

The Purpose of Signs and Wonders

Jack Hughes

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If you have your Bible you can turn to Luke 9. [I'm] actually going to preach this passage—[Luke 9:1–11]—twice and emphasize two different things.

I think pretty much without exception, everybody wants to see a miracle. Christians [especially] want to see miracles because we believe in God, we know miracles are true, we know God has done miracles in the past, and we just can't wait until [He] does them again. We would love to see it happen, especially when there is this entire unbelieving world out there. When a miracle happens, [Christians say], "I told you so. I told you so. God exists. Ninner ninner." Feeding this hunger [for a miracle] is this incessant string of TV programs, movies, and books that all talk about supernatural things and powers. Every little kid wants to be Spider-Man or Superman because [those characters] have power and everybody wants to see power being wielded.

Oddly enough, at the same time [that] all this is going on, and there's all this fascination with angels, the supernatural, the occult, and powers, there's also the huge trend in our society that's saying [that] none of that is true, [that] God doesn't exist, there are no miracles, there is no life after death, [and] we're nothing more than random, chance amoebas that have formed out of happenchance slime over millions of years. Here we are and we're going to die, and go back to the dust, and that's it. We're just the next

generation of “X-Men.” That’s it. We’re just an accident. Men, being fickle, like to latch on to whatever serves their point. If they want something from God, they’ll be religious and ask Him to bless America. But then, when they don’t want to submit to God or obey [Him], then they’re evolutionists. It’s very handy for them.

True Christians—those who believe the Bible is true—have always believed that miracles are true and [that] God is a God of miracles. We’ve been seeing [miracles] as we’ve been going through the Gospel of Luke. Any Christian realizes that God could do a miracle anytime He wants. He could do more miracles today than He ever did before and there’s nothing that can stop Him. Psalm 115:3 says, “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” He doesn’t need anybody to give Him permission. As we’ve been going through the book of Luke, we have seen that Luke is emphasizing Jesus’ miracles—His miraculous works.

We addressed this issue [of miracles] before when I preached a sermon from Luke 6:17–19 called “Miracles Then and Now.” Kevin Hobson, who is one of the people [in charge of] our Web site, tells me that it is the most frequently downloaded sermon on the [church] Web site. This tells me that people are fascinated about this [subject] and they want to know more about [it], so I’m going to give [them] more. I’m not going to cover the exact same things, so you might want to get that sermon—if you’ve never heard it or you’ve forgotten it—on Luke 6:17–19. You can just listen to it right off the Web site.

In that sermon, we learned several things. First, that God still does miracles, the most common of which is the salvation and transformation of people. That is a miracle. That is supernatural. When someone is saved, and they’re regenerated, they’re made into a new creature, they’re able to walk away from their sins, they have a whole different worldview, and they start becoming more Christlike, that is a miracle. God is doing that all the time today.

Second, He is not giving people sign gifts like He did in New Testament times. You don’t see anybody today going down to St. Joseph’s Hospital

and just emptying the whole place out. [Even though people claim to have sign gifts,] that doesn't happen [today].

Third, when God did grant people sign gifts so they could preach repentance and do these signs, He only gave that ability to a limited number of people in a limited geographical location for a limited amount of time. As a matter of fact, that's how it was in the whole history of the world. You have Moses who did some miracles, you have Elijah and Elisha who did some miracles, and Jesus and the apostles. [In] those three time periods, [it was] always certain people [in a] certain location [for a] limited amount of time. That's it.

[Fourth], we also learned that sign gifts are primarily for unbelievers, not to entertain believers, [or] to encourage believers. Believers have the Word of God—they can look at the Word of God and be encouraged. They're supposed to believe this Book. The miracles are recorded here. You read them, you believe, you're encouraged. You don't need new ones. Paul makes this clear, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 14:22, when, speaking of the sign gift of tongues, he says that it is “not to those who believe but to unbelievers.”

[Fifth] we also learned that, unlike those who claim to have miraculous sign gifts today, Jesus didn't manipulate the crowd—there wasn't a stage, there weren't tickets, there weren't people backstage doing background checks. He just went in and healed everybody of every kind of disease and sickness. That is the sixth thing: He healed all manner of disease and sickness, [and] even rais[ed] people from the dead.

It's amazing to me how people say, “Oh, so-and-so, he has the gift of healing.”

“Really? Does he heal *all* manner of disease and sickness?”

“Well, no.”

“[Has he] ever raised anybody from the dead?”

“Well, no.”

“What does he heal?”

“Earaches and backaches.”

