

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Faith is the catalyst of the Kingdom of God – it is what makes everything happen. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews confirms this with remarkable power and detail. Every person obtaining the blessing of God, whether in trial or in glorious triumph, did so by faith. So far as Scripture is concerned, there is no detached period of history during which faith is effective. Wherever faith is found, God is pledged to honor it, in accordance with His will and purpose.

At this point, there is a passage that is relevant to our discussion. It declares a procedure to be followed when one is sick among us. *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit"* (James 5:14-18).

Several things are notable about this unique text.

- † James was not an Apostle, indicating this is a common procedure. Here is a convention that involves no uniquely gifted people i.e., an Apostle or miracle worker.
- † There is an optimistic note to the text. This is not something believers are to simply try. Rather, it is a channel through which faith can be expressed.
- † Elders are nowhere represented as having unique miraculous powers. Elders are everywhere represented as feeders of the flock, not wonder-workers. Aside from Peter, who affirmed he was an elder (1 Pet 5:1-2), we have no example of any elder doing anything classified as miraculous, although two deacons did (Acts 6:8; 8:6,13).
- † The Prayer of faith is powerful and effective. The example cited to confirm this is the prophet Elijah--certainly a great miracle worker. Yet, James does not distinguish Elijah from us. Rather, he affirms the prophet was a man with a nature like ours. The prayer of faith, it should be evident, is not something that can be produced at will.
- † Even sins will be forgiven, indicating some illness is a form of chastisement. Contemporary Christian teaching rarely connects illness with sin. Yet, this connection is made in the Word of God (1 Cor 11:29-31). Here is a case where the raising up of the sick is accompanied with the forgiveness of sin.

It is not wise to speculate about such a text, or to make attempts to diffuse it with an empty theological position. This is not a guarantee of healing – it IS an open door through which such a benefit can come. But it all depends upon faith, which is *"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1). No individual or group of individuals will go astray seeking to have a strong faith, and to involve themselves whole heartedly in the will of God.

MORE ABOUT MIRACLES

More considerations about a controversial subject

by Given O. Blakely

APOSTOLIC MIRACLES

The Apostles occupy a unique position in the Kingdom of God. They were placed *"first"* in the church, not only in respect to chronology, but in priority as well (1 Cor 12:28). Because of their message, believers are said to be built upon *"the foundation of the Apostles . . ."* (Eph 2:20). Their prominence is depicted in the Revelation, where their names are said to be upon the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, or glorified church (Rev 21:10-14).

Paul spoke of the *"signs of an Apostle"* – a category of mighty works that validated both the persons and message of the Apostles (2 Cor 12:12). These included curses as well as blessings (examples of curses: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), and Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11). I know of no contemporary claims to such workings—even among those boasting of great power.

In another place, Paul spoke of *"those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient; in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God"* (Rom 15:18-19). Notice the priority of the things Paul did—*"WORD and deed."* It was his message that produced a reason for the *"mighty signs"* wrought by the Apostle. Here, then, is a special category of *"mighty works."* it should be evident they are not to be duplicated by those who are NOT apostles—who are

“AT THE FIRST”

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” (Hebrews 2:3-4)

The magnitude of our salvation is underscored by what was done “*at the first*”—i.e., when the Gospel was first preached, following Christ’s enthronement at the right hand of God. There are some key things to note in this text.

- ✦ It was the WORD they preached that was being confirmed, or validated.
- ✦ The *signs and wonders* were God *bearing witness* to the message they preached—a most unique thing. Mark says, *God working with them* (16:20).
- ✦ They employed different categories of miracles: *divers miracles*.
- ✦ Various *gifts of the Spirit* were also granted (1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:8-11).
- ✦ All of this *according to His own will*, driven by Divine purpose.

This is not a statement limiting the time during which miracles, or mighty works, were to be accomplished. These were “*special miracles*” (Acts 19:11), not the ONLY miracles, and were unique to the “*first*” period of the church.

THE GREATNESS OF THE POWER TO US

Ephesians 1:19-21 is a pivotal text in our consideration of mighty works. Here Paul prays God will open our eyes to see how great this power is. It goes far beyond what is reflected in the average church agenda!

