

Lord, Stretch Out Your Hand

Introduction

I am often torn between the idea of modern-day signs and wonders and the sufficiency of Scripture. It seems that if you believe the Bible is sufficient then signs and wonders are not needed, and yet, the early church prayed for both; the knowledge and faith received from the Apostle's teaching, and signs and wonders to show the world God the Father and Jesus, God the Son were real. When Joyce and I worked overseas we observed signs and wonders when there was no Bible in the language of the people and the church was not present. As believers came and the church was established and the Bible was translated into the people's heart language the signs and wonders faded.

Today's message from Acts chapter 5, verses 12 to 16 is tied back to chapter 4, verses 27 to 31, please turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 4, verse 27 where we read of the persecution by the non-believers or by the world, then the prayer of the saints and how God acts. Reading at verse 27 of chapter 4, *“For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of*

God with boldness.” Moving to chapter 5, reading at verse 12, “Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. ... jumping to verse 16, The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.” Wedged in between these 2 sections of scripture is the story of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrating how serious God was in protecting His church and enabling it for taking the Gospel to the world. God’s judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was both a sign and wonder.

We observe the church prayed that God’s Word would be spoken with boldness and they prayed that God would continue to stretch out His hand to heal and perform signs and wonders. In our text for today, we will see that the Lord answered their request in both ways; the Apostles did signs and wonders by the power of Jesus, showing the world Jesus is God and Jesus Christ accomplished the bold proclamation of His Gospel through His Apostles.

This passage is about the faithful; those completely surrendered to God and believing and praying in devotion, these were the believers that defined the early church. Remember from chapter 2 of Acts, the early church was devoted to Apostle’s teaching, the fellowship, sharing meals together, and praying. The theme of chapter 4 through the middle of chapter 5 is; ***God answers the church’s prayers by granting the bold proclamation of the gospel and stretches out His hand with signs and wonders for the advancement of His Kingdom!***

Pray

Living Spiritually Through Faith

We have become biased against God's miracle working power due to abuses in our day. Like in my demonstration with the blue and clear of the jar, we have let the blue haze of the world cloud the clear truth of God. God does miracles all around us but we see dimly because the world taints everything; as you can observe the blue has separated but the clear but remains slightly cloudy or has a light blue haze. It is true, we must always rely on the Scriptures as primary. It is the Word of God that saves, not signs and wonders. However, signs and wonders done by Jesus in His day and in the Apostles' day were accomplished by God for His glory and for the salvation of many.

We too, should pray for boldness in our evangelism and that God would also work signs and wonders in our midst as well. On the other hand, we must never allow misguided emotions and zeal to see miracles to take away our desire to see God's Word authenticated by His power. We cannot let the charlatans, false prophets, false teachers and smooth-talking heretics cloud God's truth with their "blue haze" of the world. Through study and meditation of God's Word, and by surrendering ourselves to the Holy Spirit, God will remove the "blue haze" to give us clearer vision of who He is and of His truth and His mighty works.

Let's now go to God's Word to clear away the "blue haze" of the world and see God's truth more clearly. Reading at Acts chapter 5, beginning at verse 12, *"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Even though unbelievers respected their faith, dedication and proclamation of the Gospel – they remained unbelieving and separated from the church. Continuing in verse 14, And more than*

ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.” At first glance, does it not seem a little far-fetched that Peter’s shadow might fall on them and heal them? What was the purpose of such extraordinary healings? Was it to magnify Peter? Was Peter alone among the Apostles in performing these amazing healings? No Peter was not work for his glory and he was not the only one, for in the very next chapter we read, “Stephen, full of grace and power, was **doing great wonders and signs among the people.**” (Acts 6:8) Stephen was not one of the original 12 disciples, like Peter, but he acted with the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Moving ahead to chapter 19 reading, verses 11 to 12,¹¹ “God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.” This seems beyond the normal miracle and Paul was also not one of the original 12 either. I do not know if this was normal in the administering of miracles, as if there is a normal about miracles, but these miraculous healings take place while absent from the Apostles. Jesus was the first to perform miracles without physically touching and directly praying over the person, Mark recorded “Wherever *Jesus* came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and **implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.**” (Mark 6:56) The Apostles were following the example of their Master. Later in Acts we read that,⁵ “**Philip** went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and **saw the signs that he did.**” (Acts 8:5-6) Philip was one of the 12 as

Peter was. So, through all this we discover the Apostles performing miracles, signs and wonders in the power of the name of Jesus and they were commonplace. What purpose do these all miracles have in common? They were to verify God the Father had sent Jesus the Son and after He ascended to heaven, Jesus sent the Apostles to carry on His work of evangelism and expanding the church by His authority and power He received from God the Father.

