

IX

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Through mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:19).

In a brief ten years of time, the Apostle Paul had “fully preached” the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum. Therefore, “having no more place in these parts” (vs. 23) he desired to come by Rome on his journey to Spain.

The remarkable growth of the gospel was due in part to proper techniques, to much hard work, and also to political, social, and religious circumstances which helped set the stage for evangelism. It cannot be denied, however, that “mighty signs and wonders” didn’t hurt anything. As a matter of fact, as Paul reflected on the growth of the Gospel, he associated it with “mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God.”

BEYOND THE VEIL

A study of church growth in the twentieth century might also reveal the same.

The July 11, 1986 issue of *Christianity Today* contains a fascinating article entitled, "Where in the World is the Church Growing?" A color coded map reflecting growth rates around the world places mainland China, Brazil, Guatemala, Costa Rica and other "third world" countries in the highest category.

When Christian missionaries were expelled from China in 1949-50, there were only approximately 1,000,000 Chinese believers. Today it has been conservatively estimated that there are between 30-50 million believers in mainland China and some feel that there may be as many as 100 million. This has happened in spite of the fact that the greatest bloodbath in human history occurred in China during the same period of time, and Christians, in particular, were victims of the holocaust. It seems that the amazing growth of Christianity in China cannot be explained without an element of the supernatural.

Christianity Today tells about a miraculous healing in Zhejiang Province and then adds:

The experience of the Zhejiang villagers is not unusual. Healings, exorcisms, and other supernatural signs and wonders have accompanied phenomenal growth of the church not only in China, but in many other parts of the world. In fact, the church around the world is growing in ways that have seldom before been seen.

Leslie Lyall, in his book *God Reigns in China*, estimates that in the three years following 1980 as many as 27,000 people per day may have become Christians in China.

Donald McGavran was a Christian Church missionary before founding the Fuller School of World Mission. He is quoted in Peter Wagner's book, *On the Crest of the Wave*, as saying:

I do not come from a church background that emphasizes healing. In fact we have been a bit critical of it. . . . The evidence I uncovered in country after country—and in North America

as well—simply wouldn't permit me to hold my former point of view. And I may say that as I meditated on it, my biblical conviction also wouldn't permit it (p. 131).

Those of us who believe that the Bible is inspired of God sometimes grow weary with people who reject it's message purely on the basis of preconceptions and prejudice. We correctly argue that before one rejects the miracles of the Bible he ought to be honest enough to at least consider the evidence. Perhaps the time has come for us to practice what we preach. Why should we reject the accounts of modern miracles without first considering the evidence?

We, who are Children of the light, should not be afraid of the light. We are commanded in Scripture to "prove all things" (I Thess. 5:21). The Greek word translated as "prove" is one which is used with reference to the assaying of metals. We are to "prove all things" and then: "hold fast that which is good, and abstain from all appearances of evil. . . ."

In 1974 Peter Wagner taught a workshop at the Lausanne congress stressing the urgency of planting new churches. Afterward a Nigerian came up and thanked him. He said that the Lord had enabled him to start 258 new churches in the previous five years with an estimated 34,000 believers. Such a dramatic harvest of souls is apparently not something unusual in our generation. We seem to be in the midst of a world wide revival, and unfortunately, some of us like Rip VanWinkle, are sleeping through the revolution.

In 1983, Regal Books published *On the Crest of the Wave*, by Peter Wagner. At that time he indicated that there were 78,000 more believers every day (p. 19). This was not a figure drawn wishfully out of the air, but a studied conclusion based upon statistical evidence.

He points out that 100 years ago there were no churches in Korea. Now there are 6,000 in the city of Seoul alone and six new churches are started in South Korea every day. These churches include the largest Methodist church in the world, the

largest Presbyterian Church in the world, and also the largest church of any church in the world.

