

"Signs and Wonders"  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
July 26, 2020

"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. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 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. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed." (Acts 5:12-16)

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Pastor Wally indicated that Acts 5:12-16 reflects the first "intersection" between the early church and the rest of the people around them – the culture around them and the impact the church had on their community. What impact is our church having on the community surrounding us and how do we know?

Pastor Wally spoke of miracles as defined by Wayne Grudem who defines a miracle as "a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself" (Systematic Theology, chapter 52) as opposed to the idea that a miracle is God's direct intervention into my life which implies that He is not directly involved in my life 24/7/365 or that God is acting contrary to the laws of nature which implies that the "laws of nature" operate independently of God and that God must intervene or "break" these laws in order for a miracle to occur. Pastor Wally went on to say that folks tend to believe that a miracle has a positive outcome (check out the "signs and miracles" revealed in Exodus 7 and 8 which are described as plagues) – that they result in "rainbows and unicorns" in my life. If I don't understand what God's signs and wonders truly are, then what does this say about my understanding of who God is? Explain.

Pastor Wally also spoke of God's Divine Providence (see Psalm 103:19; 104:14, 21 and Job 12:23). Webster's 1828 dictionary says that providence is "the care and superintendence which God exercises over his creatures. He that acknowledges a creation and denies a providence involves himself in a palpable contradiction; for the same power which caused a thing to exist is necessary to continue its existence." R.C. Sproul once said that "[Psalm 46] focuses on God's providence to remind the people that God is in control, that He will bring about His promises in His own way, and that His people are to "be still" and know that He is God. By elevating God's providence in the minds of the people, the psalmist extols the power of God...The word providence has all but disappeared from Christian vocabulary. In times past, believers often spoke of Divine Providence directing their lives. They faithfully beheld the "works of the Lord, Who has made desolations in the

earth" (46:8). Too often we attribute to chance what rightly belongs to God. Let us, then, bring back into the church a right understanding of the providence of God, praising Him for His preservation." Have I lost sight of God's "care and superintendence which God exercises" over my life? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally reflecting on Hebrews 2:3-4 said that miracles are not outside the providence of God. Hebrews 2:1-4 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." Is it possible that I need to "pay much closer attention to what [I] have heard" that "was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" and why?

John Piper in explaining Divine Providence said that "[w]hen it says "provide" in Genesis 22 the Hebrew word is, "see." Very simply Abraham said to Isaac, "God will see for himself the lamb." And in verse 14: "The Lord will see." Why does God's "seeing" in Hebrew mean that he will provide? I think the deepest answer is that God never simply sees without acting. He is God. He is not a passive participant in a world that exists without his sustaining it. Wherever God is looking, God is acting. If God perceives, he performs. If he inspects, he effects. In other words there is a profound theological reason why "providence" does not merely mean "foreknowledge," but rather "the active sustenance and governance of the universe." When God "sees," he "sees to." His seeing is always with a view to doing. Where he patrols, he controls." Piper pointed out that a good understanding of His providence is needed so "we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move." Do I see how an understanding of His Divine Providence drives the level of my faith...or does it? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Charles Spurgeon posited the following thought: "Is not the gospel its own sign and wonder? Is not this a miracle of miracles, that 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish'? Surely that precious word, 'Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely' and that solemn promise, 'Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out,' are better than signs

and wonders! A truthful Saviour ought to be believed. He is truth itself. Why will you ask proof of the veracity of One who cannot lie?" Haven't I, at some time in my life, asked for God to "prove" Himself by performing a miracle for me? Have I not said to God at some point in my life that if He will only do X, then I'll do Y for Him? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that we are not "brokers" of God's power, but rather a conduit of it...that the power to do whatever it is He wants to accomplish comes from Him, passes through me and is used as He sees fit. In what way(s) do we get that wrong? Explain.

A.W. Tozer once said that "miracles should not be uncommon. I am not a miracle preacher. I have been in churches where they announced miracle meetings. If you look in the Saturday newspaper you will see occasionally somebody who will hit town and announce, "Come out and see some miracles." That kind of performing I do not care for. You cannot get miracles as you would get a chemical reaction. You cannot get a miracle as you get a wonderful act on stage by a magician. God does not sell Himself into the hands of religious magicians. I do not believe in that kind of miracles. I believe in the kind of miracles that God gives to His people who live so close to Him that answers to prayer are common and these miracles are not uncommon. John Wesley never lowered himself to preach miracles once in his life. But the miracles that followed John Wesley's ministry were unbelievable. On one instance he had to make an engagement, and his horse fell lame and could not travel. Wesley got down on his knees beside his horse and prayed for its healing. Then he got back up and rode, without the horse limping, to where he was going. He did not publicize the miracle and say, "We'll have a big tent here and advertise it." God just did those things for him. While C. H. Spurgeon did not preach healing, he had more people delivered in answer to his prayer than any doctor in London. Those are the kinds of miracles I am talking about." Luke says in Acts 5:12 that "many signs and wonders were regularly done". So...dare I expect God's signs and wonders today? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Discuss Pastor Wally's statement that I need to "chase after Jesus".