

Coming Soon...

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[0 : 0 0] All right, for those of you who are interested in movies, you've probably heard of Star Wars, right? Star Wars? Even if you're not interested in movies at all, you've probably heard of the Star Wars movies, right?

I'm sure you have. It's a series of six movies that started back in the 1970s, and soon these movies became cult classics with millions of fans in almost every country around the world.

And it's this year, 2015, where those fans are getting excited all over again because of the upcoming release of the seventh Star Wars movie in the franchise this December.

The producers of this new movie recently released a teaser trailer, which you can watch on YouTube if you want to. But a teaser trailer, as you know, is just like an early trailer, months and months before the movie, with just a few minutes of footage to whet people's appetite.

For the upcoming movie. And within days of the release of this little trailer, it became one of the most watched movie trailers of all time. It was released a couple of months ago.

[1 : 1 0] And in fact, people in the USA, where it was first shown, bought theater tickets to movies they didn't even want to see, just so that they could see the 90-second trailer before the movie they paid for.

And when it was released on the internet, it got over 40 million views in the first three days alone. And it got, of course, the internet abuzz with talk about the upcoming film.

Now, whatever you may think of Star Wars, there's no denying the ability of a good movie trailer, isn't there? To get people excited about something to come.

To hype people up. To get people talking. Well, I've entitled this sermon, Coming Soon. Because when we turn to Acts chapter 3, and we read about the healing, the restoration of this lame man who was lame from birth, what we're seeing is a teaser trailer of sorts.

We're seeing a sneak preview of something to come, and something much greater than some movie. We're seeing, as Peter goes on to explain, we're seeing a preview of a new world.

[2 : 1 4] A world where sickness and death have no place, and where everything is restored to how it should be. And this miracle is recorded here to get people excited about that.

To get people talking about this world to come. Which is exactly what happened on that day. And so, as we look at this miracle this morning, I hope that it gets you excited about what God has coming soon for this world.

So that you will talk about it with your friends and your family as well. And so, let's pick it up from verse 1 of Acts chapter 3. One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at 3 in the afternoon.

Now, a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put to beg every day from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Okay, let's just pause there. I want you to picture the scene for a second. It's not difficult. As a South African, we come across similar situations every day. Here's a beggar. And he's carried to the same busy spot by his friends every day to beg.

[3 : 3 1] It's equivalent, really. He's outside the temple. It's the highest area of foot traffic. It's really equivalent to a beggar begging at traffic lights today. In fact, speaking about that, I saw a video not long ago.

It was taken on someone's phone camera of a beggar in Joburg who had no legs. And he was sitting at the traffic lights begging with a hat.

He had no legs. But then at the end of the day, once the hustle and bustle had gone after rush hour, this beggar, someone who was recording him from across the road, he gathered up all his things.

And out of his T-shirt popped his legs, which apparently he never had. He had sat all day with his legs tucked in his T-shirt to make it look like he had no legs. And I admire, actually, him for the discomfort he went through every day to pretend to have no legs.

And I'm afraid you'll get lots of people who sort of try to make us feel sorry for them when actually they're faking it. But this man in Jerusalem was no fake.

[4 : 38] He wasn't faking it at all. Luke, who writes this, he was a medical doctor, in fact. And he tells us that this man was genuine. He was lame from birth.

Okay, imagine it. He had never been able to use his legs from birth his entire life. He was a genuinely broken man. But we're also told that the place that he begged, and this is interesting, was a gate called Beautiful.

It was probably the famous gate that was made out of Corinthian brass. It was a very impressive sight, and people would come from all over to have a look at it.

But it's ironic. I mean, I think Luke mentions it for a reason. It's ironic that this broken man is sitting at this beautiful gate. A great example of human artistry and beauty, and yet next to it is the example of human brokenness, together, side by side.

And that's the world we live in, isn't it? It's beauty alongside brokenness every day. You drive from the airport to town, and what are the two things that you can't help but notice?

[5 : 50] Well, the first is Table Mountain, isn't it? Majestic, beautiful, one of the natural wonders of the world. And yet, at the same time, you see the shacks at the side of the road.

Thousands of families struggling every day just to put food on the table. Beauty and brokenness coexisting in our world, isn't it? We see it every day.

But there's a problem with that. The problem, especially for us as South Africans, is that because we see it every day, we kind of become numb to it, don't we? We get so used to it that we just tend to accept it as part of life, so that it doesn't even get to us anymore.

We don't even let ourselves notice it. And yet it should get to us. It should get to us because we know, especially if we come to church and read the Bible, we know more than anyone else, this is not how it's supposed to be.