Wagner was himself a missionary to Bolivia for sixteen years. During all of that time on the mission field he did not see any signs of miracles. The evidence he encounters today, however, is causing him to have second thoughts. He writes:

Why is it that we American evangelicals have not really believed in the immediate power of the Holy Spirit in miracles and wonders? Oh, most of us believed it intellectually because we read about it in the Bible. But it did not play much of a part, if any, in our daily lives or in our churches. I now think that a good deal of the problem is the pervasive influence of secular humanism in our American culture" (p. 129).

It may very well be that Wagner is right. Many of us have arrived at preconceived notions on the basis of a theological bias. We have our minds made up and sometimes resent anyone trying to confuse us with the facts.

THE MORSE FAMILY

It has been my good fortune to be personally acquainted with the family of J. Russell Morse. They have been missionaries laboring in Asia since 1921 and are among the most famous Christian workers in the world. The *Reader's Digest* and other national and international publications have featured articles about their outstanding work.

A book by Eugene Morse, *Exodus to a Hidden Valley*, was published by *Reader's Digest* and condensed in their February 1974 issue.

In more than sixty years on the mission field this family has seen dozens, and perhaps even hundreds of miraculous answers to prayer. Permit me to share just one. The fact that this story was recorded in the *Reader's Digest* will give it a certain measure of credibility with some people. We know that this popular publication is not inspired, but its editors do have an outstanding

track record. They researched the book about the Morses for a year before going into print.

The essence of the miracle was this. Several thousand refugees were trapped in Hidden Valley, high up in the Himalayan Mountains. On the verge of starvation they found their rice crop threatened by a plague of caterpillars.

They had no sprays or insecticides . . . literally nowhere to turn but to God. They had picked bushels of caterpillars by hand, they had released their chickens in the fields . . . they had tried everything within their power . . . and had failed.

Finally they assembled their preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, and song leaders to decide on a course of action. Like Elijah confronting the priests of Baal they determined to challenge the caterpillars by the power of God.

Together with at least one person from each affected family they went from field to field praising God and crying out for deliverance.

Within three days the plague was gone. They heard on their radio that the same or similar plague had destroyed thousands of acres in lower Burma, and no insecticides seemed to be effective against it.

Now the conscientious reader is faced with a decision. Do we summarily disregard this story as a fabrication, do we consider it a coincidence, or do we accept it as a miracle from God? Pharaoh saw a whole series of miracles without surrendering his heart to God. Let us give diligence to guard against hardening our hearts like the Pharaoh.

Not everyone is sensitive to spiritual things. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, for example, spoke with an angel and yet did not believe. His wife, by contrast, simply felt her baby move within her womb and was filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to be sensitive to even little and insignificant inward feelings as she was.

One tremendous asset in discerning the power of God is the ability to reason. Sometimes we get in such a hurry that we fail

BEYOND THE VEIL

to stop and reflect upon unusual circumstances. Balaam, for example, got so mad at his donkey that he was ready to kill it. At that point God opened the animal's mouth and he began to reason with the wayward prophet:

Am I not thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee? (Num. 22:30).

When Balaam stopped to think about the unusual things happening right before him, God opened his eyes and he saw an angel standing in the way with a drawn sword.

What do you suppose God will have to do to us before we will slow down long enough to really consider some of the unusual things happening around us?

DR. GARLAND BARE

Dr. Garland Bare is quoted several times in this book. His name is synonymous with integrity to all who know him. He has lived a life of faith and can tell stories by the hour about answers to prayer.

Among the most remarkable experiences of his life was a miraculous healing which took place in Pua, Thailand in 1973.

A young man named Ban Chong wanted to become a Christian. His father was a witch-doctor and forbade him to do so. In order to keep him away from the influence of the missionaries Ban Chong was banished to the mountains for a year to care for the cattle. Here he was stricken with falciparum malaria and was brought to the hospital where Dr. Bare was practicing.

For some forty eight hours Dr. Bare used every new medical treatment and technique available, but to no avail. Ban Chong only became worse.