Seventh, we learned that Jesus and His apostles were all able to discern who was demon-possessed and [to] cast out demons with a word. There was no elaborate ceremony, no holy water, no incantation learned from ancient people. It was just, “Come out of them.” And eighth, and finally, Jesus healed everyone, often regardless of [the person’s] faith. As we learned last week, He healed the woman with the hemorrhage and He didn’t even know it. He made no conscious effort to heal her. She just touched Him and [she was] healed.

This morning, we are going to address some other aspects of signs and wonders. [We’re] not going to address the same things [that were addressed in the previous sermon on this subject], but there will be a little bit of overlap. Just to kind of prepare you, we want to focus primarily on the *purpose* of signs and wonders, even though this isn’t the main theme of our text. Our text actually has two main themes. One is the calling, equipping, sending, warning, feedback, and modeling of Jesus’ method of discipleship, which, Lord willing, we’ll get to next week. But today I just want to survey the text and see what we can learn from the text and other related Scriptures about the *purpose* of signs and wonders.

This is so critical because once you understand the purpose of signs and wonders, you understand why God did miracles in certain periods and times in history, [and] why He isn’t doing [them] today like He did back then. That will help you have discernment so that you are not led astray. You might be thinking, “Well, why would we be led astray?” Because we also learned before that God has given Satan the ability to do signs and wonders. [God] gives [Satan] the ability and permission, at times, for the very purpose of deceiving people who will not receive Christ as Savior, who will not receive the gospel message and believe. God allows Satan to send upon them a deluding influence. For instance, in Matthew 24:24, speaking of the end times, Jesus said, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” So God, who is sovereign over all, is going to give permission to Satan and demons [to work these signs and wonders]. Then false prophets,

[who do the work of Satan], will then work their miracles to deceive people, even those who are already saved, if possible. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10, speaking of the antichrist said, “Then that lawless one will be revealed” —the “lawless one” is another name for the antichrist.

Whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Did you see that? There is this permission granted to Satan to do signs and wonders to deceive those who will not receive the truth of the Word of God. In other words, [the people] won’t believe the truth, so God allows Satan to deceive them as a form of judgment because they will not receive “the love of the truth so as to be saved.”

We see, for instance, in Revelation 13:14, [that] the false prophet who works with the antichrist to deceive the world is described by John: “And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast.” Later on, in Revelation 19:20, speaking of the judgment of the beast, which is another name for the antichrist and his false prophet, John writes:

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Now, I’m telling you this because we are *in* the last times and then we’re going to be in the *very* last times. Now, I don’t know when Jesus is going to come, but I know things are going to proceed from bad to worse. And I

know this: that in the *very* last days, there are going to be [extremely impressive] miracles being performed by people who claim to be teachers of the truth and representatives of Christ, but who are, in fact, those who are working for Satan, who have not received “the love of the truth so as to be saved.” This is why this topic is important: so that you, when you’re out in the world and you’re talking to people, you don’t get swept away just because somebody has done some sign or wonder. That is always something to be cautious about. You take what you see, and you experience, and you hammer it out [on] the anvil of God’s Word to see whether it matches up with Scripture. If it does not, it is not of God. I don’t care how impressive and wowing it may be.

So, what about our text? Well, Jesus is ministering in Galilee, [and] Luke is showing us how He did all these works to verify that He is the Son of God. And now, we come to Luke 9:1. Look there and follow along as I read down through verse 11.

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. And He said to them, ”Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. Herod said, ”I myself had John beheaded;

but who is this man about whom I hear such things?” And he kept trying to see Him.

When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. [9:1–10]

Taking with them. . . Talking with them. . . Talking. . . Talking them. . . Taking them with Him. . . There’s no “L” there. My problem is [that] my glasses work well for about this distance. I can actually see [the text] without my glasses, but then when I look up I can’t see you. So, I’m in that bad stage of life.

Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. [(So they’re going to take a break.)] But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. [9:10–11]

All right. So, from this text we’re going to look at three important facts about signs and wonders so that you can understand why they happened—their purpose—and so you don’t get deceived by people who come along today *saying* they can perform signs and wonders or maybe even *doing* signs and wonders that don’t match up to the Word of God.

The first thing we need to know is: God has given certain people the ability to perform signs and wonders. Let’s just talk about [signs]. What is a sign? Well, we know what “signs” are—we see them all over the place. They’re on billboards, on bus stops, on cars, and bumpers and I think probably half of us here have some sort of shirt with a little logo or something on the arm which says [that] this person made it, or [we have] some special stitching on our back pocket, or whatever. All those are signs and they all advertise, or say, “Hey, this is the product,” or, “This is the person,” or, “This is where this came from,” or, “This is what you need to go see, or spend money on.” It’s advertis[ing]. That’s what a sign is.

