

Title: Healings and Miracles

Text: 1 Corinthians 12.7-11

Theme: Spiritual Gifts

Series: 1 Cor. #60

Prop Stmt.

This passage brings up some issues that have been the occasion for a number of debates, disagreements and division. I am seeking to preach through this passage being mindful of the main message of the book. Therefore, we have to look at these issues with; a) a spirit of humility since we are not the source of truth, God is; b) a spirit of hesitancy since our experiences are not the final judge, God's Word is, c) a spirit of confidence in God, since His Word provides for us what we need to know. In other words, we must be cautious about our own opinions, but confident in the clarity of God. If a particular topic is not crystal clear in the Scriptures, we really should not make it a source of argument.

Here is what everyone agrees on: Spiritual gifts are important for the church to understand, embrace and use. And here is where the debate occurs: What does each gift mean? (the debate is usually over the so-called miraculous gifts vs. non-miraculous gifts) How were they used? And why? And are they still in operation today? And if so, in what way and for what purpose?

Introduction point #1 – General observations about this text.

There are no clear definitions provided for each gift. Paul does not provide different categories for the gifts. (wisdom/knowledge; faith/healing; miraculous powers/prophecy/healings/tongues) Therefore, we must allow for some overlap in their operation and recognize that there may be a miraculous and non-miraculous aspect even to the same gift. (e.g. faith) Faith may drive an infectious God-confidence, and it may be linked with the gift of healing. It is also clear that Paul is not bothered by the presence of miraculous gifts in his absence at the church of Corinth.

Introduction point #2 – General observations about this topic.

Most of the debate centers on the gifts of tongues and healing. However, while those gifts receive most of the press, they are only a part of a greater issue. The greater issue is: "are miraculous gifts for today?" Answering that question helps to provide us with a background and environment in which we can better deal with the more specific issues of tongues and healings. Let's start with a point that all believers agree on.

1. **God Performed Miracles.**

Creation, Flood, Tower of Babel, Exodus from Egypt, Conquest of Canaan, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and the life of Christ and the early days of the church are all clear evidence that God clearly performed miracles.

This Sovereign Creator established the world to function on the basis of laws that He designed. (law of gravity, law of reproduction, law of sin and death [2nd law of thermodynamics], law of Murphy [known as the law of the Detroit Lions – whatever can go wrong will go wrong]) Sometimes, God chooses to suspend or overrule one or more of His laws, or He intervenes in a very direct and obvious manner to make a point.

Sometimes we call something miraculous that technically is not miraculous. When a baby is born, and we are holding this new life in our hands, it is easy to say, “What a miracle.” Seeking to avoid the wrath of any new grandparents or parents, I want to carefully and compassionately say, “that baby is amazing, that baby is beautiful, that baby will probably grow up to be the president, but the creation of that child was the function of a law of reproduction. God superintended the union of matter to initiate a process of cell reproduction that resulted in the birth of this child. Now, I would argue that the original creation of the universe and along with it, the law of reproduction that was born in the heart of God, was miraculous. But, the ongoing function of reproduction is not in itself miraculous, but is providential.

When you look at the Scriptures there seems to be a pattern to the miracles that are recorded. Miracles do not appear on every page or behind every tree. Actually, they appear more clumped together in groups and, those times of miracles seemed to be during times when major changes (either major advances or major threats) were taking place in God’s plan of redemption for His people. (chart on screens) You can see that the times of miracles are very few in comparison to the rest of time.

2. God is still capable of performing Miracles.

I am not aware of anyone who loves God and His Word who would say that God is not capable of performing miracles. This point does not need much attention, other than to acknowledge that both sides of the issue believe this deeply. No one is intentionally seeking to present a “Honey I just shrunk God” sort of view.

If someone asks you “does God still do miracles today?” Many of you may instinctively want to say – “Well, yes!” Ok, when was the last time you saw the Red Sea opened up, or a dead man raised back to life, or water pour out of a rock after someone hit it with a stick, or someone feed 5,000 men with a couple loaves of bread and a few fish or a large fish swallow a man for three days and then get indigestion and spit him out? Does God still do miracles is different than, “Can God do miracles?” God is still capable of doing miracles, the question is, does continue to perform then now? Are miracles the normal means that God uses to carry out His plan for this world?

3. God will Perform Miracles.

The unfolding drama of God’s redemption and the ongoing formation of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ take place by colossal acts of God that impact the entire world setting. These events as they are depicted in the book of Revelation involve the sun turning black, the moon turning red, stars falling from the sky and all of the mountains and islands

being rocked. A third of the earth is burned up, a third of the sea turns to blood, and a third of the waters are contaminated. These future events involving the bodily resurrection of the two witnesses culminate in the visible and personal return of King Jesus on a white horse with His armies to take back that which is rightfully His.

So, we all agree that God did perform miracles. God can still perform miracles. God will perform miracles. But, is God performing miracles right now? Or are we living in a time of redemption and kingdom history when miracles as they are defined in Scripture are not part of God's means in carrying out his work?

