

God Is There

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Over the years I've heard this comment a number of times. People ask:

"If this is truly God's church, where are the awesome miracles that took place in the first century church? Why aren't we seeing these things today?"

An example of this is when Peter healed the lame man and said, in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk. I'll just turn to that in Acts 3:1.

Acts 3:1 *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*

2) And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3) Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4) And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."

5) So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

6) Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." (NKJV)

Of course, Jesus Christ did a phenomenal number of miracles because that was a sign of who He was. After the church started, after the resurrection—Christ had started the church and the apostles went out, there were miracles but I think they trailed off after that. I had a friend—an Elder in United church—who was so bothered by this question that he started his own group, searching for miracles, for manifestations of the spirit. He was battling in tongues and he had been taken over by demons.

There was a Rabbi who wrote in a column last week:

We seek instant gratification in all of our objectives. Even within the realm of spirituality, we all desire spiritual highs.

I think that's a sign of our times—instant gratification. We hear that and it happens in miracles too. Show me a miracle—that's what people want to see. Let's look at Matthew 16:1.

Matthew 16:1 *Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. (NKJV)*

Continuing in verse 4, Christ said:

4) A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed. (NKJV)

People ask for signs and quite often they get the wrong answer. Turns out that spectacular miracles or signs bring crowds of shallow believers. I think we’ve seen that in the church over the years. When you think about it, God really knows what He’s doing. With infinite wisdom, He has the plan that He’s working out and He knows what He is doing. God has different ways of using miracles at different times. People who say there are no miracles really don’t have eyes to see, because there are miracles all around us. Looking back through history, it becomes clear that God uses miracles at different times and in different ways for particular purposes. God has used more spectacular miracles when He is starting something or something new or different is happening in the world. I think the biggest example is when He called Israel out of Egypt. All of the miracles that were performed there, all the plagues against Pharaoh, and finally dividing the Red Sea and bringing the Israelites across on dry land—that was a miracle. But people soon forgot it and they wanted to go back to Egypt of all things. Look at that in Exodus 14:21.

Exodus 14:21 *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.*

22) So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (NKJV)

Exodus 19:3 *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:*

4) You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.

5) Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

6) And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” (NKJV)

God showed them all of these miracles, but again pretty soon they were forgotten. Christ performed awesome miracles as a sign of who He was. These crowds drifted away and the church soon became scattered. Look at Jude 1:3.

Jude 1:3 *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

4) For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

There were some miracles after Christ left, but people started drifting away. When God called Mr. Armstrong—and I know some people think that God didn't call Mr. Armstrong—but I do because I believe there were miracles in the same fashion when something starts. I think you can see the pattern there in what I'm talking about in the early radio church of God. Sometimes money came just in time for a radio broadcast to come out. The work went forward on a ragged edge. I do believe it was a miracle how the property in Pasadena was acquired for the church. There were miracles of healing at the beginning of the church era—they have faded away. James Smyda in a sermon not long ago mentioned that the Worldwide church era was an anomaly and I think it was. The Plain Truth and the World Tomorrow broadcast blanketed the earth. Many groups now are trying to duplicate that with their magazines and things and just aren't able to.

There are also examples of a personal nature that I think a lot of us can identify with. There's a story that I've used in sermonettes before and I want to repeat it because I think it's, in my life, quite profound. How did I come into the church? I was in my late teens and there was a beautiful program of music on KIRO—the radio station in Seattle—and I used to lay in bed. It was from 9:15-9:30 and the music was on and I would listen with headphones connected to a crystal set. If you know what a crystal set is, you're probably about as old as I am. At 9:30 came the Worldwide broadcast and I kept the headphones on and I became hooked. I started reading some of the booklets and articles that came from Pasadena.

My mother died and my father had been killed in an accident when I was 10 and I was a student at the University then so I moved into the dormitory and was by myself. My income then was about \$50/month. I was just helping on the janitor crew in the dormitory. That doesn't sound like much but back then it was quite a bit. \$50/month would pay about half my room and board and tuition. With a summer job, it wasn't hard to work your way through college. Times have changed. About that time, I got the booklet on tithing and I thought, I'll try this. So, I put \$5 in an envelope. It was anonymous and I mailed it to Pasadena. I dropped it off in the mail on my way to class. I came back in the afternoon and there was a letter from my grandmother and in it was a \$5 bill. Neither of my grandmother's ever sent me any money and neither did after that. So, it was profound in my mind.

Next month I said, I'll try this again so I put \$5 in an envelope and mailed it to Pasadena and dropped it off on the way to class. When I came back there was a letter from an insurance company with a check for \$5 and it turns out when I was an infant my mother had bought a life insurance policy and it was a full life insurance policy which paid some dividends and somehow, I had forgotten all about the policy and they found me at the dorms. I couldn't really call this happenstance; it had to be God talking to me and this is where I had to be. I think a lot of you have stories like that which have guided you to some place or some time.

There's a pattern in the way that God teaches. God performs profound miracles for a person or people and then He watched for the response. What are they going to do? Are they going to continue to give God the credit and try to obey Him? The history of

mankind has been failing that test. Individuals in Israel and in the church, even in modern times. In every case God calls out people and a few pass the test and hang on. Spectacular miracles bring crowds of shallow believers. Christ said, *many are called but few are chosen*.

In the intervening times, I think God is observing, but in His mercy, is not leaving us alone. Let's look at Philippians 1:6.

Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (NKJV)*

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (NKJV)*

God has given us a promise that if we are faithful, He will be faithful as well. God shows Himself through various things that happen in times of need in less dramatic ways. I call this a time of quiet miracles. I think miracles that you can see if you look, but you have to have eyes to see. I call it an age of quiet miracles. It's a time of testing. Are we going to see what God is doing? This is a method that God is teaching us and a method that is seen in the Bible. It's taken place in the church and I've seen it in my own life. God uses miracles at the beginning of something—really at the beginning to teach a lesson to show what He is doing. Sometimes quite awesome and sometimes not quite so awesome. Then He backs off to see what happens—what do we do? It doesn't mean there are no miracles taking place. There really are miracles all the time, but miracles for a particular purpose.

Looking back over my life and especially over the last few years, I can see many times when things just worked out. I've come to see that God really is just one step away from showing Himself. He's there and His help is there. I think this is true for those God is working with and for society in general. God steps one step back from openly showing Himself and I think He does it for a very definite purpose, both for those He is working with and for the world in general.

I have 2 reasons here.

1. For those that God is working with.

I have three points.

1A. He has shown us the miracle of His creation.

Romans 1:20 is one of my favorite scriptures.

Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse ... (NKJV)*

God has allowed us to see His creation. I think He has opened our minds to see that. The world has taken all of this creation for granted. There's an incredible blindness that God has brought upon the world. He has used that blindness for a purpose. It's a gift that we can see creation for what it is and see this whole design that is all around us.

1B. God, through His Holy Spirit, is teaching us to learn that we have to do something—hands on—with limited supervision.

This is why we have laboratories in school and college. I do believe in guardian angels. I think I've seen the unseen hand there many times. Look at Psalm 91:11.

Psalm 91:11 *For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.*

12) In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone. (NKJV)

Christ quoted this passage. I think in the syntax or the context, it applies to all those that God is working with. Matthew 18:2.

Matthew 18:2 *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,*

3) and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

4) Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5) Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. (NKJV)

Continuing in verse 10).

10) Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. (NKJV)

I have no idea of God's organization—how He does this—but I'm sure in my own mind there are guardian angels. I've seen a silent hand working things out for me. As an example, last week my checking account was compromised and I had to get a new checking account. I went to the bank and they restored the money that was lost and were very nice and everything just worked out. It seems like Satan is throwing rocks and they bounce off because there is that help. Luke 16:23.

Luke 16:23 *And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

24) *Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'*

25) *But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'*

26) *And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'*

27) *Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,*

28) *for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'*

29) *Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'*

30) *And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'*

31) *But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' '(NKJV)*

God has given us the Bible, He has given us so much and with that, I think God wants us to be satisfied and remain in the faith.

1C. God is testing us to teach us faith and humility.

He has allowed us to know His plan and to see His creation for what it is. He's letting us live in this world and experience the things that are happening around us.

John 17:14 *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

15) *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (NKJV)*

If we have faith, God will keep us from the evil one and protect us from evil spirits. We are to remain in this world and experience things that are going on here.

2. The world at large.

2A. God has blinded the minds of these people to His very existence.

They take a human life and all this creation for granted. They take all the cosmic universe for granted. They don't know why we are here and show no purpose there. God can blind man's eyes. There are examples of that. Luke 24, right after the crucifixion.

Luke 24:13 *Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.*

- 14) *And they talked together of all these things which had happened.*
15) *So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.*
16) *But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. (NKJV)*

Continuing in verse 30)...

- 30) *Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.*
31) *Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. (NKJV)*

God can absolutely blind a person's eyes to whatever He doesn't want them to see.

John 9:39 *And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (NKJV)*

God has blinded this world. Ecclesiastes 3 talks about how God made everything beautiful in its time. God has made beautiful music, as I mentioned, He has made right morals, He has made love and joy and mankind has perverted every one of these things—every facet. James 4.

James 4:1 *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?*
2) *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. (NKJV)*

Without God's laws and God's teaching, the world has completely gone the wrong way.

2B. God is teaching the ultimate lesson to the world, of good versus evil and it eventually leads total destruction.

That's the final lesson. Let's look at Proverbs 14.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (NKJV)*

Man's way leads to death. I just read James 4—where do wars come from? They come from not knowing God, not being able to follow God. Matthew 24 shows Jesus was telling about the end time.

Matthew 24:21 *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*
22) *And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (NKJV)*

That's the final lesson of good vs. evil leads to total destruction. I would like to turn to Daniel 2:20.

Daniel 2:20 *Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His.*

21) And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. (NKJV)

I think we've seen many times how God raises up kings, over history. He's able to raise up a king for His particular purpose. God deals with nations as part of executing His plan that He is carrying out in this world. I think in my mind, we saw that recently. We just had the election this month and Donald Trump was saved from assassination. It looked to me like a miracle. The bullet pierced his ear and just barely missed his head. He was saved again from assassination and people threw everything possible at him and he won the election. It does appear to me that God is using him in some way that we have yet to see. It does seem that God has stepped up what He is doing in this world right now. He allows us to witness what is happening.

Denis Prager in a recent column said, he never imagined that he would think of the democratic party victory as a blessing but now he sees it as a blessing in disguise because it led to the sounding triumph of Trump in this election. It's amazing how things worked out. I think we're seeing God's Hand in the world today. We just have to see that it's wonderful to know that God is there and doing these things and we are the witnesses. If we just have faith, he'll see us through.

God really is there for us. We just have to have eyes to see. Luke 12:7.

Luke 12:7 *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (NKJV)*

God says He knows how many hairs we have on our head. Which means that He has quite an investment in each and every one of us. As I read in Hebrews 13, God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. We just need to have faith in that promise.