages. You hear someone say, "Wow, listen to that clutch, man, that's an incredible clutch." What you hear people say is "Wow, check out those 5 liters under the hood, that's a powerful engine." When faith releases the work of God to do miracles in the world, we don't say "Oh, you man or woman of ever increasing faith, aren't you something." We say what a wonder working God we serve. But I tell you, if you don't release the clutch, the power of the engine is never going to move the car forward. And if you don't exercise faith, if you don't ask God for a miracle, you'll never see miracles released in the world. We don't glorify our faith, we glorify God. Yet it's so amazing to me that God's sovereignty is great enough to work in cooperation with us. That God has chosen to restrict himself to our prayer, to our faith, to what we choose to release in the world.

So let me ask you something. How much of God are you releasing in your world? How much of God is flowing through your life? God's kindness, God's mercy, God's gospel. How much of God's healing is working through your life? How often do you believe, God will do it whether I do it or not? Which is just a lie.

Faith not only pleases God and it not only releases God, but it also responds to God. Listen, in all my talk about faith today, I never want to give you the least indication that faith somehow takes the initiative or control away from God. Faith releases God, but faith is always responding to God's lead and God's initiative. God is always the one in control. God is always the leader.

You know, I have often described Christianity as being like a dance. Unlike Hinduism, we don't believe in a God who just dances alone. You know Hindus believe in a dancing God and that he dances alone and that people are just sort of absorbed up in God. The pagans dance alone and they don't believe in God. They believe in magic. They control everything. Christians believe in a dance. Yes, but God is the leader of the dance and we follow God. As Paul says in Galatians 5: "Make sure that you keep in step with the Holy Spirit." God is the leader of the dance and he takes the initiative.

Jesus put it real plainly to us in John 5: "I tell you the truth. The Son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, that the Son also does."

Faith responds to God. To God's word and God's character and what God is saying and what God is doing. And we just follow along. Where, I think, the faith movement, as it is called, the positive confession movement, the faith walk people have gotten off in their focus on faith is this. There is this idea that somehow

because we see faith as the requirement for doing miracles, that faith means that God has turned control of things over to you. God has said, "Well, if you have enough faith, I am going to turn the control of the universe over to you. Here, I will slid over and you drive." And faith walk people will often talk about writing your own ticket with God.

Friends, God never turns control over to us. He is always the Almighty, always the Sovereign, always the Lord. Yes, faith releases God, but it releases God to do what God wants to do, not what we want to do. Can you imagine what kind of monster you would be or I would be if God gave me the power or you the power to do what you or me wanted to do? The power is always in God and is never entrusted to people. The power is released through us. So we don't boast about ourselves. We don't write tickets with God by faith and we don't boast about our own faith. Faith pleases God. It releases God but it always responds to God's initiative.

Now today as I'm talking about believing God for a miracle, I believe there a couple of foundational matters that need to be placed in a person's life if they're to see God's miraculous power released through them. Here are two things you need to build on. First of all you need to know who Jesus is. You're walking towards someone who obviously has a need and you're going to pray but then your eyes turn and your look at yourself and you say "oh, my goodness, how am I that God should work through my life? My faith is so weak, it's not been so long since that great big sin. I don't know very much of the Bible. I'm not very smart. I'm not good enough.

I'm not wise enough." As you're walking towards somebody you say "It's not about me, the donkey, it's about who's on my back. Who is this Jesus who's riding on donkeys into battle. Look at the titles given him. Verse 14, "You disowned the holy and righteous one." Peter is accusing these listeners of constantly contradicting God's verdict. God's verdict about Jesus was that he was a holy and righteous one. I'm not holy, but you who are on my back, you're holy and righteous. These people instead asked for a murderer. They acquitted the guilty and condemned the innocent.

I feel so unspiritual, so dead inside. Who is Jesus who is riding on my back. He is the author of life. God raised him from the dead. You don't feel very smart? In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). You don't feel very righteous? Christ Jesus has become for us our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor 1:30) Arise off yourself donkeys. Remember who's on your back. You're walking towards the person, you're going to pray for them, praying for a miracle, and then this thought seizes you. "How do I know it's God's will?"

So many people when they're praying for the sick or praying for something great are robbed of the ability to release God's miraculous power because they say I don't know if it's God's will to heal the person who's standing in front of me. I don't know what God's will is. Is it God's will to heal this blind person? Is it God's will to heal this marriage? Is it God's will to heal this cancer?

Let me give you the answer for those questions. Is it God's will to heal this blind person. The answer is yes. Is it God's will to heal this person with cancer? The answer is yes. Is it God's will to heal this marriage? The answer is yes. You say, "How are you so sure?" We know that in heaven there won't be any blind people. Blind people will see. We know that in heaven there is not going to be any cancer. Cancer will be removed.

You say, "Rich, that is just playing games." No, no it is not playing games. You need to know what the will of God is. What the heart of God is regarding sickness. The heart of God regarding sickness is to remove sickness from this universe. Sickness is not something that God is going to tolerate forever. His heart and will is to remove it. The issue is not will God remove the illness, he will. He wants to and he will. The issue is only the timing. Will he do it in the future or will he do it now?

It never is the case that you have to wonder what God's will is regarding sickness or your child's rebellion or the healing of your marriage. The only thing you have to wonder is what God's timing is and the way we approach God is to say "God, since it is your will." Not "if it is your will." "Since it is your will to heal, may we see it now and not then, may we see it today and not tomorrow." "May we see it this year and not 20 years down the line. Since it is your will to heal, will you do it now on earth and not just in heaven."