Our world is not meant to be like this. It should get to us. It certainly got to Peter and John this day in Jerusalem. Because along come these two disciples of Jesus Christ, two men who had experienced true life firsthand, who had believed the promises of the kingdom to come, who understood why Jesus came to earth.

[7 : 10] And then when they come across this broken man, they don't just accept his brokenness as part of life. They don't just glance at him and walk by. No, in fact, they know that Jesus came to earth exactly to undo this kind of thing.

And so guided by the spirit that was given to them, they knew that this was the moment that Jesus was going to use them to demonstrate why he came to earth.

And so let's pick it up from verse four, see what happens. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. And then Peter said, look at us. So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

And then Peter said, silver or gold, I do not have. But what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.

And then taking him by the right hand, he helped him up. And instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God.

[8 : 18] I mean, imagine. Imagine if you were that guy and after decades and decades, you're suddenly able to walk. I mean, it's incredible. You can well understand his reaction.

Now, when we read this miracle, fantastic as it is, and we just relate it and we kind of put ourselves in that position. It seems as if this miracle is really just about one man being healed.

But in fact, it's actually much more than that. What's going on here is much more than the healing of one person. In fact, the words that Luke uses to describe this healing and the reaction to it are very similar to an ancient prophecy given by Isaiah.

Isaiah. And Isaiah, it's in Isaiah 35, this prophecy. And Isaiah the prophet is talking about a time in the future when God will come to put an end to sin and evil in the world.

And then I want you to listen to what it says will be the result of God coming to put an end to sin and evil. Isaiah 35 from verse 5, it says, Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the

deaf unstopped.

[9 : 32] And then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool.

The thirsty ground bubbling springs. You see, now this prophecy in Isaiah is beginning to be fulfilled in this healing.

Hundreds of years later in Jerusalem. This miracle, you see, what it is, it's Jesus through his disciples giving us a sneak preview of what God's ultimate plan for this world is.

That Isaiah and other prophets have told us about for thousands of years. Namely, God's plan for this world is a reversal of everything that is broken in our world.

And the people who live in this new world, Isaiah tells us, everlasting joy will crown their heads. They will enjoy this new world forever and ever without end.

[10 : 28] It's a world that doesn't end. You don't die in it. Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away. That is the world that God has planned.

That is the world that God has meant for us to live in. Right from the beginning of time. Not some spiritual afterlife in the sky, as people often think.

No. A real, restored, physical world. As real as this one. But with no suffering. With no pain. With no effects of sin.

No brokenness. And no end. We're so used to things ending, aren't we? We're so used to happy times coming to an end. All good things come to an end. The phrase goes, no.

Not this good thing. This good thing doesn't come to an end. Because this good thing comes from God. And it's what he's always intended for you. And for me. And the reason Jesus came to earth.

[11 : 27] Was to make it possible for us to enter that world. To open up the way to that new world. That is why Jesus came. And we need to remember that.

You see, Jesus didn't come to make this life a little better. He came to give us an entirely new life. In a new world. That we can know for sure.

Which when we do know that for sure. It changes this life completely. But remember, he didn't come primarily for this life. To make it better. No, he came to give us a new life.

To come. But I think we forget that. Often. In a way, I think we expect too little from Jesus. I think we're all guilty of that to a certain extent. You know, like that beggar.

Expected too little from Jesus' disciples. Notice all he expected was some money from them. He didn't expect anything more than maybe a few coins. He never expected for his problem to be removed completely.

[12 : 25] He just wanted some money to ease his problem. And I think we so often look to Jesus. For what he can do to ease our problems. Here and now.

In this life. You know, so many sermons at churches these days are about how Jesus can improve your life now. Five principles for a better marriage.

Or managing your finances. Or how to find fulfillment. Or a biblical diet to make you thin and healthy. Whatever it is. But that's often what people's primary focus is when it comes to Jesus.

How he can improve my life now. How he can ease my problems. But you know what happens when that's our focus? Well, we end up only valuing Jesus insofar as he helps us here and now, don't we?

But then, when we don't need his help, or when he doesn't give us what we want here and now, then we just don't pay him much attention. But our focus is still just on the here and now.

[13 : 28] But you see, we must not think of Jesus like that. We can't think of Jesus like that. As Christians, we must value Jesus not for what he does for us now, but for what he's already done for us to secure our future.

