

Acts 1:6-9

June 7, 2020

Psalm 77: 11-15

Miracles

In this day and age many scoff at the idea of miracles. Yet when something unexpected and improbable occurs even skeptical persons will exclaim “It’s a miracle!”. If we believe that the world and its material existence is governed by laws – “laws of nature” – then these laws would have to be suspended for the surprising events we generally call miracles. But we know that even if the greatest saint who lived fell from a many-storied building the law of gravity wouldn’t be suspended and he’d be dashed into the ground.

Another way to understand miracles is to call them unexplainable happenings. “A miracle is an event which so far exceeds human knowledge and human expectations as to put its explanation in another realm.”¹ We may try to understand what just happened but in the end we just say, “It’s a miracle.”

Ponder this: God’s creation is a miracle. Science has done much to help us understand our natural world, and yet from the endless expanse of space to the tiniest subatomic particle there remains a great deal of mystery and the unexplainable. Each new-born baby is a miracle.

Miracles In The Bible

The Bible attests to miracles as acts of God most often involving people ... so many references I can’t mention all. The Psalmist says of God: *You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples*, Psalm 77:13. Recall the burning bush from which God called Moses.² Think of the wonders Moses and Aaron performed to impress Pharaoh with God’s power;³ and then the parting of the seas to let the Israelites escape Pharaoh’s army.⁴

When it comes to the Bible many think of the physical healings that Jesus performed: the paralyzed man healed (Matt. 9:2; Mark 2:3); a blind man given sight (John 9:1-12); a man with leprosy healed (Mark 1:40-42). Miracles in the Bible are called signs because they are performed in order to point to God. The healings Jesus performed, the wonders performed in the OT were all done with this purpose: to draw people to belief in the one, true living God. Jesus’ miracles were signs of His power, where He came from, and who He really was. There was also a human element in those miracles – just as there is today. In His hometown of Nazareth Jesus: ... *could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith*, Mark 6:5-6. [*Elsewhere it says: Then Jesus began to*

denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. Matt. 11:20.]

If you wonder why Jesus didn't heal every invalid or sick person He met ... or maybe you wonder why He doesn't heal you or your loved one ... recall the temptations Satan put Him through (Matt. 4:1-11). The greatest healing Jesus performs is the spiritual healing of our souls. Healing the body is a sign of the spiritual healing.

Miracles of Acts

In the next several weeks we're going to take a look at the miracles reported in the Book of Acts. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that Acts is the first church history ever written ... penned by the same author as the Gospel of Luke. As reported in "The Acts of the Apostles," some of the apostles performed miracles. *So, Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders, Acts 14:3.*

However, the first miracle attested to in the Book of Acts did not come at the hands of the Apostles. It is this: *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* Acts 1:9-11. This was the ascension of Jesus.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples, friends, and others. Forty days later Jesus and His disciples went up to Mount Olivet where Jesus promised them that the Holy Spirit would come to give them strength and power to be His witnesses to all nations. After saying these things, Jesus ascended into heaven, bodily rising into the clouds. Now that's supernatural, beyond our experience and understanding. It's a miracle! Many onlookers saw and bore witness to this miracle.

Then came the second miracle: Pentecost ... which we celebrated last Sunday. Jesus had said to His disciples, *Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them, John 7:38. The Apostle John added, By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified, John 7:39. But once Jesus had ascended to heaven the Holy Spirit came to fill those who believed. Another supernatural event. And from this miracle there has flowed a never-ending stream of miracles, just as*

Jesus had predicted: *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father, John 14:12.*

Peter hailed by a crippled beggar near the Temple in

Jerusalem: ... said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong, Acts 3:1-10.

Reported of Paul: *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them, Acts 19:11-12* Paul acknowledged this when he wrote to the church in Corinth, saying, *I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles, 2 Corinthians 12:12.* So it was not unusual for the Apostles to perform miracles, and to expect others in the church to do so.⁵

Miracle of Changed Lives

Last week I spoke of the vital question that John Wesley posed to those who sought admission to his groups: "Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?" In other words, do you know deep, down in your soul that you have sinned against God and yet have been forgiven through Christ Jesus? Some would say it's a miracle when someone can thoroughly admit to their own sinfulness. Then comes the miracle of the transformation that takes place in a forgiven sinner's heart and life.

