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Signs and Wonders

"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." John 4:48

Key verses: Matthew 8-9; 12:39; Mark 5-7; 9:39; 16:14-18; John 3:30; 4:46-54; 5-11; Acts 2:22; 4:30; 15:12; 19:11; Romans 15:14-33; 1 Corinthians 14:1-2

Key personalities: Jesus; the Disciples.

Timeline: The God of Eternity walked and taught being fully God and fully Man, about 26-28 A.D.

Signs and wonders refer to the miracles produced by God like Jesus and in Acts of the Holy Spirit, such as through the Apostles--especially Paul--as a testimony to God's power and glory. We can see them portrayed in many places in Scripture (Ex. 7:3; Duet. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; Isa. 8:18; Dan. 6:27; book of Acts). This is also refers to *powers* and *miracles* as an instrument to point to God's confirmation as He used supernatural activities beyond our limited knowledge and comprehension to prove His point and demonstrate His Word. They were also used to show the authority of Jesus and, then, the Apostles and those sent by God such as Stephen, who healed people who were sick beyond current medical knowledge. This was the authentic witness and proof of God.

Signs are never pointed to themselves or the human performer; rather, they point to the Person and Work of Christ. If they point to the performer they are not real or from God (Acts 2:4-12, 22, 43; 3:7-9, 11-12, 16; 4:30; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:4-12; Heb. 2:4; 6:1-12).

Key Happening: The confirmation of Jesus' mission!

Signs and wonders that Jesus did refer to God's confirmation of His mission as He used supernatural activities (beyond their and our limited knowledge and comprehension) to demonstrate and prove His Deity and mission so people could put their trust and faith in Him.

- The word 'miracle' is not used to refer to the work of Christ in the Bible; rather, more specific terms are used: *Wonders* is to give a sense of awe of God, point people to His love and work. *Powers* are to prove His ability and claims. *Signs* show where God is at work. The Resurrection is the ultimate sign and wonder!
- They were also used in Acts and the Epistles to show the authority of the Apostles and those sent by God to heal people who were sick beyond current medical knowledge. This was the authentic witness and proof of God. Signs never point to themselves; their power and purpose never was and will not ever be to wow and entertain. When others use them, they are never to point to the person or the preacher or performer; rather, they must point to the Person and Work of Christ and glorify Him. When the manifestations become center stage, we miss the point of them by placing the focus on the delivery of the message while ignoring the message (Acts 2:4-12, 22, 43; 3:7-9, 11-12, 16; 4:30; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:4-12; Heb. 2:1-4).
- *Never believe* means unbelief, a deep refusal to see or to trust. Faith--as in believing in Jesus and then trusting in Him--is the essential aspect that opens our heart to receive His election and apply His redemption into our lives. Without a trusting belief, you have nothing. In spite of the

unbelief of the crowd and the perhaps misguided motivation of the official, Jesus healed this man's son and the word spread even though the people did not directly see it accomplished (Matt. 16:1-4; John 4:48; 1 Cor. 1:22).

- It saddens the Lord that so many people in this and, perhaps each generation, seek a sign and wonder just for sensationalism and do not seek Christ as Lord of their lives. It saddens Our Lord when people think that faith is a performance thing on a stage we seek ourselves and not Him. We seek excitement and look for miracles instead of Him.
- The wonder is not the healing; the real wonder is taking faith, making it real, and using it to catch others. We have to ask: *What are we seeking in and from faith?* Is it a show or is it the impact of His *real* wonder--that of His Word indwelling and working in us? What about the *real* wonder of His transforming work that dissolves our pride, creates our character, and builds our maturity? There is the *real* wonder--that of being contagious to others for Christ. A show will do nothing to create real authentic faith, which is why Jesus "puts it down" in the book of John.
- *Took Jesus at his word.* The contrast is that this man merely heard and then believed, a template for us today since ;we do not have Jesus physically here with us. We have His Word in Spirit and in Truth and we are to hear the Gospel and believe it. Jesus did not go with the sick man who would be healed by power of Jesus; this could have caused quite a crisis, yet he had more faith than Jesus' own people (John 4:46-54)!

Are signs and wonders for us today? Yes! It is often debated as to the normative aspect and whether or not it continues today. Some scholars propose that miracles are no longer a function of the church and were just a part of "redemptive history." However, there is no Scriptural support for that position! Miracles may be rare; however, to say they do not happen puts a limit on God's sovereignty. God has no limits! The only limits exist in the minds of men.

- What we need to do biblically is to seek what the Scriptures have to say regarding signs and wonders. Remember the scope, purpose, and context of the passages and the reason they are being used. When we do this, we find that the purpose was to glorify Christ, not put on a show! When the manifestations become center stage, we miss the point of them, placing the focus on the delivery of the message, and ignoring the message!
- Seeking a show from God is like just looking at an advertisement billboard; we are getting excited about the product, but never using the product. Signs and wonders in the Bible are meant to point us to where the action is; signs are wonders always point to Christ.
- So, consider miracles like signposts, showing us whom to seek--Christ. If we just seek the sign and our emotions from it, Christ will be the One who is ignored. This is like looking at an ad for a soft drink and thinking the ad will quench our thirst. Christ is whom we seek; He is the LORD and point! Any miracle is merely a means to show us to His Way and it is never a show unto itself or about our way!

