

***Question: Some churches place a great emphasis on miracles, but others do not. What would Jesus do if he were on earth today?***

In the gospel of John, we see Jesus using miracles as a means for bringing people to faith; but he wanted these people to place their faith in him and not in miraculous signs (John 20:31). It is also clear that Jesus did not come to heal every physical disease and amaze people with his powers. Instead, he came to bring a message of hope that would transform hearts and lives of those who would believe in him. An over-emphasis on miracles themselves instead of focusing on Jesus and his message can create problems.

Although Jesus continued to show his compassion through healing and blessing people miraculously, he was often critical of those who were always looking for miracles. To a royal official from Capernaum, he said: “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders . . . you will never believe” (John 4:48). When some of the Pharisees came asking for a sign from heaven, Jesus said: “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39).

As much as we may be impressed with miracles today, it is also clear that even the miracles of Jesus did not guarantee that people in his day would believe in him. After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees admitted that he had done many miraculous signs; but they were determined to kill both Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:47-50; 12:9-10). A little later John wrote, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37).

The Bible also teaches that Satan and his servants have the power to produce counterfeit miracles that can deceive us into believing lies instead of the truths Jesus taught. Jesus warned his disciples that “false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (Matthew 24:24). In his letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul said that the “coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). An over-emphasis on miracles can make a person more easily deceived by Satan’s trickery (1 John 4:1).

That God has a place for miraculous signs through his chosen agents is not in question. He can do anything he wants in anyway or at anytime he wants. But we must be sure we are not deceived by false miracles, and we should be careful of placing so much emphasis on miracles that we miss Jesus and his message of eternal life. The miracles in the New Testament were helpful only when they led people to trust and follow Jesus, but they were a hindrance when they caused people to care more about what Jesus did for them or gave to them than believing his message and following him. Even in our prayers, we must be careful that we do not become so fascinated by the power ascribed to prayer and the desire to get what we want through prayer that we fail to trust in the Lord as the one who always does what is best for us all. It is not miracles but Jesus who saves us and gives us new life.

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