The Purpose of Signs and Wonders

Luke summarizes the pattern in the Book of Acts when he writes, “**Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.**” (4:12) Signs and wonders for the purpose of verifying God was commonly done through the Apostles and in Christ’s Church, they were a regular occurrence. The Apostles would boldly preach and Jesus’ power would boldly heal. Luke writes that it was the Apostle’s hands that were performing the miracles but what he is really doing is connecting these accounts of healings and Jesus’ work recorded in chapter 4, when the church prayed, “**Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,**”³⁰ **while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.**” (Acts 4:30-31) The Apostles had become God’s mouthpiece proclaiming the Gospel and God’s hands in healing. In the Book of Acts the typical pattern for great movements of God in salvation began with a miracle coupled and with bold proclamation of the Gospel by an Apostle. Taking a count of this pattern recorded by Luke in Acts of miracles performed followed by the proclamation of the Gospel with many coming to believe, I found at least 17.

Let me share two examples that show this clear pattern of miracles opening the door for the Gospel and many coming to faith. Both are from Acts chapter 9.

First,³² “Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda (*Town between Joppa and Jerusalem and the name means ‘strife’*).³³ There he found a man named Aeneas (ahee·neh·as), bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.³⁴ And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.’ And **immediately he rose.**³⁵ And **all the residents of Lydda and Sharon** (*the plains area extended from Lydda to Joppa*) **saw him, and they turned to the Lord.**” Miracle performed and many people opened their hearts to the gospel and were saved. The next story follows right after beginning in verse 36 of chapter 9, where Peter traveled from Lydda about 9 miles to Joppa.³⁶ “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha (Aramaic name meaning “gazelle”), which, translated, means Dorcas (Greek form of Tabitha meaning “gazelle”). She was full of good works and acts of charity.³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, ‘Please come to us without delay.’³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.⁴⁰ But **Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.**⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.⁴² And **it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.**” Hundreds of people in Lydda, the plains of Sharon and now Joppa came to believe because of miracles and then the gospel proclaimed.

So, we understand that the working of miracles or signs and wonders by the Apostles helped open people to believing when the gospel was proclaimed. This is

what Luke wants all his readers to understand and why the saints in chapter 4 prayed to God asking, “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” *The purpose of signs and wonders was to glorify God the Father who sent Jesus, God the Son, who empowered the Apostles to bring people into the kingdom of God.*

Righteous or Adulterous Prayers

The question that arises and I have been asked is why is the prayer of the Apostles in Acts chapters 4 and 5 asking God for signs and wonders considered righteous while in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus taught asking for signs was evil and adulterous? Let’s examine both the Acts and Matthew passages and see if we can determine the differences. First, Acts chapter 4, “**Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,**³⁰ **while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’**³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Moving to chapter 5, reading at verse 12, “Now many signs and wonders were **regularly** done among the people by the hands of the apostles. Now moving on to Matthew chapter 12 where Jesus warns about seeking signs.³⁸ “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered *Jesus*, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’³⁹ But *Jesus* answered them, ‘**An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign**, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and

condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.’” (Matthew 12:38-41) Why did Jesus condemn a generation seeking signs and then the Apostles prayed and God grants them signs and wonders?

The generation Jesus condemned as evil and adulterous generation who would not believe regardless of signs and wonders or the preaching of the Gospel. They could not see past the blue haze of the world to see the clear truth of God. Jesus was teaching and preaching and anyone who cared to follow Him, for even a short while, would witness a miracle or a healing of some kind and yet they still refused to believe. So, to state it another way, seeking signs from God is evil and adulterous when the signs and wonders are demanded to prove God is God and seeking more and more evidence when evidence has been clearly given and the demands are from those with a heart of stone and they ask for more miracles, simply to cover up their unwillingness to believe as they cling to the lies or blue haze of the world.

It is the same today as it was at the time of Jesus and the early church; the evil and adulterous generation tells God that the reason they refuse to believe is that He did not perform enough miracles thus placing the blame on God. They are the sinners and He is calling them to belief and yet, in their stubborn hearts, they claim He is not enough. Just as they did then, they also do today, for we hear people basically say, *“God we would have believed if You would have performed one more miracle”* This is what many of the TV evangelists feed upon; people always wanting more miracles, so they perform what they claim are miracles to receive fame and money from the people. They defame God and get people to believe in what is not of the Bible. The problem is that they are trying to cover up

the fact that their unbelief is rooted in their sin and their rebellion, so they blame God.

We have the very same thing today, for example, when a practicing homosexual says that God made them the way they are. They tell us, “It is **not** their fault, it is simply who God has made me” They say, “God if you would have made me different, I would not be practicing homosexuality”. That is an example of an evil and adulterous generation. They blame God for their sin – they claim it is something He did. The right response before a Holy God would be to repent and ask God for His power through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to overcome their sin. In the case of the generation of unbelievers in Jesus’ day, they wanted more signs not Jesus. Today, in the example of the gay or homosexual movement, they want their sin more than they want Jesus. Seeking signs and wonders is evil if you make them the excuse for not trusting God.

