

Miracles

Lesson 2: Miracles Today?

My previous article dealt with why I believe God used miracles in New Testament times. Now I would like to address the thought of miracles still happening today.

We already discussed that Jesus was preparing His disciples for what would happen to Him. Matthew 26:2 tells us of His words to them, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of Man is to be delivered up for crucifixion." They had the Passover meal together and again we find the Lord telling them what would happen next. In Matthew 26:31-32 He even tells them that this very night they would all fall away. Then He reassures them and gives them hope by saying, "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." I wonder, when they heard this, if they remembered others that Jesus had raised from the dead, like Lazarus (John 11:44) and Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:42)? I can only imagine how their minds must have been racing as all these events were unfolding before them! Peter argues that he would never fall away, even if all of the others did (Matthew 26:33), but Jesus, knowing all, tells him the number of times, before morning, that he would deny Him (Matthew 26:34).

After His death, we find that the women are the first ones to go to the grave and receive a message from an angel of the Lord (Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10). In Matthew 28:6-7 he tells them, "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." What I find amazing here, is that while they were running quickly from the tomb with

"fear and great joy", Jesus met them and greeted them! Then He repeats the message again, "Do not be afraid, go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see me." Matthew 28:9-10. (I know that I would be so excited to have seen the risen Lord, that I would need to hear the message again to be sure that I got it right!)

We now move to the book of Acts where Jesus does appear to them, as He said He would. He had another message for them, "but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5) We read of their baptism taking place then in Acts 2:4. (It is important to note here that the ones who received the Holy Spirit were the twelve disciples. Acts 2:1 refers back to Acts 1:26 where we have Matthias being added to the eleven.) Once again, the Lord told them ahead of time what this would happen. In Acts 1:8, He says, "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The multitudes were witnesses of this power as they heard these Galilean men all speaking in different languages! (Acts 2:6-10) Why did Jesus give this miraculous power to the twelve? Let's finish the verse, "and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The next verse tells us that Jesus ascended to Heaven then, and the "footwork" was left in the hands of His disciples. It doesn't seem like much time has passed until another miracle was performed. Peter, in Acts 3:1-8, heals a lame man. Acts 5:12 tell us, "And at the hand of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people." (Notice the WHO here-at the hand of the apostles.) In Acts 6:8 and 8:6-7, we see others, specifically Stephen and Philip, who are also now performing signs and miracles. How was this

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possible? Acts 8:17-18 tells us that when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. He wanted a "piece of the action!" So we learn that the power of God was passed on to others that the disciples laid their hands on. The Lord sends another disciple, Ananias, to Damascus, where he is to meet with a certain man, Saul. He lays his hands on him, heals his blindness, and the Holy Spirit falls upon him (Acts 9:1-20). As you probably already know, this man's name is changed to "Paul", and from this turning point in his life, he would go on to "increase in strength and confound the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 9:22)

There is hardly a chapter in Acts that does not tell of a miracle taking place by the disciples, or someone that they have laid their hands on. I love the words chosen by the Spirit in Acts 14:3, "Therefore they (Paul and Barnabas, Acts 13:46) spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." All that was done by them was pointing to the fact that Jesus is who He said He was—the Son of God. Once again, in Acts 19:6, we see Paul laying his hands on twelve men so that they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. I, once again, love how the verse reminds us who the credit belongs to, "And GOD was performing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul." (Acts 19:11) Paul and the other disciples were clearly being used as instruments for the Lord. They were traveling all around the area setting up churches. The book of Acts tells us of these workers laying the cornerstones of the early church, whose founder is God.

After we read of these foundations being set up in Acts, then we have the letters to the churches, the epistles, encouraging them to "keep on, keeping on!" Each church had its individual challenges, just as the church today does. 1 Corinthians 12 talks specifically

about the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts in the church. Let's go to verse 10, "and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues." So basically, each member of the Body had a role. They would work as individual members, individual gifts, but one group, one goal; yet they are reminded in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. Therefore abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

The new church had all these miraculous gifts that were given to them at the time this letter was written. Paul is telling them, through inspiration, that the gifts would stop—therefore let faith, hope, and love live on in the church. Notice also how the "partial" is contrasted to the "complete." Right now they had partial knowledge, but it seems to me that when the "perfect" came, their knowledge would be complete and the gifts would cease. The word "perfect" is not referring to Jesus, because it is in the neutral form here. It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 2:6 as the word "mature." The statement is somewhat repeated in Ephesians 4:11-13, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man,

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to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Here is that word used again—mature, perfect. Inspiration of God's Word is letting the followers know that the miraculous will cease when the church is mature, or has reached the fullness of Christ. Only God knew when that time would be.

We know that the miraculous gifts have stopped because we do not see them today: the dead rising, the lame walking, the blind seeing, and people speaking languages that they had not previously known. These are not happening in our assemblies today. Romans 14:9 reinforces what is important to focus on, "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

In Luke 16:19-31, we hear the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus is poor, covered with sores, and lays at the rich man's gate, begging. Both the rich man and Lazarus die. The rich man goes to a place of torment, and Lazarus to "Abraham's bosom." The rich man has five brothers and begs the Father to send someone to warn them before they die also, so they can be spared this place. He says he knows they will repent if someone goes to them from the grave. Jesus' response is clear, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

Isn't this similar to how people are today? We have the assembled Word of God at our fingertips to learn from, we see God's handiwork in the creation (Romans 1:19-20), and in our fearfully and wonderfully made bodies (Psalm 139:14), and yet some still refuse to accept God as Lord! They want signs from God and miracles to "blow them away" so they can be sure. That's where our faith should "kick in." We are assured of things hoped for, and convicted of things NOT seen (Hebrews 11:1) Let us all "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude vs. 3) The faith has already been

delivered, the foundational teachings of the church were given; there will be no more miraculous signs or proofs. God has given us all that we need. "You however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:14-17