

The Gift of Miracles (#30)

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

A Baptist preacher and his wife decided to get a new dog. Ever mindful of the congregation, they knew the dog must also be a Baptist. They visited kennel after kennel and explained their needs. Finally, they found a kennel whose owner assured them he had just the dog they wanted. The owner brought the dog to meet the pastor and his wife.

"Fetch the Bible," he commanded. The dog bounded to the bookshelf, scrutinized the books, located the Bible, and brought it to the owner.

"Now find Psalm 23," he commanded. The dog dropped the Bible to the floor, and showing marvelous dexterity with his paws, leafed through and finding the correct passage, pointed to it with his paw. The pastor and his wife were very impressed and purchased the dog.

That evening, a group of church members came to visit. The pastor and his wife began to show off the dog, having him locate several Bible verses. The visitors were very impressed. One man asked, "Can he do regular dog tricks, too?"

"I haven't tried yet," the pastor replied. He pointed his finger at the dog. "Heel!" the pastor commanded. The dog immediately jumped on a chair, placed one paw on the pastor's forehead and began to howl. The pastor looked at his wife in shock and said, "Oh no! He's Charismatic!"

In our studies in 1 Corinthians, we have come to the matter of miracles. Three times the charismatic gift of miracles is named in the 1 Corinthians 12; namely, in verses 10, 28, and 29. Three Greek words are used in the New Testament for "miracle;" They are "semeion" (say-mi-on), "teras" and "dunamis" (doo-nam-is). "Semeion" (say-mi-on) is a miracle as a sign authenticating the divine mission of the doer. It is translated "sign." "Teras" is a miracle as a wonderful thing, named for the effect of astonishment it has on the beholder. It is translated "wonder." "Dunamis" (doo-nam-is) is a miracle as an exhibition of divine power. It is translated "miracle." All three words are used in such passages as Acts 2:22, 2 Corinthians 12:12, and Hebrews 2:4.

A miracle is an interruption, an intervention, in the system of nature as we know it. It is a temporary suspension of the laws that govern this world as we commonly observe them. A miracle is "supernatural," above the "natural."

The virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is a "miracle." There is no other way to explain the birth of Christ as one without a human father except as a sovereign act of God suspending the laws of nature. Sometimes we use the word "miracle" in a figurative sense. We say "a sunset is a miracle of beauty and loveliness," or "a Christian is a miracle of grace," or "a mother is a miracle of patience and self-sacrifice." But this use of the word is not in the same sense as turning common dust into insects (Moses), or dividing a stream by the sweep of a mantle (Elijah), or feeding five thousand with a few loaves and fishes (Jesus). To turn water into wine through the process of nature is one thing; to turn water into wine with a spoken word, as a sovereign act apart from the processes of nature, is another thing. And that truly is a "miracle."

The gift of miracles is an astonishing gift. In the list of "charismata" in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, one of the nine gifts named, that of "healing" is fourth and that of "miracles" is fifth. The gift of *healing* is a specific category within the larger gift of *miracles*. Miracles that are not bodily healings are illustrated in the fish with the shekel in its mouth, caught by Simon Peter at the direction of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 17:24-27), Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14:25-33), Peter being liberated from Herod's prison with the iron gate opening of itself (Acts 9:36-42), and Paul calling down blindness on Elymas, the sorcerer in the court of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:8-11).

The Gift of miracles was not for show or for entertainment. Miracles in the Bible were never performed to be spectacular. They were never presented in a "Circus Maximus" to attract attention to the doer. In the second temptation (Matthew 4:5-7) Jesus pointedly refused to hurl Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in order to be lavishly applauded by the people for His deliverance in so great a feat.

When the Jews required of the Savior a sign (Matthew 12:38-40), Jesus refused to accommodate their empty curiosity with anything but a verbal denunciation of their hard hearts (Matthew 12:41-42). The same reaction was witnessed in our Lord when He was brought to trial before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:5-11). The Scriptures state that "when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad...because he hoped to have some miracle done by him" (verse 8). When the Lord not only refused to work a cheap miracle for the monarch's entertainment but also refused even to answer a word, Herod mocked Him and returned Him in contempt to Pontius Pilate. For the most part, the miracles of our Lord and of the disciples were works of compassion and mercy, but never for the sake of showing off.