- ✦ It is exceeding great power (verse 19)
- ✦ It was demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection and enthronement (verse 20)
- ✦ It was demonstrated in the placing of everything under Christ (verses 21)
- ✦ It is seen in God giving Jesus to the church as Head over all (verse 22)
- ✦ It is through His church that Jesus will use this power (verse 23)
- ✦ It is possible because we have been raised up with Jesus (2:1-6)

It is inconceivable that this great power is no longer available to the church, or that Christ has ceased to work through it. It is the vision of the church that is defective, and which can—yes, MUST—be expanded by the grace of God.

The teaching of this passage (Eph 2:17-2:6) is that God has incorporated us into Christ, having put us into Him (1 Cor 1:30). God has made Jesus “*the Head over all things,*” and given Him “*to the church*” in that capacity. Although He is the “*Head of the church*” (Eph 5:23), that is not the meaning of this text. Rather, it teaches that Jesus has been given TO the church as One possessing all power. He is over the enemies of the church, the angels who minister to the church, and the blessings reserved for the church. The church, however, cannot take advantage of His authority unless they see that it is for them. They are why He rules!

NOW GOD IS ABLE

With a great burden for the church, Paul also prayed they would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to take hold of this power (Eph 3:15-21). In this marvelous text we see the following.

- ✦ That Christ can dwell in our hearts only as the Spirit strengthens us (verse 16)
- ✦ That we are made stable ONLY as Christ does dwell in us (verse 17)
- ✦ That spiritual insight is the result of stability (verse 18)
- ✦ That God’s goal is for us to personally experience the love of Christ (verse 19a)
- ✦ That God intends for believers to be filled with His fulness (verse 19b)
- ✦ That NOW God can do far more than we can ask or think (verse 20)
- ✦ That this is the Divine intention for *all ages* (verse 21)

A successful church is not one with a large attendance, extensive program, or talented staff. It IS one through which the mighty power of God can work—when He desires, and for His purpose. A powerless, uninvolved church brings no glory to God.

The ability of God (“*Him that is able*”—Eph 3:20) is not a subject to be debated and philosophized. It has to do with the fulfillment of His purpose IN the church. There is no known limit to this power – all of the limitations are found in the affections of the people, or their unbelief (2 Cor 6:12; Matt 13:58; 17:20; Heb 3:19).

WHAT ABOUT NOW?

Does God work miraculously, or outside the realm of nature, NOW? The answer to that question is not to be found in a mere theological position. How God works depends upon several factors, some of which are determined by us.

- ✦ It is dependent upon His will. He will not contradict His purpose. (Eph 1:11)
- ✦ It is also dependent upon our faith (Matt 9:29; Mark 9:23)
- ✦ It additionally depends upon our agenda (Rom 12:1-2). Are we doing what He is doing?

God has called us into “*the fellowship of His Son*” (1 Cor 1:9). That fellowship has more to do with us joining with Christ in His working, than with Jesus joining with our self-made plans and agendas. It is pointless for any person or collection of persons to speak about the possibility of God working, if they are not “*workers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9).

We have a commitment from Jesus that “*all things are possible to him that believes*” (Mark 9:23). We also have a revelation that the mighty power of God is devoted to those who believe (Eph 1:20). Furthermore, believers are told that God is working in them “*both to will and to do of His own good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13).

If we choose to involve ourselves in the good will of God, we will find His power is available to us – but only to the extent our wills are harmonious with His. That degree of harmony is far more extensive than most have dared to think.

WHY DO PEOPLE SEEK MIRACLES?

Why do people seek miracles?, and is it wrong to do so? The answer is not as simple as it may appear. Like everything else in the Kingdom, there are acceptable and unacceptable reasons. In the case of unacceptable reasons, there are some driven by a lack of understanding, and some by stark unbelief.

Remember, God honors faith. He will not consistently do things extraordinarily beneficial for someone dominated by unbelief. I say "*consistently*," because He did feed the multitudes miraculously, only to have them leave because of unbelief (John 6:26,66). He also healed ten lepers, nine of which were unthankful (Lk 17:17). This was not, however, the norm of His ministry.

Consider four examples of people seeking God to work supernaturally. In three of these cases, the request was denied. Yet, there were different reasons for each denial. It will be to our profit to grasp the significance of these occurrences.

