

MIRACLES (5)

Looking for miracles today

A. Introduction

1. To believe in miracles is both reasonable and vital.

It is reasonable if God exists and if the Bible is true.

It is vital because if the miracles of the Bible did not happen the Bible cannot be trusted and there is no salvation.

2. What do we mean by 'miracles'?

Miracles are mighty acts of God (mighty works), that are unusual, causing amazement (wonders), and which have a specific purpose (signs).

3. The four Gospels describe Jesus as performing miracles defined in this way.

He did miracles that showed His control over nature.

Miracles that showed His control over sickness and disease.

Miracles that showed His control over Satan and demons.

Miracles that showed His control over death.

4. The reason Jesus did these miracles was to point us to who He is and what He had come to do.

They were proof of His identity:

That He is God – in His own power Jesus does things that God did in the Old Testament.

That He is a prophet – He did things that were similar to those done by the Old Testament prophets.

That He is the Messiah – His miracles fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about a coming King who would save God's people.

They were pictures of His salvation:

The miracles were a foretaste of Jesus' saving work. The particular needs Jesus met point to the greater need He will meet through His death and resurrection for those who trust in Him.

The miracles were a foretaste of what life with Him in His kingdom will be like. They give us a glimpse of what heaven is like.

5. The miracles Jesus did also tell us about ourselves and how we desperately need to be saved by Jesus because of the condition we are in, and how we can be saved by Jesus through faith in Him.

6. But do miracles like the ones Jesus did still happen today?

Should we expect them?

Should we look for them?

Or have they ceased?

B. There are miracles we shouldn't look for today

1. We shouldn't look for or expect to see today miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them.

These kinds of miracles are uncommon, even in the Bible (their rarity).

These kinds of miracles had a specific purpose that has now been fulfilled (their uniqueness).

2. But haven't miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them taken place after His ascension?

Yes.

However, this does not mean we should expect to see them as the answers to the following three questions will make clear.

3. Who performed miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them?

The New Testament records the apostles, and those closely associated with them who preached the gospel, doing miracles like Jesus did.

"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles." (Acts 2:43)

"Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I 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. He jumped to his feet and began to walk." (Acts 3:6-8)

"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people... As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed." (Acts 5:12, 15-16)

"Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed." (Acts 8:5-7)

"There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and tidy up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up." (Acts 9:33-34)

"Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up." (Acts 9:40)

"In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk." (Acts 14:8-10)

"The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them." (Acts 15:12)

"She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her." (Acts 16:18)

"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)

"Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey

and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"... The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted." (Acts 20:9-10, 12)

"His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured." (Acts 28:8-9)

This was something Jesus had said the apostles would be able to do in His name.

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons." (Matthew 10:5-8)

4. Why did they perform miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them?

As proof that they were true representatives of Christ.

"The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance." (2 Corinthians 12:12)

As proof that the gospel they preached was authentic and from God – like had happened on other occasions in the past.

"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:3-4)

"Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?' Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has appeared to you." (Exodus 4:1-5)

"Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth." (1 Kings 17:24)

Remember in the early years of the early church there was no New Testament, and there was plenty of people preaching. So the early church needed a way to tell if a preacher was representing Christ and preaching His Word.

It is also interesting to note what kinds of miracles the apostles did and didn't do.

They performed miracles that showed Jesus' control over disease, demons and death. But they did not do miracles that showed Jesus' control over nature.

Was that because the miracles that showed Jesus' control over disease, demons and death pointed to Jesus' ability to save sinners, whereas the miracles that showed Jesus' control over nature pointed to Jesus' ability to provide for His followers?

5. When did they perform miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them?

They performed miracles in the early years of the early church.

They performed miracles during the time when the New Testament was being written.

The books of the New Testament that were written first are the ones where you tend to read of miracles like the ones Jesus did taking place.

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means

of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues." (1 Corinthians 12:7-10)

The focus of the later New Testament books is on guarding the message of the gospel which has by now been authenticated by the miracles the apostles did.

"And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." (2 Timothy 2:11-14)

6. We shouldn't look for or expect to see today miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them because they are now no longer needed.

The miracles Jesus did had the specific purpose of proving His identity and picturing His salvation which He accomplished by His death and resurrection.

We don't need to see the miracles Jesus did because we have the account of eyewitnesses who saw them written down for us in the New Testament.

And we can trust that what is recorded in the New Testament is accurate, because it was written by the apostles (or close friends of an apostle), and their message has been authenticated by the miracles they had done in Jesus' name.

7. This doesn't mean we shouldn't look for or expect to see miracles today.

C. There are miracles we should look for today

1. A miracle to look for.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

What are these greater works we will do?

It is not more miracles or more spectacular miracles.

It's talking about the preaching of the gospel by His followers which leads to the conversion of far greater numbers of people than Jesus was ever able to reach during His lifetime.

The miracle we are to look for is the miracle of conversion – the raising of the spiritually dead to life.

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

2. A miracle to pray for.

Help for those who are in need – yet sometimes this help will not be given.

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord." (James 5:13-14)

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with

the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

Help for those who are hindered in their service – yet sometimes this help will not be given.

"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains." (Colossians 4:3)

"But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." (1 Corinthians 16:9)

"Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." (Acts 16:6-7)

3. Just because we shouldn't look for or expect to see today miracles like the ones Jesus did and in the way He did them does not mean we shouldn't look for or expect to see any miracles.

God is at work in His world not only in saving people but also in other unusual ways.

When someone is saved or help is given in an amazing way our response should be to praise God and give Him all the glory.

"Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today." (Luke 5:26)