

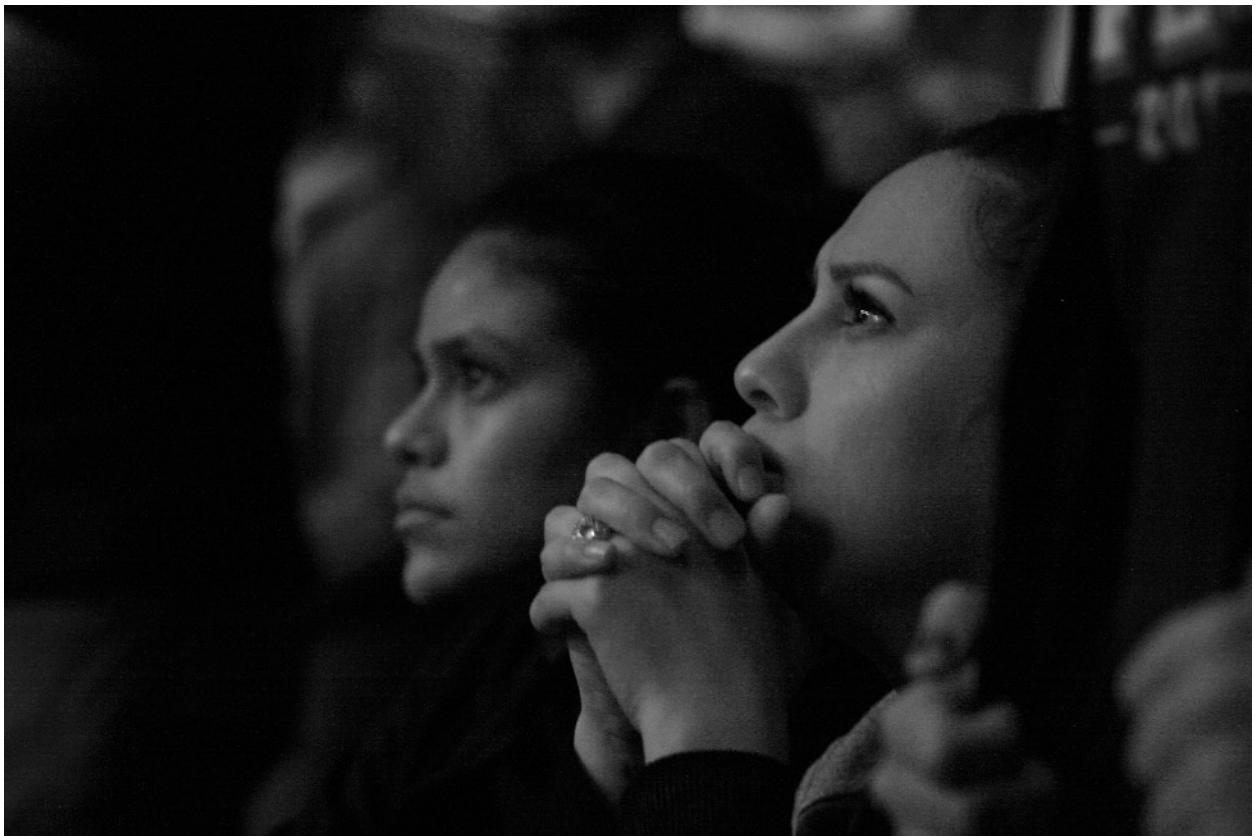


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How to Listen to a Sermon

Scripture: Acts 3:11 - 4:4 **Sermon Series:** *The Acts of Jesus Today*

Topic: Preaching, Gospel



Acts 3:11 - 4:4 (ESV)

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people:

“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and

you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²² Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

¹ And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Introduction

A miracle has just taken place. A man who had never before walked has just now stood for the first time in his life. This man was known to all the people. Everyone knew this man had been born lame. They had all seen him being carried by his family and friends and daily being laid by the gate into the temple so that he could receive alms from the entering worshippers.

But this day was different. Something amazing had happened. This man, who was more than forty years old, was now no longer at the gate, but rather was inside the temple courtyard. And he was not being carried. He was "walking, and leaping, and praising God." This truly was utterly astounding (v.11).

What exactly had happened? How was this man walking and leaping? Evidently God had something to do with it, for this man would not stop praising Him.

Peter and John were also there. Apparently they had something to do with it also, for this man was clinging to them. Naturally everyone rushed in close to better understand what was happening.

