

Should The Church Do Miracles?

Mark 16:15-20

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Introduction: It has been a delight to spend this week with your church. Jordan is not only a dear friend but a brother whom I respect a lot. I hope that you value his heart for God, his command of Scriptures, his care for people and his wonderful vision – it's actually a rare mix. This being said, his sense of humor... is great.



I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know your church more. We are grateful for your support and should you desire to receive our newsletter, feel free to fill in the questionnaire or ask me in an email.

Can We Perform Miracles?

This morning will be an odd "missionary message". I would like to address a question that I get a lot when I travel in different mission fields. As believers, do we have the power, the authority to heal the sick, to cast demons out – and even to resurrect the dead? I have heard we do – yet hospitals and mortuaries are still quite full!

Our friends and brothers from charismatic circles often say that we do have that authority, that the church ought to do miracles in the name of Jesus. And they point to Mark 16 as a proof text – so we are going to look at this passage.

But before we do, I want to warn you about something. Most bibles will put this section in brackets to indicate that there is a doubt as to whether it is part of the gospel of Mark. Some of the best manuscripts of Mark do not contain that finale. Now I do not want you to feel robbed of your confidence when you read the Word of God. Fortunately, we have over 6000 Greek manuscripts of the NT, a spectacular number for such an old book. When you compare them, there are only a few passages of Scriptures where there is a doubt. This is one of them. The solidity of the Scriptures is beyond anything, beyond any other antique literature. A specialist says:

...we can with confidence reconstruct the text as it was originally written, or at least come within about 99 percent of it. This is a record of preservation that by far and away surpasses that of all other texts from antiquity.¹

¹ Evans, Craig A. *The Reliability of New Testament Manuscripts* (Lexham Press: 2014) [Source](#). Also [here](#).

For the sake of argument, we are going to assume that it was part of Mark's Gospel and see whether it does mandate you, the church, to perform miracles...

Mark 16:15-20

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." ¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

God has given to some the authority to perform powerful miracles to confirm the Gospel.

Proclaiming The Good News (v. 15-16)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

"To them" refers to the apostles. Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead. And it took quite a while for that odd reality to set in – nobody rises from the dead! But they had to face the evidence. Jesus is alive and he tells them something that we are all familiar with.

We are to "proclaim the Gospel" all around the world. This message is not only for the WASPs. It's universal. Even the French can benefit from it! Jesus is not your local philosophy teacher with an original idea to defend. He is the eternal Son of God, the Jewish Messiah, and the Savior of the World, and everybody should know about Him. Eventually, the whole world will recognize that reality, either bowing down for judgment or bowing down with an amazing sense of gratitude and admiration.

- Jesus is the Gospel! It's not a contract we have people sign. It's an encounter with the living God who made us and who is restoring our broken hearts.
- The Good News comes to our friends through two channels. We see the first channel in Matthew 13 where God considers our life to be like a seed. Our testimony, the way we behave matters, our love matters. And the other channel is the Word of God. It's the seed that will awaken someone to realize that the shame, the guilt, the pain that we all feel come from our sins, and that Jesus is the person who took all of that on himself to deliver us from our sins.
- In Christ, we are instantaneously declared righteous as we acknowledge our sins and acknowledge Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. We are then adopted, we are reconciled to God.

Everything changes. We become citizens of another country, we change passports. And the outward expression of that is baptism. Some have taken verse 16 to say that baptism is necessary for salvation. Not at all! That would be a negation of the cross of Christ, and a complete misunderstanding of what salvation is (see Eph. 2:8-9, Tit. 3:5-7)! But baptism demonstrates the reality of our salvation.

I hope you are trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation. I hope that in doing so, you have gone through the waters of baptism as an obedient expression of your salvation.

So the apostles are to proclaim the Gospel far and wide...

Now the tricky part!

Demonstrating The Good News (v. 17-18)

¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

These signs are spectacular:

- They will cast out demons.
- They will speak in new tongues
- They will pick up snakes
- If they drink deadly poison, it will be fine
- They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.

Whoa! Powerful... Do you do that? Should you do that?