The same thing is true of biblical signs. When you read the Word and [it says], “He performed a sign,” or “they asked for a sign,” [it’s talking about] a miracle that advertises that [the] person [performing the sign] is from God. [The people of that time] knew that only God could do miracles and so they’re looking for a miracle that would attest to the validity of [the] person [performing the sign] being from God. Sometimes, the word “sign” is also translated “miracle.” Literally, it just means a “testifying miracle,” or “a miracle that gives testimony to something.” In this case, that [something being testified to is] Jesus or one of His messengers and their message.

Second, what is a “wonder”? Well, it’s pretty much a synonym for the word “sign.” The word “wonder” can be translated “miracle,” just like the word “sign” is sometimes translated “miracle.” It just means something that is a wonder, something that happens out of the ordinary and it makes you wonder. It gets your attention. It is marvelous because it’s supernatural. So when you read through the Bible and it talks about signs, or wonders, or miracles, it’s just talking about those supernatural acts of God performed by God, performed by Jesus, performed by the apostles, or [by] those [whom] they commissioned.

So, that’s what signs and wonders [are]. Let’s look at our text and see what we can learn about this. We’re going to skip around and look at those relevant verses that address this [subject]. Next week we’ll come back and scour the text more deeply.

Look at verse 1: “And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases.” Remember, [from] our previous studies, were there just a few people following Jesus? No, there was a huge multitude, right? There was this great mass of people—so huge, in fact, they couldn’t even go into a town because if they did, they would just plug it up. So, Jesus would [go] to the outskirts of the town and people would come out to Him. So there are thousands of people following Jesus. We also learned that as Jesus went around, there was this large group of women—it says, “many women”—[who] were ministering to Him and the apostles [see Matthew 27:55] and many men were

ministering to them. So you have Jesus, the Twelve, their families, and a whole bunch of other people—this great multitude of believers—who are ministering to Jesus, and the apostles, and those [to whom] they minister. In addition to [those people], you have a whole bunch of thrill seekers—curious people who want to see the show, see the miracle, eat the bread, or whatever.

And so, that is what's happening. Now, I want you to notice here that in verse 1, Jesus gave the authority to heal and cast out demons to how many of this great multitude of [people]—[many of whom were] believers? Twelve. Not everybody—not all the men or all the men and women, just twelve. This is how it always is: [there is] always a limited number of people [given the gifts]. Never has God given all people, or universally all people, or all people in all locations, [or] a sampling of people in all locations, the ability [to perform signs]. It's always been a very small area for a limited [amount] of time for a limited purpose. We're going to see what that purpose is in a minute.

So, it was the Twelve [who received the power to do signs and wonders]. Now, there are instances, for instance, where you learn that Jesus gave, and/or the apostles gave, other people the ability to do signs and wonders. If you look in Luke 10[:1–8], Jesus sends out seventy people and gives them the ability to do the same thing—heal and cast out demons. We see [also that] Paul, and Peter, and Stephen in the book of Acts were given the authority or the power to do miracles, and to cast out demons, and to wow people—to do an advertisement that [said], “Hey! Guess what? God sent me and I have a message for you.”

But, this leads us to the more important question: Why did God give the Twelve, the seventy, Paul, Barnabas, Stephen, others, the ability to do miracles? Why? Why them? Why them for a limited [amount] of time? Why not us? I mean, wouldn't you like to be able to go someplace and heal everybody you came in contact with? I would. It would be a nightmare for a while, until you got everybody healed, but [in the end it] would be

incredible, wouldn't it? Everybody would want to fly to Burbank, land here, and seek you out because of their bad back or whatever.

But look at what we discover here. We've already talked about verse 1, that Jesus gave them [the power]. But, now we're going to look at why. You need to know why God gave people miraculous sign gifts. Look at verse 2: "And He sent them out to *proclaim the kingdom* of God and to perform healing" [emphasis added]. So, here, notice the twofold approach: preach the Word and heal. Look down at verse 6: "Departing, they began going throughout the villages, *preaching the gospel* and healing everywhere" [emphasis added]. And, after they went out "preaching the gospel and healing everywhere," they came back and reported to Jesus and then they tried to take a little sabbatical in Bethsaida, but the crowds were aware of it. Verse 11 says [that] Jesus "began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing." The same exact thing [happened repeatedly]: preach, heal; preach, heal; heal, preach. Those two [actions] went together.