And when Peter saw it he addressed the people.... Acts 3:12 (ESV)

What a great time for sermon? A miracle has happened. A crowd has gathered. Peter saw an opportunity to explain what had happened and he would most certainly take it.

This is not Peter's first sermon. A very similar event happened on the day of Pentecost, not so long ago. On that day, there was a noise like a tornado, but there was no destruction from the wind. A crowd gathered in order to understand. Peter saw an opportunity to explain what had happened and he took it.

As we continue to make our way through the book of Acts, this is a pattern we will see. God will move, people will gather, and one of the apostles will take the opportunity to explain what God is doing. We call this *preaching*. The content of the preaching is called the sermon.

In Acts 3:12-26 we find the content of Peter's second sermon¹ in the book of Acts. Some might say that the New Testament church was birthed through a sermon. After Peter preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost about 3,000 people became believers in Jesus. Here, in Acts 3, on the occasion of Peter's second sermon, at least 2,000 more became believers.

In Acts 2:42 we are told that the early church "*devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching.*" Thus, the preaching of the sermon has been the indispensable² heart and center of the gathering of God's people in worship since the first century. It remains so to this very day. Therefore, it seems right that we consider and understand the contents of a biblical sermon.

As students of God's word we all need to know what makes a good sermon. I need to know it so that I preach rightly. You need to know it so that you listen rightly. You need to know how to listen when you hear any sermon. **How should you listen to a sermon?** For what should you be listening when you hear a sermon? What are the essential elements that comprise a biblical sermon? Furthermore, should you ever be offered the opportunity to give one, what should you say? We all need to be prepared for that time when someone asks for "the reason of the hope that is within you."³

Four Qualities of a Biblical Sermon

So what are the qualities of a biblical sermon? Using Peter's sermon as a model, I see four in this sermon (and you will find the same four qualities present in Peter's first sermon if you care to go and compare).

1. A biblical sermon clarifies the focus.

¹ Acts 2:14-41 contains the content of Peter's first sermon in Acts.

² John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 15.

³ 1 Peter 3:15.

2. A biblical sermon exposes sin.
3. A biblical sermon proclaims the gospel.
4. A biblical sermon calls for a response.

1. A Biblical Sermon Clarifies the Focus

The very first issue Peter addressed when he began to preach with the issue of misplaced focus. There was misunderstanding that need to be clarified.

Acts 3:12 (ESV) And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"

Peter was quick to confess that he and John were not the source of the power that made this man well. He admitted immediately that he and John had "no power or piety" to make this man walk. Peter and John were not miracle workers. They were not the ones who healed this man. The origin of this miracle was in no human. No man was the force behind this wonderful event. Peter was warning them that their focus was on the wrong place. "Don't look at us. We're not the ones who did this!"

The Misplaced Focus in the Preaching of Joel Osteen

Oh how this clarity of focus is desperately needed today. We live in a world that is hopelessly man-centered. We live in a world that tells us at every turn "You can do it, you deserve it, and it's all up to you." We hear it all the time, don't we. "You've got the power. Just look within yourself. You can be who you want to be, do what you want to do, be who you want to be, and don't let anyone tell you any different." It's a lie.

Last week, for the first time, I listened to a full so-call "sermon" by Joel Osteen. It wasn't a sermon. It was a self-help pep-talk that made me want to cry. The talk was entitled "The Power of I Am." This is the "sermon" that Oprah Winfrey Network reports "changed the way she sees her life."⁴ This "sermon" has 3.9 million views on YouTube.

I expected Osteen to speak about where the phrase "I Am" came from. He didn't. I expected him to explain that it was God's own explanation of the meaning of His personal name. He didn't. He never even hinted at this. I expected him to explain that Jesus took this phrase upon himself seven times in the Gospel of John in order to make clear that his own nature was intimately connected to God the Father. He didn't. He didn't even hint at this fact. He didn't related the phrase to God the Father or Jesus the Son even once. In fact, he didn't talk about Jesus at all.

⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjSK-PcU9o> accessed 21 November 2020.

What he did talk about was your power to create your own reality. He said,

“If you say ‘I am ugly,’ then ugly comes looking for you. If you say ‘I am fat,’ then calories come looking for you. But if you say ‘I am young,’ then youth comes looking for you. If you say, ‘I am rich’ then opportunity comes looking for you.”

The “power of I am” had nothing to do with the power of God and everything to do with the so-called power of the individual to create whatever we want. This was the worst so-called “sermon” I’ve ever heard in my life. Don’t listen to Joel Osteen. Don’t listen to him unless you want to be deceived. Don’t listen to him unless you want to hear the truth that brings life twisted into a lie that brings death. The focus of Osteen’s talk was misplaced. His focus was solely on man, rather than on God.

