

Sermon- The Push and Pull of the Apostle's Healing Ministry

Scripture: Acts 5: 12-16

Sunday, September 19, 2021

Returning to our journey through Acts, this weeks passage you may have noticed is not a narrative of dramatic events. This week's passage is instead a summary statement of the early church. We saw another summary statement previously at the end of chapter 4. That statement talked about how much unity there was in that church and also how much they shared their possessions to take care of each others needs.

In contrast, this summary statement focuses on the healing ministry of the early church. Just recently in Acts chapter 3 you will remember, we witnessed a dramatic healing story of the man who was born lame and begged in front of the temple gate called beautiful. In our passage today, we are told that there were many such stories. In in verse 15 and 16 it says, ***"As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. ¹⁶ Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil^[a] spirits, and they were all healed."***

We have to also remember that at this time in history people had no awareness of bacteria and viruses or anything smaller than could be seen by the naked eye. They did not know about DNA and genetics and had no medical understanding of inherited disorders. They did not know what the brain and neurons did so they did not know about medically what a mental or neurological illness was. You can add the heart, liver and lung and every other organ to that list. If you don't know what is wrong, you can't fix anything. In those days the capacity to fix things medically was very limited. So when people got sick with something mildly serious by today's standards like an infection, it was either a miracle or death or in many cases a disability for life. When it came to a

person's health, it may be hard for us to swallow as Americans, but the stakes were even higher for them than it is for us. But when the stakes are that high and a miracle happens, now you can imagine the wave of emotion and excitement it would send across the community.

But in those waves there is both a push and a pull and that is what we are going to examine today.

The first thing that happens when people hear about someone who can heal miraculously is that it generates a strong attraction or pull towards the healer. Everyone wants to rush in and take their loved ones to the healer that they are hearing about. We know that at this point, all the action was still in Jerusalem. So all the people from the surrounding villages were coming into Jerusalem to reach the Apostles and get the healing they needed. This was the pull that the healings generate. If in this church some miraculous healings took place, the same thing would happen, I assure you. Many people would rush into our doors even though we are in 21st century America with advanced hospitals all around. People still need this kind of healing in spite of all the medical advances we have made.

But just the physical healing was never the ultimate end goal of the Apostles ministry right? The end goal was always to introduce those who were healed to the ultimate healer, Jesus Christ. They were the first to declare that it was Jesus' power and name that was doing the healing.

As a result of this a number of people believed in Jesus. Verse 14 says this, ***“Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women”*** This is the good part. The part where you see the pull of the church as it witnessed powerfully to Jesus and grew rapidly as a result.

But there is another verse, verse 13 that gives us pause. It says, **“But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them”**. To see this verse in context let me quote the preceding verses as well. ***“The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹³ But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them”***.

At first glance this could be a bit confusing. It seems to be saying that the Apostles were doing a lot of healing at the Solomon’s Colonnade and everybody had very high regard for them. But also no one dared to join them. So who was it that did not want to join them? Was it the other believers? Was it people who wanted healing but were afraid to go near the apostles? Well, it is possible that there were both non believers and believers who were afraid of the Apostles. This is the push away from the church generated by the healing power on display. Let me explain.

Firstly, let’s look at the non-believers who were coming for healing. Many people we are told were bringing sick people to the Apostles but not necessarily to actually meet. They only wanted to come near the Apostles. In verse 15 it says, ***“sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by”*** This verse does remind us of an instance in Jesus’ life where the woman who had an issue of blood and did receive healing. But her initial aim was to receive anonymous healing by simply touching Jesus’ garment. In that story we know that it was not God’s will that she receive anonymous healing, because Jesus brought her to the attention of the entire crowd. Why? Because Jesus is never interested in healing people anonymously. After all his chief aim is to have a relationship with the people he is healing. You can look at the story of the 10 lepers or the story of the man born blinded but did not know Jesus. In all those stories we are told specifically of how

Jesus interacted with them after they received healing so that he could begin a relationship with them. The relationship is always Jesus' ultimate intent.

The problem though is having that Jesus relationship is usually not the intent of the one who is coming for healing. Their intent is simply to be healed and move on with their lives. That is why you see people bringing their sick relatives and friends all the way from the villages into Jerusalem to reach them to the apostles. But when they get there, they only want a piece of the shadow of the Apostles and not the apostles themselves. That is what they were doing when they were trying to have the sick simply touch the shadow of the Apostles. That way, they can get what they want and leave. This is the story or most of those who do not believe in Jesus.

But there is even more than that going my friends in verse 13 where it says "no one dared to join the apostles in Solomon's Colonnade". I believe there is the behavior of the believers that need to be examined as well. This is where the context of what just happened is so important. In the same chapter previously we just finished examining the story of Ananias and Sapphira. That was the story of believers who were projecting one thing on the outside and had something else going on, on the inside. We know that when Ananias and Sapphira came to the Apostle with this inside-outside mismatch, that mismatch was quickly exposed and they died from the shock from that exposure. Their death would have sent some serious ripples within the church world. I am not just speculating here, the text in verse 11 says so. It says "**great fear gripped everyone else who heard what happened**". Every now and then God manifests strong earthly consequences to disobeying Him. These consequences serve as a warning sign to everyone about not taking God as seriously as He deserves. It is very likely that with this lesson very fresh in everyone's mind, that even some of the believers wanted to keep a safe distance from the Apostles. It is even possible that these believers want to keep a safe distance even from God.

So what do we learn from this short but very powerful section of Acts? Well, if you are a believer, there is one take away and if you are not a believer in Jesus there is another take away.

Let me start with the believer's take away. If you are a believer and you are in that place where you are fearful that you do fall short of God's expectations and therefore think it is better or safer for you to keep your distance from God or even the spiritual leaders God has placed in your life, let me tell you that that is not the solution to your sin. In fact the very fact that you are aware of your spiritual short comings is a very good thing. We should be aware of our spiritual short comings. But once we are aware, the next step is to admit it to God and those closest to you. Because when we admit it, there is no contradiction between your inside and outside any more. When sins are confessed, they can be forgiven by the power of Christ's blood and great cleansing and right living comes out of it. That's the believer side of things.

Now if you are not a Christ follower yet, the take away from today's text is simple. If you need healing in your life, by all means come to Jesus. He is able to heal all your diseases and relationships. But remember for that healing to be complete, you need to get what Christ really wants from you, which is a relationship with Him. Because Christ knows that your physical healing is temporary but when you have a relationship with Him, it is eternal. So the bottom line is don't stay away, people, whether you are already a believer or not one yet. Draw near to Christ because he wants very badly to draw near to you and take you on a journey to discover eternal things. Let us pray.