It is most noted that very few converts were won by "signs and wonders and miracles." **After the feeding of the five thousand on the eastern side of the Galilean Sea, Jesus left and made His way in a boat to Capernaum. The multitudes followed Him, walking to the city around the north end of the lake.** When they found Him in Capernaum, John 6:26 they were greeted with the announcement that they sought the Savior not because they had seen in Him the presence of God but because "they did eat the loaves and were filled." And John 6:27 tells us that when Jesus proceeded to preach to them a sermon on the bread of life, beginning with the words, "labor not for the meat which perishes, but for the meat which endures unto everlasting life." And John 6:66 tells us that "they were offended in Him and walked no more with Him." **The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand did not convert one life, not one.**

The same effect of the wonder-working life of our Lord can be seen in the reaction of the Jewish rulers to Jesus. They finally, in desperation, attributed His astonishing power to Satan and furthermore set about to have Him removed from the earth. His restoration of life to the four-day dead Lazarus in Bethany was the climax that sealed His fate. **In fact, John 11:47-53 tells us that instead of the leaders' cold spirits softening and their hard hearts repenting, they gathered together the Sanhedrin to find formal means of putting Him to death.**

The sterile fruitlessness of conversion by miracles is dramatically emphasized by Jesus in His teachings. Luke 16:19-31 tell the story of Dives and Lazarus in the life beyond the grave is unforgettable. In torment Dives pleaded with father Abraham to send back to this earth Lazarus that the rich man's five brothers may be warned of hell and thereby repent and be saved. Abraham replied, "They have the Bible (Moses and the prophets): let them hear them." To this the rich man responded, "Nay, father Abraham: but if the miracle of one raised from the dead could be seen by them and if that dead man's pleas for repentance and faith could be heard by them, they would turn and be saved." Abraham from heaven closed the conversation with these words, "If they heed not the appeal of the Word of God, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." **Miracles do not bring conversion, even the astonishing wonder of one raised from the grave. This was the clear teaching of Jesus.**

The teaching and example of Jesus concerning the effect of miracles on the unrepentant is corroborated in the experience of the apostles. In Acts 14:8-18 the story is recounted of the reception of Paul and Barnabas as gods by the city of Lystra when the citizens saw Paul heal a man crippled all the days of his life. You would have thought this experience would have brought about

a glorious move toward salvation, but the story continues in verse 19 with these sorry words, "having stoned (they) drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." **Acts 16:12-24 tells us the story of Paul healing the demented, demon possessed girl of Philippi. You would have thought that surely this miracle would have resulted in great rejoicing and a turning to God.** Instead, Paul and his companion, Silas, were brutally beaten because of the miracle and, furthermore, were placed in stocks and chains in the deepest part of the dungeon. **The simple truth is that no saving faith is achieved by the miraculous. Nor did the apostles ever seek to evangelize through signs and wonders. They relied entirely upon the convicting, regenerating power of the Holy Spirit for their converts, the same as do we and the same as God instructed from the beginning.**

Why doesn't God use miracles to bring people to the point of salvation? Because salvation is based on "simple childlike faith." And that means that any man, woman, boy, or girl can come to Jesus the same way, regardless of race, creed, or color, or background, or education. **The biblical truth is simple: salvation is Jesus then, Jesus now, and Jesus forever!**

Does that mean that the "day of miracles" is over? Listen to me very carefully; there has never been a "day of miracles." There has only been the God of miracles! And we have been told in Hebrews 13:8 that "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

But there is a vast difference between the miracles of God sovereignly wrought and the gift of miracles sovereignly bestowed. God can, has, and does work miracles throughout history; yesterday, today and forever. The sign of the presence of God is always the miraculous, whether in heaven above or on earth beneath. **If it is of God, it is wondrously miraculous.**

Miracles of God are on every hand. They are recorded everyday, because the miracle-working God is with us forever. God does not change or evolve. His power and wisdom are this day what they were before the morning stars sang together as seen in Hebrews 1:10-12, "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they shall become old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." **The fires that forged the strong bands of Orion are the same as those that were seen by Moses in the burning bush of Horeb; and is that same fire that Israel looked upon in the Shekinah glory above the tabernacle and the temple; and is the same fire that smote Abihu in the day of judgment; and is the same fire that consumed the sacrifice and the**

altar and the very dirt of the ground in response to the prayer of *Elijah*; and is the same fire that burned in the presence of *Ezekiel*; and is the same fire that sat in *cloven tongues* upon Peter and the apostles on the Day of Pentecost; and is the same fire that blinded the eyes of *Saul of Tarsus* on the road to Damascus; and is the same fire that burns in the hearts of *believers* all over the world as we come together to worship and life up praises to His holy name. God does not change nor does His power to work miracles among men cease. Glory to God!

What, then, is the purpose of the miraculous? Miracles are for introduction, for authentication, for corroboration, and for substantiation. What does all of that mean to us here tonight? As in the days of Old, our generation needs to know that our God is still alive and well! That His power has not diminished. That His great love has not burned out. And that His desire to save has not waned.

Our faith and our assurance are not dependent upon a sign or a wonder or a miracle, but upon the promise of the Word of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, as seen in Romans 10:17, "So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." **I have the Word of God, and that is enough.**

If you have never been saved, then I ask you to consider the miracle of Calvary, which has paved the way for you to come to Christ.