

Text: Acts 3:11-26

Title: “The Unstoppable Purposes of God”

Open your Bibles to Acts 3:11. As you’re turning I want to remind you that next Sunday evening will be the first of our Evenings of Prayer and Praise. I’m preaching this series from Acts entitled “Unstoppable ... Living in the Irrepressible Power of the Holy Spirit.” The powerful things done by the Holy Spirit here in Acts, with thousands being saved and a loving fellowship being formed, happened because they devoted themselves to prayer. So we want to follow that same pattern.

Now, last week we saw a miracle performed by Peter and John when a crippled man was given power to walk through the name of Jesus. So there was the *miracle* and today we will see the *message* that followed the miracle. God sets off an explosion to attract attention to the message he wanted to deliver through Peter. **To get started today, let’s read Acts 3:11-16.**

Remember that about one-fourth of the book of Acts is taken up by preaching such as this. And there are many remarkable things about this sermon, but I want you to notice how the purposes of God in redeeming a lost human race through His Son Jesus could not be stopped. In fact, all of the purposes of God are unstoppable ... and what an encouragement that is to us.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

So we may ask: Is there any purpose to the mess I’m going through ... to the cancer that I’m battling ... to the terrible situation at my work ... to the car wreck that was my fault that I don’t know how I’m going to pay for it ... to that weak moment when I gave in to temptation and hurt the people who love me?

Listen, we serve a great, awesome, powerful God. He is Almighty God, and His good and glorious purposes for us will be fulfilled. You may be going through something today that has caused you to doubt that. But behind it all and through it all, God is working.

Now, to Peter’s message. This miracle draws a large audience ready to hear what Peter has to say.

Acts 3:12 - When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

This is God’s doing, not man’s. In fact, this is just Jesus’ ministry continued. Later in v.16 Peter will say...

Acts 3:16 - By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

Notice that the miracle that was performed was a miracle that helped someone with a real need. They didn’t make a building disappear or create a spectacle in the sky. They healed someone; they helped someone. Why? Because that was the way Jesus demonstrated that God’s Kingdom had come. And

that's the reason we do ministries like we did yesterday with the Mercy Clinic Health Check and the Thanksgiving Celebration tomorrow and the Christmas Store the next week. These acts of love and meeting needs open the door for the Gospel. And that's what happens here.

So this is what God is up to:

Acts 3:13a - The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.

Here's the first thing I want you to see about the unstoppable purposes of God.

1. THE PURPOSES OF GOD CAN'T BE STOPPED BY TIME.

ILLUSTRATION – I have a little home improvement project that I started a couple of years ago. At the time I was really motivated to get it done. But some other pressing needs came up and I set it aside and haven't done anything else to it. And as the months (and now years) go by I find it harder and harder to get motivated to finish the job.

Do you have something like that in your life? Well God doesn't. His purposes are eternal. They don't run out of steam over the years. God has had one overarching purpose in history ... to redeem a spiritually lost and dead human race. It began the day our ancestors Adam and Eve first sinned. Later God formed a nation starting from Abraham from whom would come the One, the Messiah, who would bring redemption. The God who revealed Himself to and through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in OT times is the God who has glorified Christ in NT times and healed this man. God's purposes march on generation after generation, age after age. They never stall out.

Maybe you've been struggling with something for so long and you wonder if God has forgotten you and, while His purposes have worked for others, you wonder if they just might not work out for you ... it's been so long. Friend, God's purposes can't be stopped by time. He is working everything together for a good purpose in your life. Don't grow weary when it doesn't happen as quickly as you like. The purposes of God can't be stopped by time and...

2. THE PURPOSES OF GOD CAN'T BE STOPPED BY OPPOSITION.

Just look at the opposition the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities threw at Jesus. Peter said...

Acts 3:13b - You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

Acts 3:14 - You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

Interesting! Twice now Peter has said that they "disowned" or "denied" Jesus. Peter uses the same word that was used of himself when he denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion. But Jesus overcame that terrible failure in Peter's life.

Acts 3:15 - You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

In an ironic and corrupt twist of circumstances, the Jews disowned their own Messiah before a pagan governor. Pilate wanted to let Him go, but no, the Jews wanted to release a murderer (Barabbas) instead. So they released a murderer, and murdered the “author of life.”

“Author of life” is the same name given by the writer of Hebrews, which many of you have been studying in your SBS classes. Jesus is the pioneer, the trailblazer, of eternal life.

