

Message Date: 08-02-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real!

Message Title: Week 3, Signs and Wonders

✠ Have you ever witnessed a miracle?

- *Have you ever witnessed a miracle?*
 - *Something that happened, where you said “there is no question, not doubt in my mind, that THAT was a supernatural act of God. Now way would that have happened if it had not been God at work. Have you ever witnessed, or experienced, a miracle?*
 - *The question of miracles brings up lots of questions*
 - *Do miracles still happen?*
 - *If God DOES do miracles, then why? For what reason? Our need, or something bigger*
 - *If God is in the business of working miracles today, then why does he withhold them from so many who sincerely pray for them? What do you do when you hear people speak of miracles, but you have no experience of this, especially if you had a tremendous need that wasn't met?*
 - *Why doesn't God pour out miracles all the time- wouldn't that convince people that he is real and true?*
 - *I mean, have miracles ever even happened at all, or is this all just religious superstition and some great historical public relations?*
 - *Doctoral thesis' have been written on this topic, and we won't get even close to covering all of that... BUT, this is clear. In the Bible- both OT and NT, God HAS intervened supernaturally in the affairs of mankind and the lives of individuals. Either this is a historic reality or scripture is not true.*
 - *Here's our focus today... if we see God doing miraculous things in scripture- particularly the book of Acts- then how do we understand and apply this now? Is this all just history, or is the supernatural power of God still at work in our lives today?*
 - *Virtually all the presence of miracles in the NT are recorded in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, including our text today, which is Acts 5:12-16. But, before we go there, THANK YOU for joining with us today... it is Sunday AUGUST the 2nd, I'm pastor Ethan, and this is Trinity online.*
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✠ Signs and wonders

- *First, lets spend a few minutes with what's going on here in our story*

¹²*The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.*

- *“Apostles”... The original 12.. minus Judas, replaced by Matthias, soon to include Paul. God is at work through the entire community of believers, but very uniquely through the apostles. In fact, this first generation of the church is often called the ‘apostolic age’, because much is characterized by what God did through these people.*
- *Signs and wonders- multiple throughout Acts, but here the primary – if not exclusive- activity seems to be healing. This was done among the PEOPLE- residents of Jerusalem.*

And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

- **Some debate among scholars about the construction of verse 13. Specifically, who is the ‘no one else’, and who is the ‘them and they’. I’m going with BOCK, who asserts that the THEY and THEM are the apostles... They were respected and highly regarded not only by the believers, but also by the community at large. The ‘NO ONE ELSE’ that refused to join publically with them likely refers to other believers.**
 - **On one hand, just had experience of A&S... and the believers could have been afraid to try and join the Apostles, or even get to close to them.**
 - **On other hand, it could have been because of the increasing pressure and threats of the Sanhedrin against the apostles... fear that if they stood publically with the apostles, they risked arrest and punishment as well.**
- **In any case, the church continues to grow, and Luke intentionally tells us it was both men and women coming into the community. (The importance of women in the community of faith is something Luke emphasizes)**

¹⁴ *Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.*

- **Then, Luke makes a clear connection between the growth of the gospel community, and how God is working through the apostles by way of miraculous healings.**

¹⁵ *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.*

- **Some scholars have suggested that Peter’s shadow didn’t actually heal anyone, and this just shows how desperate people were to receive the healings that were happening. But the context really does indicate that this all was happening... people were healed even when Peter’s shadow crossed them. This is a HUGE and very public- demonstration of God’s power.**

¹⁶ *Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.*

- **This is an amazing description of events. Miraculous. But what is the bigger picture that is happening here?**