In 1742 John Wesley wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Character of a Methodist." His description of a reformed and renewed life was not really novel. The Bible gives us the teachings of the Apostles, who received it directly from Christ himself. Wesley also drew heavily from an early Christian teacher, Clement of Alexandria, who described the life of a genuine Christian – as opposed to one in name only. Here's what Wesley said of those Christians:

Fear in their lives has been cast out by love ... In everything they give thanks ... They pray without ceasing ... Their hearts are full of love ... They are known by their fruits ... They do all to the glory of God ... They do good to all they meet. Such a person "is a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God. ... His soul is renewed after the image of God, in

righteousness and in all true holiness. And having that mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.”⁶

... would it be a miracle if this described you and your life? We’ve been talking about the power of resurrection which the HS brings to believers. Too many Christians try and fail to be Christ-like, because they forget the key ingredient. Christ was filled with the HS ... the Christian who would be as Christ will not achieve his/her own righteousness but will invite the Holy Spirit to work on them and in them. The HS works miracles.

Miracle In Your Life

Do miracles still happen? I for one, do not believe that miracles, extraordinary, unexplainable acts of God, are limited to the time of the Apostles. They do indeed still happen. I’ve personally known two people who experienced extraordinary physical healing ... I’ve experienced other things that one could call a coincidence or a miracle, depending on how you look at it. Here’s another thing to consider: What happens when a person can truly say: I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20)? What happens when the power of God is working in a human life that is yielded to Him? Believers who take their problems and activities to God in prayer find that ideas come to them, many they’d never considered before. We cannot see what may come tomorrow, but through prayer we are in touch with the One who can. As ideas formulate in our minds and we begin to develop plans, we can turn to Him for help and guidance, every step of the way. So, you see, some miracles (maybe most) involve some doing on our part. If you do it in the power of God, you are likely to see a miracle. Those who expect miracles and seek miracles are much more likely to be involved in them. For those who ask, receive, and those who seek, find.⁷

For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, miracles occur all around us. Miracles that heal illness and physical disability still occur and when they do, we notice with exclamation. Other miracles involve transformed lives (Mike Lindell of “My Pillow” fame, or Phil Robertson of “Duck Dynasty”). The Mission at Kern has a history of being a conduit for God’s miracles wrought in the lives of those saved from drugs, alcohol, and death. HS power transforms lives that were lost into lives that glorify our Heavenly Father. Similar miracles unfold through the agency of many churches where people are brought into a vital relationship with Jesus that spurs someone to get out of debt, to get off alcohol, drugs, pornography, tobacco, bitterness, anger, or a downcast mind.

Many miracles go unnoticed ... except over time as they occur in the hearts and souls of people whose lives are being transformed by the power of the HS. For you it might be to actually, consciously, give your

heart and life to Jesus Christ. For some it might be a miracle that they became more loving and compassionate toward their spouse, their children, some other relative or a neighbor or co-worker. The miracle might be reconciliation with someone after you've had a falling out. It might even be a miracle if suddenly you got on fire for Jesus, hungry to know the word of God, eager to serve Him and share his grace with others. I am confident there are miracles unfolding today in people that you and I know...

The 70s rock group Moody Blues, in their song "Questions," sang: "I'm looking for someone to change my life. I'm looking for a miracle in my life..." How many of you are looking?

The One you're looking for, right now, is Jesus Christ. Through His HS power He can work a miracle in your life. And that miracle is the transformation of your heart.

God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will, Hebrews 2:4.

¹ Robert Benjamin Hall, *There's More*, (Logos, International, Plainfield, NJ, 1972), 75.

² Exodus 3:2

³ Exodus 7:9.

⁴ Exodus 14:21

⁵ *God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.* 1 Cor. 12:28.

⁶ Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings, Vol. 4, Ethics and Society* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI), 36-39.

⁷ Hall, 76.