

Spiritual gifts #5

WORKING OF MIRACLES

Read: Acts 2:22-24; 2 Cor. 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4

What is a miracle?

A miracle is ‘an amazing or wonderful event, often attributed to a supernatural cause’ Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) widely influenced thinkers on this subject. In his treatise on Miracles he wrote: ‘*No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.*’

This sounds impressive but in simple terms all he is saying is, ‘The harder something is to believe the less likely it is to be true!’

What is a miracle?

- *Energema* = working, deed, act, action
- *Dunamis* = power, ability, strength
- Literally = ‘acts of powers’
- See 1 Cor. 12:7-11

Not permanent

The use of the plural indicates repeated use rather than permanent ability although some people see them more than others eg apostles (1 Cor. 12:28-29 [lit. ‘Are all powers?’]; 2 Cor. 12:12)

Variety

- The use of the plural also indicates variety (Heb 2:4)
- *Poikilos* = variegated, of various colours, diverse
- Perhaps never to be repeated (eg walking on water; crossing the Red Sea)

Acts of power

See Acts 1:8. Every Christian is promised power through the Holy Spirit

- Power to witness (Act 1:8; 4:33)
- Power to abound (Rom 15:13)
- Power to endure (Col 1:11)
- Power to heal (Mark 16:17-18)
- Power to overcome (Eph 1:19)
- Power to love (Eph 3:14-19)
- Power to handle suffering (Phil 3:10; 2 Tim 1:8)
- Power to preach (1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5)

We can all expect to see the power of God at work in our lives. But workings of miracles (acts of power) are given to meet situations which are above and beyond the norm

The purpose of miracles

Convincing signs, wonders and miracles confirmed—

- The ministry of Jesus (Matt 11:4-6; Acts 2:22)
- The ministry of apostles (Act 6:8; 9:11; 2 Cor 12:12)
- The preaching of the gospel (Act 8:6; Romans 15:19; Heb 2:3)

Signs and wonders today

- Compare the first century world with the 21st century world
- Cessationist view: ‘We don’t need miracles now we have the New Testament.’
- Not true for most of the world—signs and wonders still needed
- Still millions of people without Christ and without hope
- Eg Reinhard Bonnke crusades in Africa. Hundreds of thousands of people, regular testimonies of miracles – the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear.

Guidelines

1/Miracles are by definition rare

- What if diamonds could be found in every paddock?
- God can repeat them but is not obliged to do so unless there is a biblical promise or pattern
- Cf ‘Two or three witnesses’ principle (Deut 19:15)

2/Miracles are not ‘magic tricks’

Compare Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-13)

3/Miracles are normally beneficial

The result is always health, safety, encouragement (1 Cor 12:7; 14:12)

4/Miracles always honour God

Compare Acts 8:9 and 3:16; 14:14-15.

5/Miracles in themselves do not convince

- eg Story of the rich man (Luke 16:31)
- They either awaken faith or confirm people in their unbelief (John 12:37)
- Ultimately, we must believe God’s Word
- For those who do not believe, no proof is possible; For those who do believe, no proof is necessary

Signs

- *A sign gives a sense of direction*
- John uses the word thirteen times about the miracles of Jesus (eg 2:11)
- These signs pointed people to him
- Eg Appearance of the grieving face of Christ on the wall of the church at a Stephen Jeffreys meeting just prior to World War I (See B Chant, *Spiritual Gifts* 2002:80)

Wonders

- *Wonders create a sense of worship*
- People were filled with amazement when they saw the miracles of Jesus

- Matt 12:26; Mark 1:27; 2:2; 7:37; Lk 4:36
- Eg four people in Wesley International Congregation last year independently reported experiencing unusual and beautiful aromas while worshipping in the Sunday morning service

Miracles

- *Miracles (acts of power) give a sense of God's power*
- Convincing and compelling
- Eg Stephen Jeffreys who prayed for a girl with one eye and saw the creation of a new eye (Chant, *Spiritual Gifts* 2002:79)

Challenge

- It is easy to put miracles in too-hard basket
- We are commanded earnestly to desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1)
- This includes acts of power
- Jack Hayford: 'Nothing spoils a cemetery like a resurrection!'

Question: why do we see so few miracles?

- God's sovereignty? (1 Cor 12:11)
- Our unbelief? (Matt 17:20)
- Let's pray and believe God for miracles today

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Read Acts 2:22-24; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4

Biblical

1. What does Peter say was the reason for miracles, signs and wonders in the ministry of Jesus? (Acts 2:22)
2. What does the phrase 'as you yourselves know' (22) suggest about the nature of the miracles Jesus did?
3. What does Paul say are the marks of an apostle? (2 Cor 12:12) Which other New Testament apostles showed such signs?
4. Why do you think Paul says he worked signs and wonders 'with utmost patience' (ESV) or 'with great perseverance' (NIV).
5. According to Hebrews 2:4, what was the purpose of signs and wonders?
6. In terms of preaching the gospel, what advantage do miracles have over words? (Acts 4:16; 8:6-8)
7. What is one danger with miracles? (John 6:26-27)

Personal and Practical

8. 'To those who do not believe, no proof is possible; To those who do believe, no proof is necessary.' What do you think of this statement? See John 2:23; Luke 16:31.
9. What is the difference, if any, between a miracle and a healing? (compare Acts 4:30)

10. Share with the group stories of miracles you have witnessed.
11. Name any ministers today who you think would qualify as apostles according to 2 Cor 12:12.
12. Some people say that now we have the New Testament we no longer need signs, wonders and miracles. What do you think? (Compare the majority of people in today's world with those in the first century world.)

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