Finally, as a last resort, they began dripping quinine into his veins. At this point the patient began to hemorrhage in his digestive tract and bladder. The condition was described as "black water fever" as it causes the urine to turn black.

Dr. Bare then gave Ban Chong a transfusion. In that remote area only one suitable donor could be found . . . and he weighed but 90 lbs. One unit of blood was given . . . but it did no good.

By now Ban Chong's blood pressure was 80/20. His family was summoned to his bedside and informed that he was dying. His witch-doctor father came with his brother, Jur Sha, who was a Christian elder.

Father - "Can God heal my son"?

Dr. Bare - "God can do all things!"

Father - "If he becomes a Christian will that guarantee his healing?"

Dr. Bare - "No!"

Father - "One year ago I forbade him to become a Christian, but now I am willing if he wants to."

Ban Chong - "It is too late . . . I am dying."

Dr. Bare - "You can give what is left of your life to God."

Ban Chong - "I can't pray . . . I have on the spirit strings."

(Spirit strings are articles associated with demon worship. By now Ban Chong's blood pressure was 50/0 . . . his extremities were cold and his eyes were glazed. Dr. Bare asked for scissors and removed the spirit strings.)

Ban Chong - "God, I am dying. If it is at all possible save me!"

At this point Dr. Bare said that immediately Ban Chong's color returned to his face and his bloated stomach became flat. Dr. Bare asked for a blood pressure reading and the nurse said it was 120/70 . . . his pulse was 80 and regular . . . and he had no more fever or other symptoms of malaria.

Since it was late Friday night Ban Chong remained in the hospital until morning and then was released a well man. On Sunday he was baptized into Christ along with his father and other members of the family.

Dr. Bare states that one of the interesting ironies of the story is that the miracle was recorded at the hospital by an unbelieving nurse. Not only was she not a Christian, she had been openly antagonistic to the Gospel. After witnessing this event, however,

she ceased her opposition to Christianity . . . but still did not give her heart to Christ.

I personally believe this story. I think all who know Dr. Garland Bare will believe it too. If you do not believe this story you ought to at least examine the motives for your unbelief. Is it a lack of evidence which causes you to doubt, or is it a humanistic view of God? Surely the rational mind must conclude that all things are possible with God!

BRAZIL

According to *Christianity Today*, Brazil is among the countries of the world where Christianity is growing at the greatest rate. It was my privilege to visit there several years ago and speak at a missionary conference.

When the conference was over Gerry Laxen and I took several days and visited missionaries throughout the country. Just before returning to the States we were privileged to spend a day in Sao Paulo.

My reason for visiting this beautiful city was to see first hand a little group of believers who prayed. David Sanders told me about them. At the time he was a veteran of thirty five years on the mission field. He had been called to Sao Paulo some time before to baptize 37 people into Christ. He was not certain just how all these people were converted to Christ, except that there was a woman who prayed. She had no theological training, but apparently had so many prayers answered that people were coming to Christ as a result.

When we arrived I was delighted to discover that a prayer meeting was scheduled in her home that very night. It was a large home in a very nice part of town. Since preacher counts are notoriously exaggerated I counted chairs before anyone arrived. There were 96 chairs.

When the meeting began I observed that every chair was occupied and some parents were holding small children on their

laps. There were also people standing, and people listening from outside. There were easily over 100 people present.

K.O. Backstrand used to say, with a certain amount of sarcasm, that one way to call some churches to order is to ask for testimonies. In some places when you do that it will get so quiet that you can hear a pin drop. This was not the way it was in Sao Paulo.

After singing a group of spirited praise choruses the smiling and excited converts began sharing their testimonies. Bro. Sanders translated for me. One man said that he had leukemia . . . until he came to Sister Fonseca. He claimed he was healed. A woman stood up and told about her divorce. Her estranged husband had refused for years to give her any support . . . until she came to Sister Fonseca for prayer. Within three days the money began to arrive. The testimonies continued for more than an hour. I was invited to share a few words with them . . . they had a Bible lesson . . . and prayer. It was after 11:00 p.m. before the people began to leave.