✚ The bigger picture

- **No question... the Love and Power of God is at work in the lives of every individual impacted by these miraculous healings.**
- **But (discussed few weeks back) the greater purpose of these miracles was not just to meet the very real needs of the sick people of Jerusalem. It was To REVEAL, to authenticate and demonstrate, that Jesus is the messiah, which is the message the apostles were preaching even as these healings occurred.**
- **These miracles not only served to authenticate the gospel message being preached, but to demonstrate that everything happening within the community of faith was a result of the resurrection of Jesus... that this was GOD AT WORK, right now.**
- **Essentially put, the signs and wonders occurring here are happening to further God’s kingdom and reveal God’s glory- his goodness and sovereignty- to the people of Jerusalem and Israel.**
- **THIS IS A PATTERN that will continue throughout Acts... people will be judged, healed, raised from the dead, freed from imprisonment, and delivered from being shipwrecked.**

And in all of these, God is working to further his purposes and reveal his goodness and glory.

– *SO... the big question that arises is WHY?*

‡ *If the signs and wonders of Acts are a predominant, ongoing activity of God through the apostles, then why did God choose to cease working in this way at the end of the original apostolic generation?*

– *Some will say.. HOLD ON! God still works through miracles. People are still healed... God has, and does accomplish miracles!*

– *I would say.. YES HE DOES. My personal example.. Lost key in TJ dump.... Some might say... well, you just got REALLY LUCKY. Really? I choose to believe that God had a hand in that.*

– *Furthermore, People I personally know and trust have shared with me how they have witness or experienced God working in a supernatural way, healing or otherwise.*

– *BUT!!! These are NOT the same as what we see happening here in Acts.*

– *In acts, we see God working signs and wonders through the apostles in a manner that is widespread, highly public, widely observed, and impacting many people, over a sustained period of time.*

– *These are NOT isolated one-off events, witnessed by a few and debated as to their authenticity. In the region surrounding Jerusalem, there is NO question or debated as to what is happening. These events are unquestionably supernatural, acts of God, and we are still marveling at them, 2000 years later.*

– *The point is obvious. These miraculous events that we see in Acts are NOT normative for the rest of Christianity. God working in this way is UNIQUE to the generation of Acts, and God has not chosen to reveal himself in this way since, in a way that is widespread and widely observed across the entire body of Christ.*

– *BUT... WHY NOT? Lots of theories here, very interesting and important, but that is not my point today. Rather, my point is THIS...*

‡ *God still works miracles! The Christian life, as revealed in scripture, is by its very nature miraculous. Our problem is we can have a very LIMITED view of what constitutes a miracle.*

– *When we think of a miracle of God, most of us probably think of God doing something supernatural to meet our needs, or need of someone we love.*

- *Physical healing*
- *Mental/emotional healing*
- *Rapid Deliverance from great hardship... financial, addiction...*
- *We are in pain... and we sincerely, maybe desperately, pray for God to act to make the pain and suffering go away. We need a miracle.*

– *And there are LOTS of Christian teachers, authors, and leaders who will tell you that if you just pray enough, sincerely enough, do the right things, that if you are holy enough, righteous enough, or give to their ministry... that God will miraculously answer that prayer. If he doesn't, well, the problem isn't with God, it's with you.*

- *Friends, that is not only unbiblical and a great distortion of what we see in the Gospels and in Acts, it is spiritual abuse, placing far too many sincere believers under the bondage of guilt and disillusionment.*
- *NOW. MAKE NO MISTAKE! I pray for God to intervene in miraculous ways! I, like you, am praying for God to intervene and bring an end to the great harm and divisiveness of this Covid situation. If I ever lose my keys in the Tijuana landfill, I will pray for God to deliver us from that situation!*
- *BUT CHURCH! What scripture reveals, what I'm learning, and that We, as the BODY OF CHRIST must understand, is this...*

† The supernatural power of God is not limited to a miraculous change in our CIRCUMSTANCES. In fact, miracles aren't primarily about such events.