The power and the purposes of God cannot be stopped by man’s opposition. Jesus, who was once rejected, is now the resurrected and glorified Christ. Their guilt was enormous, but it didn’t stop God’s purposes from being fulfilled in Jesus. Peter said, “You did this to Jesus, but God’s unstoppable purpose cannot be thwarted. God raised Jesus from the dead.”

You may look at your life and think about something you have done that was in rebellion to God. You may wonder if God could ever use you or that you could ever be part of His purposes. The purposes of God can’t be stop by our opposition or sin. His grace is greater. But there’s more.

3. THE PURPOSES OF GOD CAN’T BE STOPPED BY IGNORANCE.

Peter continues...

Acts 3:17 - “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.

The Jews acted in ignorance. They didn’t realize Jesus was who He said He was, in spite of all the evidence that was presented to them. Jesus, when He was crucified, prayed, “Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.”

Their ignorance was inexcusable because God had clearly demonstrated through the life of Christ that He was the Messiah. They were just too hardened in their hearts to see it. But they were not beyond the reach of God’s love and grace. The death that they caused was turned around and used by God to redeem them. Look at v.18.

Acts 3:18 - But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

They didn’t know what they were doing, but God knew exactly what He was doing. You see, God called His shot on this. God had already announced through the prophets hundreds of years before that the Messiah would suffer in this way. In fact, it was by the suffering that they inflicted upon Jesus that their sins would be atoned for ... amazing!

Through all the sufferings that Jesus endured, the purposes of God could not be stopped in His life. Suffering doesn’t stop God’s purposes in your life either. Listen, God is so powerful in achieving His purposes that He used the opposition of their ignorance to bring about the suffering that would result in their redemption. You see, when God determines to

fulfill some good purpose for us, no time, no opposition, no ignorance can stop him. He simply makes all the opposition and all ignorance serve his purpose.

Isaiah 46:9 - Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

Isaiah 46:10 - I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

God does not just *know* history in advance, he *makes* history. Our God is a history-making God. What God *foretold* God *fulfilled*. God *perceives* the future because he *plans* the future. Centuries before it happened God informed His spokesmen, the prophets, of what He intended to do. He did this so that when it actually occurred we would know that it was not an accident, but that God had purposed it and that we might give Him glory.

Now Peter is speaking to some people who have been on the wrong side of the purposes of God. So what do they do?

Acts 3:19 - Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Acts 3:20 - and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

The purposes of God are realized in our lives when we repent and turn to God. Now here's that word "repent" again. It's been a consistent part of the church's witness so far in Acts. People need to repent because they've been going the wrong way. Turn to God through Jesus Christ. And when we do, there are three blessings that come from God's activity...

- Our sins are wiped away. This is the same word used to describe how in heaven God wipes away our tears ... like wiping the marker board clean.
- Times of refreshing from the presence of God. This is the new life that is available through Jesus. Is that what you need?
- One day you'll see Christ in person. The One whom God appointed to die for you and rise again will come again and we'll be with Him forever. When you trusted Jesus He wiped away every sin. One day He will wipe away every tear.

Acts 3:21 - He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

This is the unstoppable purpose of God. It was the perfect plan of God to send His Son the first time. This is called the Advent, and starting next week we'll spend a month celebrating Christ's first coming. But God has already called His shot. Christ is coming again. And between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ is the time where we live. Within this window of time God is working out His purposes in the lives of His people. He is preparing for heaven.

I started out by reminding you of the wonderful truth of Romans 8:28 that God is able to make all things work together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His

purpose. And that purpose is to shape us into the beautiful likeness of Jesus. That means that all of the trouble and pain and heartache and failures and the bad things that others do to us God is using for that purpose, just like He did in the life of His Son.

ILLUSTRATION – You probably have a woven rug like this around your house. Our lives as believers are like this. On one side we don't see much of a pattern. There are frayed edges and loose strings and muted colors ... not very appealing. And that's the way life can seem for us, even when we are trying to follow Christ. But one day you'll see the other side of the rug (the tapestry). You will see that all the frayed edges and things that don't seem to fit together have been beautifully woven together in the unstoppable purposes of God.

Maybe you've been on the wrong side of the purposes of God. If so, repent and turn to God. And if you've tried to live on the right side of the purposes of God, but you find yourself failing every day. Just repent and turn to God ... and see His good and glorious purposes worked out in your life.