But, if on the other hand, if you come to God praying for miracles, as the Apostles did, to bring Him glory through the vindication of His name in the salvation of sinners you are not an evil generation but a God-glorifying generation. The Apostles prayed for boldness in witnessing and they prayed that God would attest to His Word with signs and wonders for His glory and the salvation of sinners and God answered their request. God was ready to move in this way, it was time for His kingdom to make large strides toward its fulfillment. The church exploded to give it the solid foundation and the depth and the size it needed to advance the kingdom in the midst of persecution. Today the remnant church is coming under increasing persecution – it is time to go to our knees and pray to God for signs and wonders and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel for the glory of God and the revival of His church.

The Outcome of Signs and Wonders

The Apostles were performing signs and wonders, preaching the Gospel with boldness and these attested they had been given power by God and those who deceived others or fail to believe were judged by God as was the case of Ananias and Sapphira. As the people observed all of this, they developed a fear and respect for the Apostles and the believers of “The Way”. What is clear from verse 13 where we read, “None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem” is the signs and wonders gave many a reverence and awe, even the broader Jewish community but not everyone responded with repentance and came to believe. Even with signs and wonder and bold preaching of God’s truth the unbelievers did not open their hearts to God and did not become part of the church or as we read “None of the rest dared join them”. Reverence but unbelief was also observed earlier in the scriptures with the result of being lost.

Let me take you back to the Gospel According to Luke, chapter 8, Jesus arrived at Gerasa a well-known Roman city situated in the hills of the Transjordan about 35 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee and 19 miles east of the Jordan River. There Jesus encounters a man possessed by demons, whose name was Legion and He cast out the demons and healing the man. The demons entered a herd of pigs and ran off the cliff and drowned. Taking up the story at verse 34, “When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.”³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed.³⁷ **Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes (Gad·ar·ay·nos) asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So Jesus got into the**

boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ ‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.” The people had awe and fear but refused to believe. The point Luke makes is that for those who refuse to believe the miracles of Jesus and of the Apostles brings fear or awe to unbelievers but does not clear away the blue haze of the world, on the other hand, for the believers it brings appreciation and love for the saving work of Christ and they see the clear truth of God.

Another obvious result of the signs and wonders followed by the bold preaching of the Gospel is found in verse 14, “more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” The Word boldly preached coupled with all Apostles were doing in the name of Jesus resulted in respect for those preaching the Gospel, so much so, by faith “they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.” (v. 15) It is amazing that people’s faith was so clear, they understood Peter was empowered by God, and they recognized even if his shadow would pass over their sick that they would be healed. This was not superstition or magic they were healed because they believed. They were able to separate the blue haze of the world from the clear truth of God. This explosion of faith was affecting people in the whole region. Reading verse 16, “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.” These people trusted Christ through Peter and their faith healed them. The people of this region trusted Peter, the other Apostles and other believers because they saw God’s power working through them and the clear truth of God penetrated their hearts. When God brings the dead soul

to life and His Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives them faith to believe – this too is a miracle for the spiritually dead come to spiritual life by the power and grace of God.

The early church prayed for bold proclamation and for God’s miraculous works. They prayed that God would grant them boldness and continue working in miraculous ways. What should we, Christ’s remnant church, pray for in the 21st Century? The exact same thing! We should pray that God would grant us boldness and that God would work in amazing ways. Trusting God to work in any way He chooses to substantiate the Gospel message. We can plan and organize but unless God moves, it is all for nothing. We should pray that His Word goes forth and that His Spirit goes with it making people ready and receptive, whether God chooses to heal in an astonishing way or not, we should go expecting God to work miracles in the hearts of people.

It is perfectly clear when God removes the blue haze of the world that in New Testament times, in our time, the gospel is authenticated by signs, wonders and miracles of various characters and descriptions with the proclamation of His Word. The genuine work of God and not the blue haze works of man brings repentance and faith and salvation. The Scriptures never, anywhere, say that these things were only temporary—never! There is no such statement found in the scriptures. We need to quit trying to control God and telling Him what to do and surrender our lives to Him, serving Him and those He calls for the rest of our lives.

The need today is for an authentication of God, of the supernatural, of the spiritual, of the eternal, and this can only be answered by God graciously hearing our cry and shedding forth again His Spirit upon us and filling us just as He kept filling the early church. I pray, my beloved, we can have the faith of the early

church, for they believed in answer to their prayers God would grant the bold proclamation of His Word and with His outstretched hand He would do signs and wonders for the advancement of His church and kingdom. God we ask, stretch out Your hand to Canyon Bible and by the faith You give we will see the clear truth and sperate from the blue haze of the world to be as the believers of the early church – living and acting out in faith. Amen!