

*What Should Supernatural Look Like?*

Acts 3:1-10; 2:43; 2:22; John 20:30-31

Continuing our journey through the Book of Acts, and What Matters in the Church, we consider this morning “*What Should Supernatural Look Like?*” This focused question arises from our sermon last Sunday regarding What Should Unity Look Like? A Healthy Church is a Unified Church, and a Unified Church takes full advantage of the supernatural.

Acts 3:1) Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. 2) A man who was lame from birth was being carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so that he could beg from those entering the temple. 3) When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money. 4) Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, “*Look at us.*” 5) So he turned to them, expecting to get something from them. 6) But Peter said, “*I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!*” 7) Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. 8) So he jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God. 9) All the people saw him walking and praising God, 10) and they recognized that he was the one who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him.

Acts 2:43) Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.

Acts 2:22) Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: “*This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know.*”

John 20:30) Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31) But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This section of the Acts narrative opens with a supernatural healing of a crippled man in the temple complex. The resulting response of the eyewitnesses – “*they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him.*” (3:10)

If we rewind backward, Acts 3 immediately follows the summary statement at the end of Acts 2. A screen shot of the first-century church captured a unified church experiencing the supernatural – “*everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.*” (43) The observing crowd on the outside of the church and the unified congregation on the inside of the

church were both “filled with awe” = *phobos*. Our English word *phobia* is a derivative of *phobos*. A phobia is a type of anxiety causing an individual to experience extreme, irrational fear. In Acts, however, a phobia is a reaction of reverent, rational fear. This *phobos* resulted in many signs and wonders being performed by the apostles.

Now, let’s rewind back to Peter’s Pentecost sermon: “*This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know.*” (2:22) And as we continue to rewind, we pause at John’s Gospel summary: “*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” (John 20:30-31)

This trail of similar Scripture forms an established pattern: In Acts, wonders and signs are connected together to define and describe miracles. Throughout Acts, the term “wonders” only occurs with “signs” as a testimony to the fact that these events and activities point beyond themselves to God’s power behind them, and thus lead to faith. A miracle (*dynameis* – we get our word “dynamic” from *dynameis*), is defined in theological term as an event or activity which demonstrates a supernatural act through which God arouses people’s awe.

**Miracles are supernatural – unexplainable by natural law, beyond normal to abnormal.** A supernatural church looks far beyond what can be planned, organized, or programmed. We are to be the people of God who live and walk by faith and not by sight, who function in the realm of “*Wow, look what God is doing!*” What should Supernatural Look Like? From this miracle event, two words define supernatural.

**1. Supernatural involves the Unexplainable = the extraordinary.** The Jewish historian Josephus identified two daily sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple, which had become prescribed times for prayer – nine in the morning and three in the afternoon. Peter and John approached one of the ten gates opening into the temple, the gate called “Beautiful”, probably so named because of the Corinthian bronze that encased the opening. Stationed at the gate propped a beggar, crippled from birth, pleading for money. The fact that the man was born lame made the healing miracle even more extraordinary. Typically, those entering the prayer meeting would toss a coin to the beggars seated at the entrance. But Peter and John stopped, looked straight at him, and Peter addressed him, “*I have no money, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up, stand up, and walk.*”

Miracles of healing occur throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts. This same John was eyewitness to at least three of Jesus' healing miracles, recording them in his Gospel – the healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum in John 4, the healing of the paralyzed man at the Bethesda pool in John 5, and the healing of the blind man near the Mount of Olives in John 9. In the Gospels, Jesus' healing miracles always validated Him as the Son of God. In Acts, the healing miracles were performed by the Apostles in Jesus' name, invoking His authority and power. **Healing miracles, as signs and wonders invoked in Jesus' name, verify the unexplainable and the extraordinary.**

Five times in the Old Testament, God is referred to as Jehovah Rapha – *the God who heals* (Jer 30:17; Jer 3:22; Isa 30:26; Isa 61:1; Psa 103:3). Jesus performed many kinds of miracles, but the most common and extraordinary involved healing sickness, disease, or disability. Since God is still Jehovah God who heals, and since Jesus is still the Great Physician, then miracles of healing still occur today. Sometimes healing occurs through medicines and treatments, sometimes through the skilled hands and brilliant minds of surgeons and specialists, sometimes through the prayers of the people of God, and sometimes through the experience of life after death. **Our God heals – the issue then becomes not whether He heals, but when He heals** (see John Bisagno, *The Secret of Positive Praying*, 86). God is still in the business of supernaturally healing the sick, diseased, and disabled. Supernatural involves the unexplainable.

