Isaiah 35:1-10
3 Advent A Midweek + December 15, 2010
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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Messianic Miracles

The Word of the Lord from Isaiah 35:5-6: “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

I. On Miracles of Physical Healing

We heard this prophecy about the Messiah fulfilled in our Gospel lesson. John the Baptist sends His disciples to Jesus and says, "Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Jesus responds: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” In other words, Isaiah 35 said that the Messiah would make the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap and the mute sing. Jesus has been making the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap and the mute sing. Therefore, Jesus is the long-promised Messiah—not just because He performs miracles, but because He performs the miracles that the Old Testament said the Messiah would perform. In other words, Jesus fulfills the Word.

This is, first and foremost, the reason that Jesus performs these miracles in the Gospels, to demonstrate that He is, in fact, the promised Messiah. It is important to keep in mind because of a common objection of skeptics today: "If Jesus is truly risen and still powerful, then how come we don’t see a bunch of miracles happening today? How come there are still so many blind and deaf and mute and lame, even within the Christian Church? If Jesus really is a miracle-worker, how come He isn’t still working miracles today?"

This challenge isn’t helped by some church bodies and faith healers who teach that Christians should expect a steady stream of such wonders wherever the Holy Spirit is present. They would persuade you that you know you’ve found a truly Christian church when people enter on crutches and leave dancing a jig. If that is true, which we in no way grant, then little old Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is in the serious hurt. Our congregation isn’t exactly getting healthier as time goes on: are we doing something wrong? Are we missing the Holy Spirit?

Not at all. Remember that Jesus performed these miracles in order to prove He was the Messiah, in order to prove that He is the fulfillment of the Word of God. Now that He has done so, He’s established His credentials—He’s proven He’s the Christ. He doesn’t have to do that again. In fact, to demand of Jesus, "You must prove to me that You’re the Messiah by doing some big miracles in my life,” isn’t faith. It’s doubt. It’s saying, "The Scriptures aren’t enough for me. Your Word’s not good enough to give me faith. I’ll only believe if You do some special healing for me."

To put it more positively, you don’t need miracles to prove that Jesus is the Savior because you have something better. You have the Word of God. Furthermore, faith comes by means of the Word of God, not by miracles. It comes by hearing the Gospel, not by seeing wonders. No one gets to heaven by being healed of blindness in this life. Everyone who gets to heaven does so by having their sins forgiven.

So if someone says, "Why doesn’t Jesus do more miracles today?,” it’s not a question to leave us stumped or ashamed. We gladly say, "He certainly still can work miracles; and, in fact, He works far more
miracles than you and I will ever be aware of. But He doesn’t have to. He’s not a dog who does tricks at our bidding: He doesn’t have to work miracles on our command. He doesn’t have to prove Himself again. He already has in His Word, and His Word is good enough for us.”

Furthermore, there are greater miracles to speak of in Isaiah 35.

II. Greater Miracles

The miracles of Jesus are not just standalone wonders. They are inseparable from the Gospel, from His work as Messiah.

The wages of sin is death, and every last sickness and affliction and injury is a consequence of sin. This is a world in which everything falls apart, and that “everything” includes everybody, you and me. Even if we are born in good health, time and circumstance take their toll. Accidents and disease will hurt and maim. Age will wear down our senses. God gives life, and sin works to take it away. Eyes dim, hearing becomes hard, limbs are damaged or even lost. Where the Lord would have you see His blessings, sin works to take sight away. Where He would have you hear His Word, sin seeks to limit you to a silent world. Where the Lord would have you be with Him, sin seeks to keep you separated from God for eternity. Death hounds you every step of the way: as I’ve said before, you have to devote a lot of time each day to avoiding death as long as possible: it’s why you look both ways before you cross the street, why you watch what you eat, why you at least think about the importance of diet and exercise. But you can only avoid disease, injury and death for so long. Eventually, death wins.

Or, at least, it would—except that Christ has broken into this world and destroyed the power of sin and death. This is what He demonstrates by working these miracles in the Gospels. Where sin leads to the affliction of blindness, Jesus heals the blind. He often heals simply by speaking! He speaks His powerful Word, and sight is restored—blindness has no choice, but has to flee. He speaks, and the deaf hear His Word—and then hear everything else, too. He speaks His living Word, and the dead come back to life.

This is a far greater miracle: Jesus sends the wages of sin fleeing away simply by speaking His Word.

Thus Isaiah 35 declares, “Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’” In Christ, God comes with vengeance: not to condemn you, but to save you. Not vengeance against you, but against sin and death. By His death, Christ has destroyed the power of sin and death. By His Word, He sets you free from them.

I mentioned recently in a funeral sermon that, when it comes to sin and death, we’re like the little kid facing the bully on the playground; and even though he’s shaking in his boots, the little one says, “I’m no match for you—I know you can beat me. But you’re no match for my big brother!” Likewise, you might face sin and death with weak hands and feeble knees: but you say, “You’re too big for me to beat, but get a load of Christ! He’s come with a vengeance! He’s destroyed your power on the cross. He’s done that for me! You can slap me around a little, sin and death, but Christ is going to raise me from the dead.

Remember: Jesus sends the wages of sin fleeing away simply by speaking His Word. He speaks His Word to you. He says, “I baptize you,” and your old sinful flesh is drowned on the spot. He says, “I forgive you,” and you’re cleansed and sanctified as sin must flee. He says, “Take and eat, take and drink,” and He thus gives you His very body that has already defeated sin and death for the forgiveness of your sins.
Christ forgiving you is a greater miracle than Christ making the blind see or the deaf hear. Those who were thus healed would have to die again—that healing was for the body that would eventually cease to function. But by forgiveness, Christ tells you that He will use the enemy of death to deliver you to everlasting life.

But as we said before, Jesus’ miracles of healing in the Gospels are inseparable from the forgiveness He has given to you, so here is more good news for you, dear children of God: when Jesus performed those miracles, He was giving you a foretaste of the Last Day. He was demonstrating to you that He has the power to raise you up from the dead, perfect in body and soul, better than you have ever been. In the words of Revelation 21:4, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

This is not just pie-in-the-sky stuff, but the certain promise of your Savior. Let me share with you an example or two of what this means on a practical level. If you’ve ever met my father, you’ve probably noticed his left arm: only the thumb and elbow work. My father had polio as a young child, and it affected especially his left arm and his legs. Since the age of 5, he’s been unable to do things that most of us take for granted, like run, jump, catch with his left hand, etc. Polio is not just a disease: like all diseases, it’s a manifestation of sin. My dad is still on earth in relatively good health. He is baptized and trusts in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. For the sake of Jesus, he has the assurance that Jesus will raise him up to life on the Last Day. And when he is raised on the Last Day, he’s going to leap like a deer, for polio will be a former thing that has passed away. The same is true for my father-in-law, whose hearing was severely damaged at a place called Pork Chop Hill, and whose body has become a prison from the ravages of Parkinson’s Disease. This isn’t the end. The Last Day is coming—the Day of Resurrection: then will the ears of the deaf be unstopped and the wheelchair-bound leap for joy. It’s certain. God promises, and God always keeps His promises.

Forgiveness and healing of the body are both part of Christ’s victory over sin. The Lord can still work miracles of physical healing right now if He wishes, and He often does. But even if He does not grant you healing in this life, He gives you the assurance that He will perform that miracle when He raises you up on the Last Day. That miracle is sure, because He speaks this greater miracle to you even now: you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen