

## Study 3

# God's Power at Work



Raphael, *The Healing of the Lame Man*, 1515

### Key verse:

<sup>43</sup> *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.*

Whilst thinking particularly about the fellowship of the early believers in Jerusalem, this verse opens the field of view a little to say that following Peter's Pentecost speech, resulting in around 3000 people being added to the smaller group of believers already in the city, the whole population were now aware of what was happening, even if from the side-lines. They heard or watched what was going on around them and were amazed at the 'wonders and signs' happening in the presence of the apostles.

Luke possibly wants to remind his readers that wherever Jesus went, there were also miracles displaying God's power. Peter had

earlier put it this way, 'Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.' (Acts 2:22)

These signs were now continuing through the apostles, echoing Joel's prophesy of the Spirit being poured out, 'Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and the earth...' (Joel 2:29-30a)

### Group discussion:

Q) Were 'signs and wonders' unique to the early church, or something that we should have the faith to expect now?

# Spiritual gifts

Read Luke 9:1-6, Hebrews 2:1-4

The apostles were not only fully aware of God's power revealed through Jesus's actions and words, but would no doubt remember being sent out themselves, essentially as trainees, to not only proclaim the good news about Jesus but to offer healing to those who were ill. They were to take nothing with them, trusting God to supply their needs through the people in the towns they stayed within, and received from Jesus both the power and authority to do these things.

This was an important part of Luke's message when he came to write about the early church in Acts, offering validation of the apostles' miraculous power.

The disciples returned to Jesus excited at all they had seen, and this experience of both the provision and power of God's Spirit would form a part of their teaching to the churches they would help form and lead.

In Hebrews, the writer is in the middle of arguing the importance of Jesus and the salvation which he brought and taught about, confirmed by the testimony of those who were there. Therefore, you can believe this message with confidence, he argues. Not only that, he adds, but God himself has also testified to it, through empowerment of his apostles and others, and signs, wonders and miracles.

## Group discussion:

Q) Is training just for the church leader, or would it also help empower others in the fellowship to play a greater part? If so, what kind of training would you like to see offered?

Q) Spiritual gifts seem to have more of an emphasis in some denominations' teaching than others. Why should that be an issue, do you think?

Q) How important are the spiritual and faith experiences of others in your fellowship to the development of your own faith, and in what ways?

# Putting into practice

Read John 14:12-14, Acts 20:7-12

Jesus told his disciples that the time would come when they would be his representatives in the world when he was no longer with them and be able to do even more in his name. They had to realise that Jesus's death would not mean the disbanding of the group, but the expansion of the work, through the power of Spirit.

The proof of this was seen after Peter's sermon at Pentecost, when we hear of more converts than the total recorded during Jesus's active ministry, as the fledgling church expanded throughout the Roman world.



Paul raising Eutychus to life anon, 1728

Acts 20 gives us a glimpse inside the early church in the ancient Greek city of Troas. Luke describes the believers gathering one evening in an upstairs room to break bread and allow an opportunity for Paul to deliver what appears to have been a very long session of teaching. For whatever reason, a young man called Eutychus nods off to sleep and falls out of a window. By the time the others rush outside to his aid, he is dead.

Paul lays not only his hands but his whole body on the young man, who miraculously is brought back to life. Remarkably, they all return upstairs, have a midnight snack, and continue listening to Paul until dawn, whereupon they escort the young man home!

### Group discussion:

Q) It was the disciples who carried Jesus's story and message beyond the Cross. So, who has that responsibility now, ordained ministers or all who think of themselves as followers, disciples, of Jesus?

Q) Does your church have house or cell groups meeting in people's homes, and if so, what do you get from those often-smaller fellowship groups?

Q) How do you view the reported miraculous healing which Luke, traditionally believed to be a physician, writes so vividly about in Acts?

## Recognising our gifts

*Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Ephesians 4:4-7,11-13*

When Paul talks to the Corinthian church of 'the body of Christ', he is not referring to the church in one place, but has the whole Christian church in mind, as he talks of apostles and prophets in the plural. Paul is quite clear that it is God who equips and empowers his church, whether it is in leadership or in a more supportive role.

Whilst the leadership roles of apostles, prophets and teachers are important, and certainly higher profile than some gifts listed, the fact is that all gifts (including many not mentioned here) are critical within the body of the church. There is no ranking to be seen, no one has all the gifts, and what the church needs is a balanced mix of gifts and ministries for it to function and thrive.

We can misunderstand the last verse, about eagerly desiring the 'greater gifts', as Paul

had been addressing the way believers were using, and misusing, the gift of tongues. Far better might be to think of 'greater' or 'best' to be that gift that is most applicable to the situation at hand.

Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul emphasises the closeness between God (Father, Son and Spirit) and the church, where both Jewish and Gentile believers were part of the same body, with their differences reconciled in Christ, who has enabled apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And this is to equip or prepare all God's people for service, which is what unites all members of the body of Christ.

### Group discussion:

Q) How do you see God's gifts displayed within the church, both locally and perhaps more globally?

Q) Read Ephesians 4:7 again. How does it speak to you about the church fellowship?

Q) Should we be more 'eagerly desiring' God's spiritual gifts, as Paul encourages the fellowship in Corinth to do?

## Pause for thought

Take a few minutes through the week to think about the blessing you have found within your own fellowship, and whether God is calling you to become, with help, more involved.

## Prayer

We light a candle,  
and enjoy the flickering light,  
the fragrance  
and warmth it creates.  
But without the spark that ignites,  
there will be no flame.  
Without the wax,  
the source of power,  
the wick will not burn.  
Without the flame,  
there will be no fragrance,  
no warmth, no light.  
And so with us, Lord.  
You are the catalyst that ignites us,  
and the fuel that sustains us.  
You fill us with your fragrance  
as you enter our lives.  
You empower us  
to carry your flame in our hearts,  
to be the fragrance, warmth,  
and light of your love,  
in this dark world.

For the Spirit of Peace  
that calms our mind  
and stills our life,  
we give you thanks.

For the Spirit of Love  
that touches hearts  
and reaches out,  
we give you thanks.

For the Spirit of Joy  
that lifts our soul  
and gives us faith  
we give you thanks.

For the Spirit of Power,  
that gift of grace  
for this your church,  
we give you thanks.