**2. Supernatural involves the Undeniable = the evidence.** Luke described the miracle event this way: taking him by his right hand, Peter raised him up, and at once the crippled man's feet and ankles became strong. With extraordinary strength surging through his feet and ankles, he jumped up, took a step, then another, and Luke's eyewitness evidence is undeniable – the crippled beggar entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God. Day by day, this crippled Gentile sat outside the sanctuary, never invited into worship; but now, he entered the temple with them, a changed man. All who knew him as the crippled man who would sit and beg outside the gate, in their minds unfit and uninvited, now looked with awe as he entered the temple – a changed man. . The implication is that not only had he experienced physical healing, but he now enjoyed spiritual acceptance as well. For the first time in his life, he was deemed worthy to enter the house of worship – his physical healing transformed him into a man of faith. For the first time he could praise God in God's house – the place of praise. (Polhill, NAC, 128)

The observing crowd buzzed with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him – the undeniable evidence. Matthew confirmed in his Gospel narrative, Matthew 11:2 – Now when John (the Baptist) heard in prison what the Christ was

doing, he sent a message through his disciples and asked him, “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*” Listen to Jesus’ response: “*Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me.*” Undeniable evidence always looks beyond the miracle itself and focuses on the supernatural. God is not bound by the laws of nature because the laws of nature do not exist. **What we call the laws of nature in reality are the laws of God that nature must obey.** (Adrian Rogers, *Believe in Miracles, but Trust in Jesus*, 16) A pastor preached one Sunday about the miracle of the prophet Jonah being swallowed by a great fish. Later at home his son asked a straight-forward question, “*Daddy, do you really believe that a fish could swallow a man and keep the man alive inside for three days and three nights?*” The wise father answered, “*Son, if God could make a man out of absolutely nothing to begin with, and if God could create the first sea creatures from absolutely nothing, don’t you think He would have the power to make a fish that could swallow a man and keep him alive for three days and three nights if he wanted to?*” The little fellow responded, “*Well, if you’re going to bring God into it, that’s different!*” (Rogers, 16). Amen. Right on! We believe in miracles because we believe in God! With God, nothing is impossible. Here’s the deal – **It is impossible to believe in a sovereign God and not believe in miracles.** Supernatural involves undeniable evidence, because supernatural means “above natural.”

**Believe in miracles, but trust in God.** Go beyond the undeniable evidence of the miracle and trust in God – deposit your faith in Jesus – pay attention to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians find it hard to believe in miracles, but I’m not one of those. I believe in the supernatural because I’m a living testimony of the supernatural.

As a college senior, I was engaged to marry Vicki, with my future plans all set, and God had the audacity to interrupt my life and my plans. I wrestled with God, I pleaded with God, I argued with God for several months, but finally confessed to my finance that I believed God was calling me to a ministry vocation. We talked it out, prayed it through, and determined that God’s call and God’s will for us meant seminary instead of dental school.

But then came the moment that I dreaded – telling my parents of my change in life direction. I called them one evening and asked if I could drive over from my college dorm. When I began to share with them my decision, my mom began to cry – that was not unusual. But when my dad began to sob, that got my attention – I’d never witnessed my dad crying before. When I finished, and he composed himself, he said to me – “*We’ve been waiting for this day for 21 years.*” Now he

had my attention. I knew about his difficult childhood, his growing up without a father, his life before Christ and his life as a Christian, and in my mind, my father was the finest Christian man I'd ever known. My greatest fear in my 21 years of life was doing anything that would disappoint my father. That night, he informed me that I was a miracle child, that except for the supernatural intervention of God, my memory would be a small tombstone in a cemetery. He began to tell me about my mother's complications with her pregnancy, the premature contractions that rushed her to the hospital, sitting in the waiting room, alone, for what seemed like an eternity, and the doctor rushing toward him with a question: *"Francis, do you believe in prayer? Then you need to pray, because I've got to go back in there, and try to save either your wife or your unborn child, and I'm not sure if I can save either of them."* My father described sitting alone in the waiting room, praying for God's miraculous intervention, wondering if he would leave the hospital a widower and fatherless, until the doctor finally emerged and announced, *"You must believe in God and prayer, because I've just witnessed two miracles. We were able to save your wife after a near death experience, as well as your son. After great struggle and distress, I was able to "yank" your son out of the womb, but he was not breathing, so he was laid aside on another table as we worked frantically to save the life of your wife. As we attended to her, one of our nurses thought she noticed a slight movement in your son's lifeless body. We called for additional help, and they were able to revive and resuscitate your son, and both mother and son are alive!"* So I stand here before you today as a living testimony that supernatural matters, miracles happen, God is sovereign, and Jesus is Lord! Any questions?