Sister Fonseca had been mixed up in the occult for fifteen years . . . and so had many of her converts. They were discovering, however, that there was power in the name of Jesus which they had not known in their former life. At the time I was there the number of believers had already grown to 400 . . . and they didn't even have a preacher or a place in which to meet.

It reminded me of Paul's experience in Ephesus when thousands came to Christ out of the occult. The Scriptures put it like this:

Many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:18-20).

ANGELS AND DEMONS

We live in an age when thousands of American citizens are fascinated with the occult. Books on the subject are frequently

among the best sellers and libraries have long waiting lists of people who want to check them out.

Preachers of the Gospel believe in a real Devil and have some grave reservations about the many people who place themselves in the sphere of his influence and power.

I have spoken with a considerable number of missionaries who claim to have seen the power of demons manifest on the mission field. Things happen that for all intents and purposes reflect the supernatural.

Isn't it strange, however, that we are sometimes more prone to believe in a supernatural Devil than we are in a supernatural God. We steer clear of books and paraphernalia about the occult, for we properly fear their power . . . yet we are sometimes reluctant to believe in the reality of angels or the miracle working power of prayer.

Let us state categorically: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world (I John 4:4).

If the Devil has the power to work the supernatural in our day and age, then God has more power.

Many parents are placing their children in Christian schools or are home schooling, because they fear the pervasive influence of humanism. It tints and shades our thinking in sometimes very subtle ways. Every church believes in prayer, but not all churches believe in answers to prayer. Perhaps the pervasive influence of humanism has affected us more than we are willing to admit.

In many places it is completely orthodox and expected to pray for the sick . . . if they ever start getting healed, however, you're apt to be in trouble.

NO MIGHTY WORK

Virtually everyone within the framework of Christendom believes in the miraculous power of Christ. We may not feel comfortable believing in miraculous power today, but certainly

it was manifest 2,000 years ago when Jesus walked upon the earth.

It is interesting, however, to note that there were places where even Jesus could do no mighty works.

As incredible as it might seem, it was in His own hometown of Nazareth. These were the people more familiar with the flesh of Jesus than any other. When He stood up to speak they recognized Him as the carpenter who had lived and worked in their midst for almost 30 years. They knew that His mother's name was Mary, and that His brothers were James, and Joses, and Juda, and Simon. They knew that His sisters still lived in the area.

They were so familiar with the veil, that it prevented them from going "beyond the veil."

For this reason the Scriptures teach, "AND HE COULD THERE DO NO MIGHTY WORK." Oh, He did lay His hands upon a few sick folk and heal them, but the mighty manifestations of His power which were seen elsewhere, were impossible to perform in Nazareth. Their drenching doubt and pessimism smothered out the flames of His miracle working power.

Even Jesus could not do mighty works in Nazareth!

How is it in your town? How is it in your congregation?

The Scriptures beckon us to enter in boldly into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus. We are to enter in through that new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil . . . that is to say . . . His flesh!

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER IX

1. Why do some deny that the miracles recorded in the Bible are true?
2. What can be done to get such people to consider the evidence for believing the Bible?
3. Why do some people deny the existence of miracles today?

BEYOND THE VEIL

4. What can be done to get such people to consider evidence today?
5. What part did “signs and wonders” have to do with Paul’s efforts at evangelism?
6. In your judgment is there really a wave of evangelism around the world or is someone just making up all these stories?
7. Discuss the situation at Nazareth which made it impossible for Jesus to do mighty works there.
8. Why do you suppose there is such an interest today in the occult?
9. How can we demonstrate that Jesus is more powerful than the Devil?
10. If God worked a miracle in your life, who would object?