Sometimes of course we get the answer we don't want to hear—not now; not yet; not at this time. But God's heart is for healing, either now or tomorrow or in heaven.

You know, even after you run through everything that I've been talking about--you recognize who Jesus is. You say "It's not about me, it's about him. It's not about me, the donkey, it's about who's on my back." You say "It is God's will and I'm just going to ask him for it now." Faith to release miracles is a fight. The whole New Testament tells us that faith is a fight, it's a struggle. The world, the flesh, the culture, the media, the devil, constantly opposes us. It's hard. Faith is a fight.

One of the things that you are going to have to fight through is a fatalism that has infected the whole world, but has infected the church world in sort of what I call a distorted Calvinism for those of you who are theologically minded. A fatalism that says, "What can we do? It is all up to God." It sounds real super spiritual. It sounds very very spiritual, very religious to say, "Well, you know, if God wants to heal, he can heal. If God wants to deliver someone of cancer, he can deliver them from cancer. If God wants to save this marriage, he will do it in his time. Let's not bother God with really seeking him about it." A fatalism. There used to be in the 1950's a song by I think it was Doris Day or someone that went "Que sera sera, whatever will be will be." You know that idea that whatever God ordains, that is the way it is and we have nothing to say about it.

You know, I described at the front end of this talk that God intends to work his will and his power in this world through us. He wants a relationship. It is not the case that God will do whatever he is going to do despite you, apart from you, without you. He wants to work through you. It is a two-party deal in Christianity. The kingdom

of God extends from God through us. And you know what fatalism is like? It reminds me of a pitcher who is holding the ball and decides not to throw it and then blames the catcher for not catching it. Well, why didn't the catcher catch the ball? Why didn't the catcher run up and grab the ball? The catcher is simply waiting for you to throw the ball. God is simply waiting, I believe, for people to release his presence in the world through faith, for these release points all over the world, for the clutch to be let out all over the world, for his powers to be made known through faith.

And fatalism, friends, this notion that God is going to do whatever he is going to do is simply false. That is a faith killer. And you know another faith killer is not understanding that believing in God is a choice. Friends, the call to faith is not addressed to your intellect. Nor is it addressed to your emotions. It is addressed to your will.

Let me read to you a little verse from John 7:17. Jesus says, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or if I speak on my own. If anyone's will is to do God's will, then you will know."

You know, one of the fights of faith is when you are seeking God for a miracle, very often you don't understand how a situation could possibly work out, how a breakthrough can be achieved. And many people stumble at this point and say, "Well, if I can't understand how this break-through can be achieved, then I don't have the faith



to release a miracle.” Faith is not addressed to your intellect. Faith is addressed to your will. Will you choose to believe in God even if you can’t understand how it will work out?

The great Augustine understood this principle. Augustine said 1600 years ago, “Understanding is the reward of faith.” We don’t seek to understand in order to believe we believe in order to understand. Many people want to say, “Well, God, how could you heal cancer instantaneously when someone is dying? I don’t understand it, therefore, I can’t believe it.” No we choose to believe that it is God’s will, the only issue is timing. I choose to believe that God could do it right now. I don’t understand. I will understand later. Faith is addressed to the will.

You know, when you choose to follow God, you get the enlightenment later. You do. From the outside you can’t figure it out at all. Oh, there is enough evidence in terms of fulfilled prophecies in the Bible to put your trust in Christ. There is enough evidence in terms of studying and thinking through the resurrection and how the resurrection could be the only explanation for where Jesus’ body went. There is enough evidence in terms of people’s changed lives all around this church to form a foundation for a reasonable step of faith, but until you choose to take that step of faith, you won’t really understand Christianity.

The illustration I love is of standing outside a cathedral. And you can see from the outside that there are stained glass windows on that cathedral. You can examine it from the outside and look at it and you can get some sense that the stained glass

window is colored glass, but it looks pretty gray from the outside. Until you choose to step into the cathedral, you will never see the beautiful picture inside. When you step in, you will see it all. Only from the inside will you see it. Faith is addressed to the choice, to the will. It is not addressed to your ability to understand. Understanding in the Christian life comes after choosing to believe.

Faith is also not addressed to your emotions. Very often when you go to pray for someone and you are praying for a miracle, or a break-through, your feelings or emotions will not feel like faith. You will be afraid. There is not a whole lot you can do about your feelings. Not a whole lot. Anxious situations make you feel anxious. But you can choose to believe despite your anxious feelings. You can choose to believe despite the pressure you are under. You can choose to believe despite your depression. You can choose to believe despite whatever feelings you have to the contrary. Don't battle with your feelings when you are praying. Don't get distracted by your feelings and don't get distracted by your intellect. Choose to believe based on who you are in Christ, what your commission is in Christ and what you know God's will to be.

Let me finish with this thought. Faith is absorbed with Jesus. It just concerns itself and absorbs itself with Christ. It is not about us. Or about us being men or women of ever-increasing faith. It is about who is on our backs. It is about Christ. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and

perfecter of our faith. He is the beginning point of our faith and he is the end. He is the alpha and the omega. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.”

And then in verse 3, the author goes on to say, “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

You will never grow your faith by considering your faith. As you consider your faith, it will feel to you tissue thin. You grow your faith by considering him. Look at how wonderful Jesus is. Look at how he relates to the sick. Consider how Jesus related when someone cried out to him. Consider him. Fix your eyes on him.