Restoration. And which he proves to us. And he gives us absolute evidence that that's what he's succeeded in, in this miracle. That's why we should be focusing on him. Not for what he can do for you now, but for what he's done to open up a new everlasting world for you.

And so, if you're a Christian, and you're struggling this morning, maybe you're really struggling with sickness, or depression, or some disease, maybe cancer, something like that.

Whatever it is that you're struggling with. While Jesus may choose to heal you now, if he wants, you should be praising him, even if he doesn't.

Because he's promised to heal you completely and perfectly beyond your wildest dreams in the life to come. Because you see, if you only look to him for what he can give you now, then you'll end up

ignoring him when he doesn't give you that.

[14:46] And instead, what you will do, what we all tend to do, is you'll end up chasing after the things that do ease your discomfort in this life in place of Jesus.

Anything that eases your discomfort or makes you a little bit happier in this life, that's what you'll focus on. And you'll put Jesus on the side. But let me tell you, by doing that, you'll actually be turning away from the one thing you need the most.

To do that is, in fact, self-destructive. To chase after little comforts and pleasures in this life and neglect Jesus is to destroy ourselves.

And that's exactly what Peter goes on to say. Have a look from verse 12. When Peter saw this, he said to them, Fellow Israelites, 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? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate.

[15:50] Though he had decided to let him go, you disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

And we are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. And so you see how Peter draws attention to how illogical these people were to reject Jesus.

How they were, in fact, doing the complete opposite of what was good for them. You notice that? You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. I mean, who would do that?

And yet they did. You killed the author of life. The one man God sent to remove death, to give you real life. You killed him.

It's a completely self-destructive response to Jesus. They did the total opposite of what was good for them. You know, it reminds me of guinea fowl.

[16:56] You know, guinea fowl have got to be the stupidest animals on earth. I mean, come on. Have you seen what they do? When you're driving along, normal animals on the side of the road, when they see your car, they run in the opposite direction.

Normal animals. Guinea fowl, no, they do the opposite. Guinea fowl wait until you're too close to be able to respond. And then they run in front of your car and get killed. It's the total opposite of what is good for them.

They're inherently self-destructive creatures. But you know what? We all are. We're all like guinea fowl. We're all self-destructive.

Because look at us. Look at humans. Humans start wars with each other, knowing full well that it'll destroy their countries. Even if they win the war, it'll still take an untold toll in their countries.

People get addicted to drugs and alcohol, knowing that it'll ruin their lives, and yet they do it anyway. In relationships, we say something hurtful to someone we care about, knowing full well that it'll leave us both upset, and it won't help anything, and yet we do it anyway.

[18:04] You see, we're self-destructive in our relationships, in our economies, in our politics. We just do things that are the opposite of what is actually best for us. But you know what?

The most self-destructive thing you can do is to ignore Jesus. And that's the thing we do all the time as human beings. To not give Jesus the place he deserves in your life is the most self-destructive thing you can do.

To not recognize who he is and what he's done, and he's given ample proof and evidence for that in Scripture. To ignore that is completely self-destructive. To not give your life over to him, to cling on to your life, to cling on to independence, is completely the opposite of what is good for you.

You know, if you've not given your life over to Jesus yet, if you're still chasing after the things of this life, instead of following Jesus into the new life to come, I need to warn you this morning, you're clinging to a sinking ship.

And you're neglecting the one thing that can save you from it. Because this world is sinking. This world is passing away. You know, and to prioritize the things in this world, this broken world that is passing away, that is self-destructive.

[19:27] And so there's one thing that we need to do. And that's what Peter urges his listeners to do in verse 19. He says to them, Turn to God.

You know, turning to God, you know what it means? It means turning away from other things. That's the thing. We never quite get that. To turn to something, we need to turn away from something else. To turn to Jesus, we need to turn away from this world. That's what the Bible says. That's what Jesus himself says over and over again. Turning to the one who has come to restore you to new life means turning away from your old life.

Turn so that your sins may be wiped out. Because the way Jesus restores you to life is by wiping away the very thing that stops you from entering life.

Wiping it out completely. Your sin. And that's what Jesus is able to do. Okay? You have sinned. You can't deny that. You have sinned against God. And Jesus is the only one who is able to do something about that.

[20 : 43] You can't. I mean, try stop sinning for a week. You won't be able to. But Jesus, because he died for your sin, took your sin on himself when he was perfect. And he offers you his righteousness in return.

Your sins through him can be wiped away. That's why we exist as a church. That's what we're so excited about. The fact that Jesus can wipe our sins away. It's the most important thing in the world. And that's why he came.