- † **To confirm the person is from God (The Pharisees, Matt 16:1-4).** *These men had already rejected Christ. Their request was neither noble nor right. Were Jesus not working in strict accordance with His Father's agenda, He could well have shown them some tantalizing evidence of His power. Instead, He told them there were indicators all about them, which they had failed to see. He further said a wicked and adulterous generation would not receive the sign they requested. They WOULD receive the sign of the prophet Jonah. Luke adds, "For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Lk 11:30). They would see the Son of God returning from heaven like Jonah returned from the fish's belly (Lk 11:31-32).*
- † **Desiring to see a mighty work (Herod, Luke 23:8).** *Wicked Herod wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle – not so he would believe, but to be entertained. There is no need to comment on the depravity of such a request. God is not in the entertaining business.*
- † **Considering it a sign of God's blessing (Gideon, Judges 6;13).** *Gideon wondered where all of the miracles were, if God was really with them. His remark was not driven by unbelief, but by discouragement. We know this is the case, because God wrought a miraculous deliverance through this Judge (Judges 7:16-22).*
- † **Seen as necessary for doing the Lords work (Paul, 2 Cor 7:7-10).** *Because of the remarkable revelations received by Paul, he was given handicap in the flesh—a thorn. It was a grievous affliction which appeared to inhibit his prodigious ministry. A great worker of miracles himself, he asked the Lord three times to remove the handicap from him. It certainly was within the realm of possibility. After all, Paul survived a number of extraordinary experiences that would have meant the death of anyone else (2 Cor 12:24-27). Yet, his request was denied. Instead, Christ told Paul His grace was adequate, and would enable him to triumph over the debilitating handicap.*

Certainly, none of us ought to be upset if our requests for Divine intervention are not answered. Neither, indeed, should we be surprised if they are.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER???

Well, what is the answer to the matter of miracles? Are they still with us? Is it still possible a miracle to take place? Are there still people in the body of Christ who can work miracles? **THESE ARE ALL THE WRONG QUESTIONS!** Who would dare to step forward and speak for God on these matters—particularly when God has not clearly and concisely answered them in Scripture? Who can affirm there are no longer any miracles – they are no longer possible? Who will speak concerning whether or not they are present in the body of Christ, which is represented throughout the world? God had neither directed nor appointed us to answer for Him in these matters. It is not on the part of wisdom to do so.

We have **not** been called to a position, but to a Person – a Living and Exalted Person with Whom all things are possible. The enthroned Christ is not idle, He is working. He is, however, looking for someone through whom He can work. In closing, consider the possibilities that attend the following conditions.

- † **We have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God (1 Cor 1:9).** *Having put us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), the Father now summoned to a cognitive fellowship with Him. Anyone imagining nothing extraordinary can occur in such a fellowship, betrays a high level of unbelief and spiritual ignorance.*
- † **We have been called to live by faith, knowing God will have no delight whatsoever in us if we do not (Heb 10:38-39).** *Living by faith involves being dominated by heaven. It is being governed by what has been revealed in Christ and through the Scriptures. Those who refuse to so live, are already sliding backward toward hell. If, however, we choose to live by faith, we will be living in the realm of limitless possibilities.*
- † **We have been called to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16).** *Walking in the Spirit is being controlled and led by the Spirit (Rom 8:6, NIV, 14). It is being sensitive to His inner witness, which is possessed by all who believe (1 John 5:10-11). Those choosing to so live are occupying heavenly places, where all things are possible.*
- † **We have been called to seek the things that are above (Col 3:1-3).** *There are things above which are not of this world. They are eternal things that will endure the end of the world, and can be taken with you when you die. They are things Jesus gives, including joy, peace, strength, the fruit of the Spirit, righteousness, and the love of the brethren. Those who seek these things, are in a place where all things are possible.*
- † **We have been called to look at the things that cannot be seen (2 Cor 4:17-18).** *Looking at things that are **not** seen is focusing upon what God offers us in Christ Jesus. Eternal life, dwelling in the house of the Lord, the blessing of God, and reigning with Jesus are included. As we look at these things, our view of the miraculous will be enhanced.*
- † **We are exhorted to draw close to the Lord (Heb 10:22).** *Drawing close to the Lord is allowing heaven to eclipse earth. It is an experience where the things of this world become insignificant and incidental. **IF, IN SUCH A POSTURE, GOD CHOOSES TO WORK A MIGHTY WORK, RECEIVE IT. IF NOT, DO NOT SEEK ONE!***