Jesus speaks of "signs". A word that describes miracles, but actually, it is mostly used with the meaning of "an indication, a post, signpost." Sign of what? Three realities:

1. **New revelation.** Every time God gave a new revelation, he authenticated the authors with miracles. Moses and Joshua (the Law). Elijah and Elisha (the Prophets). Now Jesus and the apostles (the NT).
2. **New spokesmen.** This goes with the previous one. Every sect claims to have new revelation – but God-appointed prophets prove the veracity of their words by signs.
3. **New covenant.** In the synagogue Jesus wants to heal a man who is sick, and he says,

"For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." (Mt 9:5-6).

Signs authenticate. They are not the essence of the things authenticated. Throughout Jesus' ministry people wanted signs – not seeing that the signs were simply meant to lead everyone to worship Jesus as Savior!

So, did Jesus mean to empower the apostles, or to empower believers at large? Is it a promise to the church? To you? Should you go to hospitals, and morgues and ... do miracles?

Before we go further let's make a very important distinction. It's actually a vital definition for the rest of this message. Imagine that Jordan, your pastor, is bored stiff with my sermon, falls asleep and falls off his chair. He hurts himself badly. He is wounded and perhaps he is dead.

- If I come to him and I say: "In Jesus name be healed" and he is healed, is it a miracle? Absolutely it is! In that instance, I am acting as Jesus would (that is the meaning of "in Jesus' name"), and I exercise a direct authority over his condition.
- Now if I get on my knees next to Jordan and beg the Lord to have mercy on him, his wife, his daughters, this church, and suddenly he is healed. Is it a miracle? Absolutely it is!

- But you see the difference, right? One miracle comes from my command, the other comes from prayer.
- The Bible clearly says that God will do anything he wants, and that we should never hesitate to pray for a miracle. What I am saying this morning has to do with the *direct* command of miracles.

The key is to identify “those who believe”.

- The most common way to understand this text is to consider that “those who believe” are the believers, those who are saved and baptized in verse 16. That is the charismatic perspective “Those who believe in Jesus will do these signs...” It seems a logical conclusion, because in context, this is the closest antecedent...
- But there is one rule to understanding any text of Scriptures... Context! I have another perspective, which I believe matches the rest of the NT. You need to read the preceding section in Mark 16 to see who we are talking about here...

¹⁰ She [Mary Magdalene] went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, **they would not believe it.** ¹² After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but **they did not believe them.** ¹⁴ Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them **for their unbelief** and hardness of heart, because **they had not believed** those who saw him after he had risen. (Mark 16:10–14)

Four times (4x!!), Jesus is reproaching the apostles for their unbelief. So actually “those who believe” are the apostles who will believe. They need to wake up and smell the roses! Come to believe once and for all that Jesus is risen — and get on with the mandate of demonstrating the Good News with signs, miracles...

So which is it? Is the church mandated to perform miracles, or are the apostles mandated to do miracles? Shall we vote on that since the truth is always found with the majority of the ballot!

The Signs of The Apostles

There is actually a simple way to find the answer to that question. We are roughly in 30 AD. There is a book that tells us what happens next, right? This book is called the Acts ... *of the apostles*! It tells the story of what happens from 30 to 60 AD (again, roughly). So the easy way to see who is in view in Mark 16 is to look at who does miracles... And there we see 2 groups of people performing miracles:

- Acts 2:43 “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”
- Acts 5:12–16

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. [...] ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

- There is a touching story in Acts 9. Dorcas is a wonderful young lady who loves the Lord, but she dies. The church and the family wash the body, lay her in a room... and they go get Peter. Why? Because they know full well that as a church, they don’t have the authority to do much... And Peter

comes and she comes back to life. I wonder what it was like... Did an angel come to her in heaven and say, "Hey, sorry, you are going back down, and one day you will have to die again... !!"

- Then the apostle Paul comes to the scene, and there again, he does multiple and powerful miracles. When he arrives on the island of Malta, the sick of the island were healed – doctors were out of a job!

Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 12:12 "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."

Doing miracles is precisely the mark of an apostle of Jesus Christ – it's not the mark of a church!

Apostles' Representatives

Let me mention the second group of people who performed miracles. At one point the apostles are overwhelmed with visits and caring for the poor. So they ask the church to appoint seven men to represent them.

Acts 6:6 shows the apostles laying their hands on these men, as a gesture of representation, and from there on, the seven begin to perform miracles:

- Acts 6:8 "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people."
- Acts 8:6 "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."

This is so fascinating. God grants the apostles the authority and power to perform remarkable miracles. They do it. And they are able to grant that power to those who will represent them. All of that has to do with mandate. God gives them the mandate to do it.