4. **Is God Performing Miracles right now?**

A. View #1 – **The Need for Miracles is over therefore, God is no longer performing miracles.**

This view looks at the history of miracles as they are presented in the Scriptures and says that we are in an era in which the need for and purpose of miracles is not present. Therefore, we should not expect miracles, like tongues, healings, etc. For example, God's plan in redemption history was hidden for 430 years while the children of Israel were in Egypt. But, when God was ready to establish them as a nation and bring them to their own land, God did something that amazed the entire known world, when He, by use of huge miracles brought the nation of Israel out of bondage and into their own land.

The record of miracles in the Bible faded significantly until the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and then apart from a couple of miracles during Daniel's life, there was not another major surge of miracles until the time of Christ. This has led some to conclude that miracles are not the normal means by which God works. Miracles it seems were given to authenticate the messenger and were designed to draw attention to the message of the messenger. Miracles are like baby food that is supposed to lead a person to deeper realities. And since, miracles have in the past been the occasion for people to put more faith in the miracles and desire more miracles instead of putting faith in God and desiring more of God, then, acting as if we are living in an age of miracles is to some in reality a step backwards in faith. Since we are not right now in the midst of a major change in redemption history, we should not expect miracles.

Miracles took place when the church was born on the day of Pentecost. But, the church era no longer needs to start, it is already happening. To go back and try to repeat the day of Pentecost is like trying to go back and repeat the crossing of the Red Sea, or repeat the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. These were once and for all events that accomplished a purpose that no longer exists. If the purpose for these miraculous events is over, then it stands to reason that we should not expect nor try to repeat the miraculous event. As I mentioned, miracles were also a means that God used to show who the true messenger was. All of this culminated in the person and work of Christ, and after He left and the apostles remained, God confirmed their ministry with miracles until the Word was completed and now there is no longer a need for miracles. 2 Corinthians 12:12 says that signs, wonders and miracles are the marks of an apostle and since the apostles died, that

means that marks of an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles faded out. Doesn't 1 Cor. 13 say that tongues will cease? Therefore, signs, wonders and miracles are not for today is the conclusion that some have come to and it is not because they want to put God in a box. It is not because they are afraid of the Spirit, it is that they do not believe that miracles are the normal means that God uses to accomplish His plan and when you look at biblical history, miracles have never been the normal means that God has used. Most of the time, God has worked providentially (more of a behind the scenes approach) anyway. Therefore, even though God can still do miracles, God does not do miracles because there is no purpose for them. We are in a time in redemption history when miracles are not part of our daily lives. That is the essential summary of view #1.

B. View #2 – Miracles are a necessary part of the Christian life therefore, God still performs miracles.

But, what about the fact that miracles do not appear to be the normal means of God to carry out His plan in biblical history? Those who hold to view #2 would say, "Now just a minute, just because it is not recorded, does not mean God was not still doing them." For example, John's gospel said that Jesus did many things that were not recorded. And, the other thing that we have to consider is that when a book of the Bible was written, it was not the author's intent to record every last thing that happened, but to include the material that was germane to the main point of the book. Therefore, it is possible that there were miracles taking place in the course of history that the biblical writers did not include. There is some legitimacy to those arguments and must be considered.

This view (that miracles should be part of the life of a believer) looks at redemption history as a pattern. They see that the events, particularly of the life of Christ and the birth of the church as being an example or a pattern for our spiritual lives. They accept the fact that Christ died for our sins, rose again, ascended into heaven and then sent His Spirit to bring about the birth of the church. They accept those events has actual, literal, historical events, but in those events they see a pattern that we are to follow.

The death/resurrection event represents our salvation. Just as Christ died for us and rose again for us, we need to get saved. We understand that and will say, "You need to go to Calvary" or "You need to go to the cross." We are saying that you need to personally embrace and experience what that historical event accomplished for you. But, at the ascension of Christ, Christ told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit came. Therefore, (according to this view) after we are saved, there is a waiting time until we get this anointing. Like the disciples waited after Calvary (salvation) for Pentecost (anointing), we need to have a Pentecost experience in our lives. Therefore, what every true believer needs to do is be baptized or anointed by the Spirit with power. And when that happens, that person will (like the believers on the day of Pentecost) speak in tongues. If a person does not speak in tongues, then that person has never experienced Pentecost, and if he or she never experiences Pentecost, then perhaps that person has never experienced Calvary. Meaning, we need the miraculous evidence of the Spirit's power to authenticate genuine conversion.

This view takes historical/redemption events and turns them into a road map for our spiritual lives. I have seen people do the same thing with the OT. Egypt was the land of sin. The crossing of the Red Sea represents salvation. The wandering in the wilderness represents the defeated Christian life. Crossing the Jordan represents a spiritual break through that results in living the victorious Christian life in the promised land. Once you get into the promised land in your spiritual journey, your defeats are over, you rise above and live life on a higher plane, because you are now in Beulah Land and life is great!