In Acts 3:12, Peter stood up and said, “Take your eyes off of us and focus them on Jesus!” This is a message this world needs to hear today. “Take your eyes off of yourself and off of any other human being and turn your eyes upon Jesus. Your salvation is not within you. It is outside you.” Listen to the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah.

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:22 (ESV)

All truly biblical preaching will help a blind humanity shift its focus away from the creature and onto the Creator. **Biblical preaching clarifies the focus;** away from self and onto Christ.

2. A Biblical Sermon Exposes Sin

Second, a biblical sermon exposes sin. Peter made it abundantly clear that sin was primary problem. Humanity’s greatest problem is sin. Sin is what separates us from God⁵ and if we are to be brought into friendship with God, then sin must be removed. Notice how directly Peter speaks.

...Jesus, whom **you** delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But **you** denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and **you** killed the Author of life, (Acts 3:13-15 ESV)

Repent therefore, and turn back, that **your** sins may be blotted out, (Acts 3:19 ESV)

There’s no doubt about where the people had gone wrong. They had sinned against the “Holy and Righteous One.” They had denied an innocent man and chosen instead a guilty man. They killed the “Author of life,” while making the suicidal preference for a convicted murderer.

⁵ Isaiah 59:2.

These heinous sins need to be blotted out. Biblical preaching makes plain where the problem lies.

Sin was the problem in the first century and it remains the primary problem of humanity in the twenty-first century. Sin was not merely a first-century problem or only a problem for those living in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. Sin is everyone's problem. It was Adam & Eve's problem. It's your and my problem. The apostle Paul is clear,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

You'll notice that Paul used both past and present tense to refer to our sin. We both "*have sinned*" in the past, and "*fall short*" in the present. We both *have sinned* in the past and *do sin* in the present. Sin is an everyday problem for every person on the planet.

Jesus, when asked by the disciples for instruction on how to pray responded by saying, "...*give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us...*"⁶ Just as we are to pray daily for bread, so we are to pray daily for the forgiveness of our sins (and the ability to forgive those who sin against us). Sin is an everyday, every-person problem.

All truly biblical preaching will be honest about the greatest problem of humanity. A biblical sermon will never fail to expose the problem of sin. There is a solution to this problem. That solution is revealed in the gospel, which is the third component of a biblical sermon.

3. A Biblical Sermon Proclaims the Gospel

Third, a biblical sermon will proclaim the gospel. The gospel, as I'm sure you know, simply means "the good news."

There are two aspects of the Gospel worthy of noting, namely its beginning and its end. The Gospel begins in God and is fulfilled in Jesus.

1. **The Gospel Begins in God and His word.** If there was no God, then there would be no Gospel. From the very beginning of his sermon, Peter made it perfectly clear that everything that was unfolding before them was happening because of God. The second sentence of his sermon took them back to the beginning of God's choice to start his redemptive work with Abraham by giving him a promise to bless him and then He continues His redemptive work through the descendants of Abraham.

⁶ Matthew 6:11-12.

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers...
Acts 3:13 (ESV)

God is the beginning of all things. He is the Creator and source of all things. *"From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen"* (Romans 11:36). Furthermore, the Gospel is only "good news" because God keeps his promises. The Gospel begins with God because it is *rooted in and revealed through God's word*. A biblical sermon will be firmly fixed in the word of God. A biblical sermon does not flow from someone's wishful thinking, it flows from the a clear connection to and fulfillment of God's word.

2. The Gospel is Fulfilled in Jesus. The gospel is good news because Jesus fulfilled all of the promises of God. Jesus fulfilled all of God's word and will.

Acts 3:18 (ESV) But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.

Peter roots this fulfillment in two Old Testament (OT) passages. First, he explains that Jesus is the prophet about whom Moses spoke. In vs. 22-23, Peter quotes from **Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19**.

Acts 3:22-23 (ESV) ²² Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'

Peter understands Jesus to be the fulfillment of this prophecy. He says so in v.26. "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you..." God long ago promised to raise up a prophet "in whose mouth God would put His words"⁷ and who would "speak all that I command him."⁸ Recall what Jesus said at the beginning of his ministry, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I my preach there also, for this is why I came out" (Mark 1:38). Jesus came to do His Father's will by speaking and preaching everything God commanded him to.⁹

The second OT passage Peter quotes from is **Genesis 12:3**. This is the passage where God first made his covenantal promise to Abraham.