Jesus can wipe away the very thing that is stopping you from entering eternal life. You see, Jesus came not to deal with your temporary problems.

Jesus came to deal with your eternal problem. Your biggest problem. It reminds me, in fact, of another lame man that was placed in front of Jesus for healing in Mark chapter 2. You'll know the story.

He was lowered through the roof by his friends. And he came because Jesus had built this reputation of being able to heal people. And so they thought, if only we could get this man in front of the crowds to Jesus, he'll heal him.

[21 : 45] That's all they wanted. They just wanted their friend to be healed. And so they placed him in front of Jesus. And you know the first thing that Jesus does? He doesn't heal him. He said to him, your sins are forgiven.

And that is because Jesus knew this man had a much bigger problem than his paralysis. A problem that he didn't even know about, which was his sin. And then he goes on to heal him, but just to prove that he is able to forgive sin.

That's what healings are in. Healings in the Bible are not about just Jesus helping some people. Of course, he had compassion on people. But the main reason that he healed people and did these miracles was to show us of something much bigger.

And to prove to us that our real problem is our sin. And it's only when that's dealt with that healing and restoration can come. Much, much greater and more than we can ever expect in the life to come.

But you see, Jesus knew this man's problem, his biggest problem, was his sin. And that is your biggest problem too, whether you know it or not. And that's why you need to turn to Jesus.

[22 : 49] So that your sins may be wiped out and that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. And if you're a Christian, you'll know what that means. That phrase, times of refreshing.

You know, there is no greater feeling in this world than knowing that your sins against God are wiped away for good. Nothing better. But you'll only experience that when you turn to Jesus and when you listen to him and when you trust in him.

Because look at what Peter goes on to say. Quoting from a prophecy of Moses, verse 22. For Moses said, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. You must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people. And that's the warning.

Listen to him. It's as if we've been living in a prison for a very long time. This wrecked world is our prison.

[23 : 56] But Jesus has broken into this prison. Often people want to break out of prison. Well, Jesus has broken into this prison to show us a way out. But the problem is, because we're so used to this prison, instead of listening to what Jesus has to say, you know what we do?

We try to get Jesus to make our prison cell more comfortable, don't we? We try to get Jesus to improve our life here. We come to church and pray to get Jesus to make this life better.

When in fact, what we need to do is leave our prison cell behind. And listen to everything Jesus tells us. Because he tells us a way into the restored world, the new world that God has planned for us, that God made us for.

But you know what that means? Leaving our prison cell, everything we've known, is leaving what we're comfortable with in order to follow Jesus. Listen to how Jesus himself puts it in Mark 8. He says, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

[25 : 07] But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. You see, Jesus says to follow him means to lose certain things that you would have enjoyed in this life.

It means to make sacrifices. And the only reason you do that is if you're convinced that he has something better in store for you. And that's what this miracle and others like it are here to prove to you and to me.

That he has something far better in store for us than anything we could have in this life. Restoration. The eternal world. The perfect world that God has made us for.

That the beautiful things of this world are only shadows and poor reflections. They're there to point us to what's to come. I mean, if the beautiful world has beautiful things like whales and mountains and sunsets, imagine what the true restored world is going to be like.

You see, these miracles are sneak previews to tell us what's coming soon. The restored world and the new life that Jesus has made possible.

[26 : 19] And they're meant, you know what they're meant to do? They're meant to get us excited about that. They're meant to get us talking about it. And as a church, that's what we're here to do in Plumstead. We're here to talk about what Jesus has done to make new life possible.

We're not here to put plasters on people's problems. We're here to show people where to find their ultimate solution to their problem. The forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. And if you have found that, then will you join us in helping other people to find that too?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that not only did you do everything for us to be in a relationship with God, but you opened up the way to eternal life in the life to come.

Perfect life. The life that we were made for. Lord, thank you for removing the one thing, our sin, that cuts us off from that. And thank you for these miracles and these eyewitnesses that you've given us in Scripture to prove to us that new life is real.

That it's not just some vain hope, but that it's something we can put our hope in for sure. That it's a certainty what you've done for us.

[27 : 39] Help us to do that. Help us to put our hope and concentrate so much on you that we will neglect these other things that we chase after in life. Help us to follow you wholeheartedly, even if that means sacrificing things here and now, because we know what's to come.

And so we pray that that hope would drive us on in life, that we would live in light of what's to come, and that we would not keep quiet about it. But that as Christians, in this church, in this community, we would be excited about it enough that we would want to talk to others about it, and bring others to know what you have done for them.

And so we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.