The greater purpose and work of God's miraculous power in our lives- both in the time of Acts and now- is the miracle of the TRANSFORMATION of our soul

- *Transformation of our minds, wills, and emotions... how we think, feel, and act... RIGHT NOW, in the midst of life as it really is. As we have discussed many times here at Trinity, this is the miracle of us becoming who we already are. Becoming NOW, in our M/W/E, who we already fully are IN CHRIST- in our spirit.*
- *This is the miracle Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 3:18, which we read just a few weeks ago.*

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

- *SO I'll ask again the question we started with. Have you ever seen a miracle? I have, and you have as well.*

† Yes, you have seen a miracle

- *When a person allows God to strip away the pride that has bound them, damaged them and those around them... that is a miracle.*
- *When a persons heart is healed so that they become free to love... that is a miracle.*
- *When a broken relationship is healed as people lay down their hurts, bitterness, and pride... that is a miracle.*
- *When the Holy Spirit leads us to bear patiently with a difficult person- or a person going through great difficulty... that is a miracle.*
- *When we love the hard to love*
- *When we give of ourselves sacrificially, and from a place of emotional health and security... that is a miracle.*

- *When we set aside our own personal preferences, irritations, and desires in order to be part of another persons life- or to be part of the essential gift of the community of believers- that is a miracle.*
- *When God calls us to wisdom and discipline in our decisions... even when it is HARD... and we respond with trust and obedience... that is a miracle.*
- *And friends... when we trust God enough to truly give him permission to work on the patters of our flesh that hold us captive...*
 - *Anger... bitterness... jealousy... fear... self centeredness.. self condemnation.... Pride.. addictions...*
 - *When we say “GOD, your presence and goodness is greater than the counterfeit life I’ve been trying to draw from these things... I surrender to your work in my life... “Friends, THAT IS A MIRACLE.*
- *You see my friends...*

† We tend to think of God’s supernatural power in terms of MIRACLES. Plural.

- *God healed that person. God provided in this circumstance.*
- *HEAR... These are wonderful blessings, and God at times works in this way for his purposes and to his Glory. But the reality is that every miraculous change in a physical life circumstance, ultimately, is temporary. A temporary reprieve from the inevitable realities of this current temporary and physical existence.*
- *BUT...*

† Our great hope is in the MIRACLE, singular, that is true for every believer, everywhere, for all time.

- *THIS is the miracle that is ETERNAL.*
- *This is the miracle that the God of the universe, seeing the totality of the sin and brokenness of mankind (including you and I)- that God chose to take upon himself human form, and dwell among us... and in doing so, take upon himself our sin and brokenness, bearing it through his death on an instrument of roman torture.*
- *THEN, defeating death forever, Christ rose again to a new life so that each of us, through faith in Him, could receive that new life as our own- not just forgiveness, but the increasing fullness of a new heart- a new spirit- a new life in which we live in union with Christ, both now and forevermore.*
- *THAT IS THE MIRACLE of the gospel. That we shall live, even though we die.*

† Janes story

- *Woman in our church number of years ago. She led our children’s ministry for a time. Jane was a wonderful, loving woman, but like almost all of us, her life held some great difficulty.*
 - *She was long divorced, never remarried*
 - *Broken relationship with her son*
 - *Deeply sincere believer, but life wasn’t what she thought it would be*

- *Then, she received a diagnosis of late stage cancer. When she told me of this, she proclaimed with complete confidence that God had told her he would heal her.*
- *As a result, Jane didn't fear her cancer. She was not defined by its impact on her body. She lived far longer than her doctors thought she would*
- *DURING THAT TIME, something remarkable happened.*
 - *Her relationship with her son was restored, she witnessed his marriage*
 - *Her ex-husband took her in and cared for her when she could no longer care for herself*
 - *Even with the progressing cancer, she was at peace, telling everyone who would listen to her about the God who loved her.*
 - *VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING about Jane's life was healed... except her cancer.*
- *You see, Jane's life in these last years was a miracle. And when cancer finally claimed her physical body and she left this world, she stepped fully into the miracle of her eternal life with Christ, and with every believer that had gone before her.*
- *Friends, the miracle that animated Jane's life even as she slowly died, this is the miracle God also gives to each one of us.*
- *The miracle, of HOPE.*