We have to see that the Gospel is about relationships and the impacting, redeeming power of our Lord. It is not about traditions, culture, or a show. Christianity is cross-cultural and deeply impacting; it is more concerned with people than with customs. It is not about easy belief; rather, it is about the impact of our Lord going deeply within us, so He is displayed and deployed outside of us. Here is Jesus calling for us to cross our social and personal barriers to pursue people with a faith that is real, deep, and strong. Jesus transcended culture to minister to a person who would not have been

associated with or helped. In so doing, He cut across strict cultural barriers of race and gender, pointing us to the unity and impact of the Gospel.

God calls us to be *earnest*, that is, to be pursuing a serious, deep-rooted and determined faith. It is a call to persist in our faith and determination, regardless of obstacles--physical limitations, spiritual depression, spiritual warfare, or our circumstances. If everything came to us instantly, there would be no growth, no appreciation, no maturity, and no faith. Faith requires resistance and struggle to make it flourish and grow.

There are those who believe that the miracles of Jesus are not real or myths made up by followers for gullible people; the people who think this way cite that "there is no reasonable or scientific proof". Many liberals and scholars hold that view; they reject the Truth of the Bible for this reason. However, they do not realize the power and scope of Who God is what He has done, what He does now, and what He can do.

Key Takeaway: Without the extraordinary we have no ordinary. Real, true healing is all about that Jesus nailed our debt of sin to the Cross! He paid a debt that we could never afford to do by any means conceivable--not by works, or ideas, or experiences, or education, or service, or being good. If these things could add even an insignificant amount to our debt of grace, then Christ's work on the cross would have been unnecessary and meaningless because we could have done it on our own! Our saving faith is by Christ alone! There is nothing to add, and nothing to declare except to receive His most precious free gift of grace by our faith alone! The question inlaid in this *wonders* theme is *what will we do now? How then shall we live* (Heb. 2:1-4)?

It all comes to the decision of whether we will make our faith real and impacting, relinquishing our pride to allow us to learn, grow, and teach others, or will we plant our rears in the pew, thus making our only impact our butt print in that pew! Let us make sure our impact comes from a life transformed and carried on to the people around us!

The goal of the Christian life is our wondrous fear and zeal of a friendship with Christ! We start with Him, and we end well with Him. We are to receive His election, to know and pursue Him. He is the One we are to follow, not the ways of distraction and destruction. This is the wonder of *simplicity* that is to fulfill and sustain us. Our Zeal is to know Him and make Him known to others with clarity and honesty empowered by His Spirit, for His glory!

The Call to the Church? One of the big issues and problems is that most Christians just do not understand that Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, IS the Head of the Church--the whole Church, every church. This includes your church. Yet, our churches are run as if we were in total control and we reign supreme. This is especially true when we become too busy chasing signs, fads, trends, numbers, and sides.

The Church must model and teach that we can learn and trust and rely on our Lord. Material things will not satisfy us. Things of this world may satisfy us for a little while; but, the things of this world will never fill us, and we will always be longing for more--never satisfied. True spiritual nourishment is not from a show; rather, it comes from God's Word and our spiritual growth through worship, service, and prayer.

When we abuse the Bible, or draw attention to ourselves for showman sakes with pretentious pseudo miracles we are behaving like Satan! When we use it well, we are modeling Christ (2 Pet. 3:16). Satan seeks to get us to lose what God has given or has to offer. He does not want us to believe in miracles; if we do believe, Satan tries to get us to abuse them. In so doing, we are of no use to God, because we have bought the lie of the show and ignore Him as LORD. Our outlook has gone from

truth to fiction, to causing harm! The way to spiritual maturity and the glory of our reward is not in finding shortcuts or shows. The way to spiritual maturity is through learning, experience, and overcoming adversities and always seeking the Lord. It is a long and difficult process (Acts 14:22; Rom. 2:7).

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think that *signs and wonders* are for today? How have you seen them abused and misrepresented?
2. Why do you think that some scholars believe that the miracles of Jesus are not real or myths made up by followers for gullible people?
3. How is Jesus Christ displayed in your life as supremely greater than all?
4. Fruit and character is our primary call outside of salvation, and being blessed because of it is a central theme in Jesus' teaching. So, how much time and effort do you spend in an average week to develop or work on your character?
5. How does it make you feel that few of us ministers will undertake discipleship for ourselves or train others because of pride, lack of time, or misplaced priorities? This is why many seek trends and become showman instead of shepherds of God's flock.
6. Jesus' main reason was discipleship, which outweighed His miracles. Does this surprise you? Why, or why not? What gets in the way of church leadership seeing this?
7. How can we exhibit a life of *fruit, character, love, faith, and maturity* in our daily life now?
8. How can we develop the willingness to be a more *disciplined, character, fruit and faith* driven person who will realize *I am called, empowered, and filled* by Christ?
9. How do you show God's unfailing love and faithfulness? How can you do a better job at showing others that Christ is available to them?
10. How should someone who is filled with grace and truth treat other people?
11. How can your church go outside of their own cultural and racial boundaries to relate to others?
12. Have you submitted yourself to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the Good News of the Gospel proclaimed by our Lord, His disciples, and His Word? What can you do to make it more real and impacting in your daily life?