Acts 3:25 (ESV) "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"

⁷ Deuteronomy 18:18.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See John 7:16; 8:26, 28, 38; 14:24.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise that God made to Abraham so long ago. Through Jesus—the offspring of Abraham—all the families of the earth will be blessed. God’s long promised blessings, which He had in mind when made his covenant with Abraham, are now delivered through Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise written down in Genesis 12:3.

True biblical sermons, will proclaim the Gospel, which begins with God, is grounded in God’s word, and finds fulfillment in Jesus.

Six Elements of the Fulfillment of the Gospel

What are the specific elements of fulfillment of Gospel?

1. **God glorified Jesus as Christ (v.13).** Peter explains, “...*the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus...*” (v.13). You’ll recall how Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees, came to Jesus by night and said, “We know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”¹⁰ God glorified Jesus by anointing him to do what no one before or after him has ever done.¹¹ This is what ‘Christ’ means. Peter uses this term in relation to Jesus twice (3:18, 20). ‘Christ’ is a title and means the “one who has been anointed,”¹² which is the term that applies to messiah. Jesus is God’s messiah, the one whom He glorified by anointing Him to carry out all of His will.
2. **Jesus was sinless (v.14).** The consistent testimony of the apostles is that Jesus never sinned. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He never sinned.¹³ Peter refers to this fact in v.14. Peter refers to Jesus as “*the Holy and Righteous One.*” Jesus was completely sinless. This fact is massively important, because if he did sin, then his death only atones for his own sin and not anyone else’s. However, if he did not sin, then his death can atone for the sins of anyone who will place their faith, hope, and trust in him. Thus, Paul writes

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

¹⁰ John 3:2.

¹¹ See John 9 where Jesus healed a man born blind and hear him testify, “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind” (9:32). See also Luke 7:22 where Jesus himself explains that through Him, “...the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

¹² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 542.

¹³ Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; John 6:69; 8:46; 14:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; cf. Isaiah 53:9.

If Jesus was a sinner, then he had no righteousness to give away. But if he “knew no sin,” then he was righteous and thus he died on our behalf, atoned for our sin and not his own, thus he has the ability to cause us to “become the righteousness of God.”

3. **Jesus died (v.15).** Peter states, “*You killed the Author of life...*” The witness of the apostles is that Jesus actually and physically died. He did not pass out or swoon. He was crucified by the Romans who knew quite well how to tortuously kill a man and never failed to accomplish their goal. Jesus died.

His death did not depend ultimately upon human agents anyway. He chose to die.¹⁴ He willingly yielded his life. After saying, “... ‘It is finished,’ he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”¹⁵ After dying, to make sure he was dead, a Roman guard thrust a sword into his side, most likely puncturing his lung and heart.¹⁶

Jesus’ body was then taken down limp from the cross, wrapped in linen, and sealed into a stone tomb. Jesus was dead and buried.

4. **Jesus was resurrected (v.15).** “...*whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.*” Jesus did not stay dead. Jesus was resurrected on the third day. Since he never sinned it was impossible for death to keep him dead.¹⁷ Besides, the resurrection was part of the plan all along.¹⁸ God had announced beforehand that he would raise the messiah from the dead. He did this through David in Psalm 16:8-11.
5. **Jesus ascended into heaven (v.21).** Peter also explains that Jesus ascended into heaven, where he will remain until the time when God’s plan is completed.

... Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Acts 3:21)

Jesus is now seated with the Father on His throne. He remains there for the time being.

6. **Jesus will return (v.21).** Jesus is now in heaven, however, when the time is right, and the time arrives “to restore all things,” then Jesus will get up off his throne and return to this earth. He come and restore all things. He will put right all that is wrong and he will at that time establish everlasting justice.

So, a biblical sermon will proclaim the gospel. A gospel that begins in God the Father and is fulfilled in Jesus, who is God the Son. The gospel is good news because it is grounded in

¹⁴ John 10:17-18.

¹⁵ John 19:30.

¹⁶ John 19:34.

¹⁷ Acts 2:24.

¹⁸ Acts 2:23.

God's word, which He spoke long ago through His prophets and has now fulfilled in Jesus. A biblical sermon will be based upon Scripture and nothing else. The goodness of the gospel of Jesus is that we can be certain that God keeps his promises and through Jesus, every single promises is fulfilled.¹⁹

4. A Biblical Sermon Calls for a Response

Finally, the last element we see in Peter's sermon is the call for a response. A biblical sermon will call for a response. If there is no call for a response, then it's just a lecture and not a sermon.