Many (not everyone) who hold to view #2 tend to look at the Christian life as a 2-step process. First of all you get saved, and then later on you experience the Spirit's fullness, or power. Then you are able to tap into this Divine Energy and see miracles take place. The tension that I have with view #2 is not the fact that they believe in miracles (healings and tongues, etc.) for today. The tension I have is with their view of sanctification. In other words, many of them make tongues the divine litmus test for true conversion and power and that is just plain wrong and very discouraging to some particularly since 1 Cor. 12 is so clear that not everyone has the gift of tongues.

Those who think that miracles are something that we should expect everyday run the serious risk of putting their dreams and faith into the miracles instead of in Christ. On other hand, those who think that miracles are only for another time and place run the risk of saying "no" to a work that God may have done or may be doing. There is a third view.

C. View #3 – Although the purpose for some miracles has changed, God may still choose to operate through miracles.

Since everything that is natural is ultimately derived from the supernatural, the question of "are miracles for today?" I am afraid at times makes more of a distinction between the miraculous and the non-miraculous than is presented in the Scriptures. When we see miracles we think – WOW, now that is irrefutable evidence of the presence and power of God. Ok, I grant that point, although if that miracle is seen by a spiritually blinded person, like a Pharisee, even miracles are not a source of faith – only God is that. But, while miracles are a demonstration of the activity and involvement of God, look at history! Look at the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires. Look at the history of the nation of Israel! God is just as involved in "natural historical events" as He is in "supernatural" events. A 78 degree, day of sunshine is just as much an act of Almighty God as a hurricane.

In fact, even in the Scriptures, a supernatural miracle was often accomplished through rather natural means. The Bible is very clear that God is the Sovereign – Creator. The fingerprint of God is on everything. Therefore, there is a sense in which there is no difference between the supernatural and the natural. All ground is holy ground, every bush is a burning bush although there was only one bush that we know that was on fire and did not burn up.

For example, when God was in the process of breaking the yoke of slavery from off of the backs of the Israelites, he used a series of plagues that He inflicted upon Egypt. Some

of these plagues showed a relationship between the natural and supernatural. Take the frogs as an example. God may have just accelerated some of the ecological laws that He himself had put into motion. God did not necessarily create more frogs although He could have and possibly did. Perhaps He simply caused an extremely fertile frog condition and then called a family reunion of frogs in Egypt. Pharaoh almost croaked! What I think is so funny is that some of Pharaoh's magicians were themselves able to make more frogs appear. Now that's what Pharaoh needed! More frogs!! Frogs are normal. Millions of frogs in Egypt at the same time and in every house is not normal. But in some of the miracles of the Bible, there is a good deal of normal stuff.

Now the miraculous plagues were accomplishing a purpose. God was releasing the nation of Israel from captivity. That historical redemptive event is not taking place now. God is doing something else in His plan. Therefore the need for those miracles is over. The Biblical history of miracles does not seem to be everyday occurrences and when they do occur they seem to function for a divine purpose beyond impressing people. The times of miracles seemed to center on major turning points in God's kingdom plans. Therefore, if we are not living during one of those major turning points, it stands to reason that we are not going to see as much miracle activity. But, just because those purposes for those miracles have taken place, does not mean that all of God's purposes for miracles are no longer in effect. As I look at the entire landscape of the Scriptures, I do not see this sharp distinction for God's people between a life of miracles or a life without. Although miracles do not appear on every page in biblical history, all of life has the fingerprints of God on it. Paul is obviously not bothered by the fact that miraculous gifts are present in the church at Corinth. He is bothered by how the people are abusing gifts, but the problem is not the gifts, but what the people were doing with them. That is an important point to remember now. God is Sovereign and He can do what He wants, when He wants and how often He wants. If He wants to work through the laws that He has established for much of life – fine. If He wants to suspend or overrule those laws for His purposes – fine! We have to be careful that we do not make miracles the standard for authentic Christianity, because they are never put on that level.

Let's wrap it up for today. So, are miracles for today? Yes, if God so chooses. God just does not seem to choose that course of action all of the time and we cannot demand them. It is true that Christ chose not to do some miracles because of the unbelief of people, but that does not mean that if God does not do a miracle that it is because there is unbelief. Paul did not get rid of his thorn in the flesh through a miracle and he certainly believed and prayed. God has His purposes. Keep in mind that miracles were never promised to replace obedience, responsibility, humility and a growing sense of dependency upon the very person of Christ and the Spirit. If I need money, should I stay home and pray for a package of hundred dollar bills to appear in my mail box? No, I should pray for help in finding a job. God may chose to send the package, but do not sit around waiting on that package as an excuse to working. You do not need a miracle to cut up credit cards or stop wasting money on the lottery and cigarettes. If I am struggling with my temper, I don't need a miracle to take that away as much as I need to address the idols of my heart and stop worshipping what I want out of life and instead surrender to King Jesus. I need God's power just as much to change me as I do to change the situation.