- That's why there were miracles in the list of gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians – an apostle was there.
- That's why there are no miracles listed in the gifts mentioned in Romans – no apostle was there. But Paul wants to visit to communicate some gifts...

If I were to go to downtown Simi Valley, and if I were to stand in the middle of the street to direct traffic, what would people do? They would not follow my lead because I have no mandate from the city to do this. Same with miracles. Jesus grants that authority:

- To the 12
- To the 70
- Not to the church.

There are two other texts that we should consider briefly:

- Heb 2:2-4 tells us that those who saw Jesus – the apostles! – attested the truthfulness of salvation "by signs and wonders and various miracles".
- And then when the foundation of the Gospel was solidly laid out, the apostle Peter spoke to the church about spiritual gifts and said that there are only two types of gifts: those who speak must "speak the oracles of God", and those who serve should do so "by the strength that God supplies". Speaking. Serving.
- The sign gifts have fulfilled their role.

But... You Don't Know This Guy!

I realize we have gone through a lot of material and you didn't know this morning that you would get this avalanche of text and content. But this is so important. Because when you suffer, or when your friends are hurting, you will have people telling you or telling them that this man over here is an amazing healer, or has such a power – he will take care of it. So much pain, so many disappointments, and so much money has been lost on these false promises.

In the NT, Jesus' miracles and the apostles' miracles have an impressive signature. They show "the finger of God" to take after the expression found in the book of Exodus. What are the marks of true miracles?

- **Real.** Even the enemies of Jesus, like in John 9, had to admit to the reality of the healing. Cf. young man in Mâcon...
- **Instantaneous.** Dozens and dozens of times we see the words "immediately," "at that instant" ... So many of my friends have heard 'believe that you are healed and you will be'. Not so.
- **Often collective.** So many times we read that all sick individuals in an area or a gathering were healed.
- **Unrelated to seriousness.** Same power to heal Peter's mother-in-law's headache than to heal a lame who never walked in Acts 5.

If you want to be absolutely shocked, look up Derren Brown "[miracles for sale](#)" on Youtube. He is a magician and a hypnotist and he trains a man to be a faith healer who performs miracles in Charismatic circles. It's actually despicable...but so telling.

Bottom line. Let's not be fooled by false apostles and false miracle workers. God mandated his apostles to perform miracles and he warns us of false miracles coming in later days...

I was born of a Jewish dad who was deep into the occult. He and my mom were all about healing. And it is of the same type of healing that these men do...

Confirming The Good News(v. 19-20)

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Sometimes we think that miracles will make people believe. That is not true. Listen to what John 12:37 says: "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him"

- Miracles don't make disciples.
- Miracles are signs. They point to the preaching.

That's the point of a miracle. It drives a point home! And it points to Jesus' new message! And this is a message of hope that is eternal. Someone who is healed from cancer but dies 100 years later and goes to hell has actually not gained anything.

Bottom line, the miracles served as a signature that God sent Jesus to forgive our sins and that he mandated the apostles to lay the foundation of the Church by preaching the Good News.

Look at verse 20 again: "the Lord worked with them [who? The apostles!] and confirmed the message by accompanying signs".

The miracles were a confirmation of the Gospel. Not the essence of the Gospel. In a way, they are intrusions from the future since one day the whole universe is going to be restored. But they are not ordinary expressions of God's presence.

Conclusion

You have been patient! Time to conclude. There are other elements we could touch on. But our time is up.

When faced with suffering and sickness, we should pray. Let me say this. We should never hesitate to pray for healing, to pray for miracles. Notice what 1 John 5:14–15 says:

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

When faced with spiritual oppression, we should trust in God's truth.

- The demons have been disarmed and put to open shame (Col 2:15).
- We are delivered from the domain of darkness and belong to the kingdom of his beloved son (Col. 1:13).

At the same time, the Gospel, that is, the very person of Jesus, is central to our lives. Conversion is the ultimate healing because it is eternal, and it leads to our resurrection.

There was a chain of responsibilities... The Father sent the Son. The Son is our hope. The apostles were faithful in laying the foundation. Since then, men and women from all over the world have been faithful to pass on the baton of the Gospel.

I trust that this is your experience. You know and love Jesus and the Gospel. You cherish the testimony of the apostles and that you cherish their preaching as you meditate on God's Word. And I trust that you have experienced the grace that is in Christ.