Where the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed, a call for a response, will be clearly given. There are only two responses; reception or rejection.

1. **Reception:** marked by *repentance*, which leads to forgiveness, life, blessing, and refreshment.

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..." Acts 3:19-20 (ESV)

"God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness." Acts 3:26 (ESV)

The essential meaning of the word repentance means to turn around and change direction. The Greek word, *metanoēō*, means "to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness."²⁰

To repent of your sins means you change your mind about your sin by being to hate it rather than love it and so you change the direction of your life by moving away from patterns of sin and move into patterns of obedience and righteousness. Repentance is not merely offering an occasional apology for continuing in a path that you know to be wrong. Repentance is getting off the path heading away from God and into a path of drawing nearer to Him. Receiving the Gospel results in a life and obedience, blessing and refreshment. Rejecting it means the opposite.

2. **Rejection:** leads to condemnation, death, and destruction.

"And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." Acts 3:23 (ESV)

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 1:20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

²⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 509.

To reject the Gospel of Jesus will result in certain destruction. Refusing to accept God's provision for salvation will justly result in condemnation. Disobeying the Gospel of Jesus means that one is choosing to be cut off from the blessings and refreshment of heaven and be condemned to the eternal destruction of hell. Just as heaven is a real place, so is hell. True biblical preaching will warn the listeners of the reality of hell and hold out before them the sweet refreshment and joyful blessings of heaven. Notice Peter's final sentence, v.26

"God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness" (Acts 3:26 ESV).

God sent Jesus to **ble**ss you. God sent Jesus "to turn you from your wickedness." God sent Jesus "to turn you back from your sins so that that could be blotted out, so that times of **refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord" (3:19-20). God's aim is to bless and refresh. But this only comes experiential reality when you "turn away from your sins." You cannot continue in sin and still experience the blessing and refreshment of God the Father. But this is why Jesus came. He came to remove from you all the keeps you from God. *Jesus died to blot out your sins, and give you blessing and refreshment.*

Won't you receive it? Won't you receive his bless and embrace His refreshment? If so, then let go of and turn away from your sin.

3. How does one receive the gospel. The Gospel is to be **received by faith (v.16, 4:4).**

And his name—*by faith in his name*—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. **Acts 3:16 (ESV)**

But many of those who had heard the word *believed*, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. Acts 4:4 (ESV)

This man was healed before he even knew what hit him. He was made well before he did a single thing. This is a picture of salvation. God comes to us in our crippled condition of enslavement to sin and He gives us life. He heals us so that we can walk and leap and praise His name. Just believe it. Just receive by faith his Holy Spirit and be filled with blessing and refreshment.

Conclusion

What is a biblical sermon? How should you listen to a sermon?

1. **Listen for the focus of the sermon.** Upon whom is the speaker directing your attention, to man or to God? Are you being invited to look for salvation within yourself or outside yourself. Are you being told to look to God and be saved or look to man to save ourselves. The truth is we cannot save ourselves. Salvation is found only in Christ Jesus.
2. **Listen for the exposing of sin.** Does the preacher mention sin? Is sin the problem or is it not? Is sin what keeps us from God or is sin simply a word we can no longer use? The truth is sin is what keeps us from God and Jesus is the only one who died so that our sins could be blotted out.
3. **Listen for the proclamation of the Gospel.** The Gospel begins with God and His word and it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus alone fulfilled all of God's promises. Jesus alone is God's only chosen messiah and Christ. Jesus alone is sinless. Jesus alone died for the sins of others and not for his own sins. Jesus alone was resurrected on the third day. Jesus alone ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. And Jesus alone will one return as the just Judge of the universe and do away with all sin and establish righteousness forever.
4. **Listen for a call to respond.** Listen for a call to repentance. Listen for a plea from the preacher saying, "Turn away from your sins so that times of refreshing and blessing may come." Listen for the voice of God saying, "Won't you stop seeking sin that never satisfies your soul and won't you start seeking Me, who stands before you offering rest for your soul?" Which will you choose, blessing and refreshment or cursing and destruction?

God raised up His servant, Jesus, and sent him to bless you, but that blessing will only come if you turn from your wickedness. God sent Jesus to give you his Holy Spirit so that times of refreshing may come. And this blessing and refreshment may be yours through faith in the name of Jesus. It is only through faith in the name of Jesus that your soul can be made well.