

# MIRACLES

By

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## Should you “Expect a Miracle”?

One of the popular doctrines of radio and TV Evangelists is the slogan made famous by the late Norman Vincent Peale: “Expect a miracle – make miracles happen.” Such expectation and attempt to make miracles happen is the source of much confusion and disappointment, and often results in people resorting to occult and “New Age” practices in their search for the miraculous.

Does God still perform miracles? We would answer with a firm Yes. God hasn’t changed, and certainly performs miracles whenever it suits His purpose. *His* purpose, not man’s.

Does He teach us to expect miracles to solve our problems? No, not according to scripture. To consider the subject, we first need to understand what is meant by “miracle.” When someone escapes death in a bad accident, we may hear them say, “It was a miracle.” A child is born, and it’s a miracle! Trees bud and flowers bloom, and someone dramatizes Spring as a miracle.

DEFINITION. But these are not miracles in the Biblical sense of the word. **True miracles are events manifesting the supernatural work of God aside from, or contrary to, His established laws (called laws of nature or natural law).** Clem Thurman gives an example: “A man loses control of his car, goes over a fifty-foot cliff, totals the car, but walks away unhurt. A miracle? No, for all of this is possible within the realm of natural law. The miracle would be if the car stops two feet from the ground, he steps out, then the car crashes! You see, in the latter example, natural law (this case, gravity) is set aside. **THAT** is what a miracle is.”<sup>1</sup>

Childbirth is a marvelous thing, but it is simply God working through the laws He established at creation, and is not miraculous. The miracle was when the virgin Mary conceived a child without a human father, which was contrary to natural law. The conception of Jesus was by the power of the holy spirit,<sup>2</sup> making him the “only begotten Son of God.”<sup>3</sup> (Begotten refers to origin, not birth). The birth itself apparently followed in the normal fashion; it was the conception that was miraculous: an immaculate conception.

Many things called miracles may be rare and marvelous, but still happen in keeping with natural law.

**SIGNS WITH PURPOSE.** Millions are seeking healing at the hands of those who claim power to heal according to the promise in Mark 16:18. Of course God answers prayers, and he may choose to heal even when people’s prayers are mixed with faith healers and other unnecessary practices. But the promise in Mark 16:18 is no valid ground for modern signs, miracles, and faith healers.

This verse is part of Jesus’ private instruction to the apostles. In verse 13 it tells of their unbelief. The next verse says, “Afterwards he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they

believed not them which had seen him after he was risen” (vs. 14). Then Jesus went on to say, “These signs shall follow them that believe” (Vs. 17). In other words, there would be signs (such as casting out demons and healing), to authenticate the apostles’ preaching *only* if they believed.

This promise was no meant for all believers, and that’s why the signs do not follow believers today. But they did follow the apostles, and their purpose is clearly stated. “They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed.”<sup>4</sup> They did not have the written word, as we do today, so to prove that their preaching was God’s truth, “signs” (miracles) were given. “God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold power, and by gifts of the holy spirit, according to his own will.”<sup>5</sup>

The apostles performed miracles for the primary purpose of proving their message, and not to solve personal problems nor to fulfill the longings of those who might “expect a miracle.”

The phrase so often heard today, “expect a miracle,” actually belittles the miracles performed by Jesus and special messengers sent by God. When Moses lifted his rod and parted the Red Sea, it demonstrated the fact that Israel’s departure from Egypt was wrought by God and not by man.<sup>6</sup> What was happening was clearly contrary to natural law. It was not the product of positive thinking, and was totally unexpected.

The miracles of Jesus were totally beyond the natural realm, and did not happen because people expected them. The disciples were taken by complete surprise when Jesus awoke from sleep in the boat and stilled the tempest, and also when He came to them walking on water. Neither Mary nor Martha were expecting Lazarus to be resurrected.

While Christ’s miracles filled a practical need, their primary purpose was to prove that He was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, sent with God’s authority.

When John’s disciples inquired of Jesus, “Art thou he...?” Jesus replied, “Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.”<sup>7</sup> The miracles He performed proved that He was, indeed, God’s Messiah. They made their impression on Nicodemus, who said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him.”<sup>8</sup> Peter emphasized this fact in his preaching: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know.”<sup>9</sup>

His miracles authenticated His claim concerning the kingdom of God. He said, “If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is come upon you.”

After writing of the miracles and teaching of Jesus, John said, “These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you might have life in His name.”<sup>11</sup>

**GOD AT WORK.** Just because people are not being raised from the dead or given sight instantaneously, as they were in apostolic times, it does not mean God is less powerful, or less willing to provide for and care for His people. He has the same power He has always had, and He is using that power to accomplish His purpose, though often we might not be aware of it nor recognize it. Nevertheless, we pray in faith because God

can and will answer prayer according to His own will. God works through His natural law to accomplish His purpose, just as He may work outside of natural law (miracles).

God heals people today in answer to prayer. He could heal everyone, eliminate all disease and ills, but He doesn't. Failure to be healed or see a miracle does not indicate a lack of faith. The apostles were men of faith, yet they suffered many setbacks, were often rejected and persecuted, and suffered illness. When Paul prayed for God to remove his "thorn in the flesh", God refused to do it.<sup>12</sup> Yet Paul never wavered from faith in God's leading him on to the final and glorious victory. He kept his eyes on the day in which all those who have fully entrusted their lives to Christ will be raised from death and given immortality. It is then, and not until then, that complete healing will take place, healing that will be total and permanent.

We are to have faith, not to perform miracles, but faith that God will perform His purpose for us and His creation. It doesn't require a lot of faith to acknowledge that God provides the sun and the rain, and gives us life and breath each day. We can see God's work in these things. But it is in affliction, in suffering, in losses, sorrow, pain and failure, that faith is needed — faith that God is working that which is right and good for our eternal welfare and His eternal purpose. That purpose is not simply in giving us the physical and temporal things we may need or think we need. Rather it is to transform us to conform to his image. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world."<sup>13</sup> This is the way we are to demonstrate God's power and work today, not through signs and wonders.

In the Revelation, John saw "A great multitude, which no man can number," and was told, "These are they which came out of great tribulation."<sup>14</sup> They were saying, "Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever."<sup>15</sup>

Have faith. Faith that God will sustain us through all the difficulties of the world; he will not leave us, and no matter how corrupt the world gets, he will enable us to endure it, and will give us a great victory in the last day.

## REFERENCES

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| 3. John 1:14                     | 8. John 3:2        | 13. Philippians 2:13–15    |
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