Turn over to Acts 2. Let's just go through a few key Scriptures [that point to why God gave people the sign gifts]. These are not all of [the verses that discuss this]—we're just going to sample some [of them]. [Look at] Acts 2:43. Everybody knows what's happening in Acts 2. This is the birth of the Church. It's Pentecost, the apostles have been given the gift of tongues, they're preaching to a huge multitude of Jews who have come from all around the Mediterranean basin, who have all come there to worship at the Pilgrim Feast of Pentecost. They have their own native tongues and dialects, and it says that each one was hearing the gospel preached in his own native language, his own native tongue [see Acts 2:6]. And this is what I want you to look at here. In [Acts 2:]43, [it says]: "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." What were [the apostles] doing at this time? Preaching the gospel.

You see the same thing if you turn over to Acts 4:29. The apostles are praising and petitioning God in the face of persecution for preaching

the gospel. In verses 29[-30], we read: “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” See that? Same thing—they are preaching the gospel and also performing miracles.

Turn over to Acts 6:8. We mentioned Stephen. Earlier in the chapter, when [the apostles] needed to have some faithful people serve the people so [the apostles] could devote themselves to preaching and teaching, it describes Stephen as a very godly man who was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,” according to verse 5. In Acts 6:8, it says: “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.” He was recognized by the apostles, he was commissioned by the apostles, he was given these powers, and he used them. And, of course, in [Acts] 7, what happens [is that] Stephen preaches that incredible sermon, [and] he convicts the Jews so much [that] they just rush upon him in fury, and stone him to death.

Get this: All the apostles were there—they were all nearby—the Holy Spirit was working mightily, they were performing signs and wonders, and they *didn't raise Stephen from the dead*. They let him stay dead. Why? [It is] because sign gifts *are not for believers*. [But] what do you see on TV today? A whole bunch of believers gathered together in a manipulated crowd with a stage, and all of them are, of course, possibly going to receive a miracle if they give enough. Let's take an offering and then we'll see who God's going to heal of earaches, and backaches, and sore feet. But that's not how it was [in biblical times].

Turn to Acts 14. This is later on, [with] Paul and Barnabas. They're ministering and they're doing the same thing. Paul, of course, was the apostle, as “one untimely born” [1 Corinthians 15:8]. But notice what it says in Acts 14:1–3:

In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people be-

lieved, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

So they were preaching and [doing signs and wonders], and if you go down to verse 21, it says that many people came to the Lord while they preached. What's amazing is [that] as you look through the book of Acts, you just follow through the book of Acts, you see what happens. The apostles go out, they do the miracles, and they preach the gospel—just like Jesus did, just like the apostles did when Jesus was alive, and just like the apostles did after Jesus was dead. [It is] the same exact pattern. Why is this?

When you first think about it—and I don't know about you, but I think about this—[you might wonder], “Well, if God did [miracles] back then, why doesn't He do [them] today?” I mean, if it worked then, why not today? If it was great to do miracles and preach the gospel [then], why not do miracles and preach the gospel today? I'm sure I could get a very significant crowd if the news [crews] came and found out that I was healing every single person of every manner of disease and sickness. Do you think anybody would crowd around? That would be a great opportunity to preach the gospel, wouldn't it? Why isn't God doing that today? Well, see, this is what we need to find out.

What you need to understand here is [that] signs and wonders were always accompanied by preaching and [the purpose of the signs and wonders] was always for the evangelization of unbelievers. Now, there are a few exceptions when believers were healed, but as you go through [the New Testament], you see this pattern [most of the time]. You go into a town, you do signs and wonders, [the people] are awed, they realize you are from God, and then you preach the gospel.

Do you remember what happened when Nicodemus came to Jesus, sneaking up to Him at nighttime? Do you remember what happened to him? He came to [Jesus] by night, and what did he say? “Rabbi, we know” —we Pharisees know—“that you are from God because no one could do the works that You do unless” what? God is with him [see John 3:1–2]. They knew it! Jesus proved He was the Messiah. And when He equipped the apostles and He sent them out, then the apostles became messengers of Jesus and His message.

As a matter of fact, in 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul, as he defends his apostleship, defends it by saying this: “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.” Paul says, “Listen, Corinthians, don’t listen to these false teachers. When I came among you, I *proved* to you that I was a true apostle because I wielded apostolic, miracle-working power, which I performed among you in all perseverance. That shows you that I was God’s messenger, that I am an apostle. Let’s see these other guys do that.”

So signs and wonders were performed by Jesus to let people know He was the Messiah, the Son of God. [Do] you remember what happened when John’s disciples came and they weren’t quite sure [if Jesus was the Messiah]? John was in prison and [he] got some of his disciples to go [and] make sure [that] Jesus [was] the Messiah. [John was] looking for the takeover of Rome, the establishment of the kingdom, [and] glory, and Jesus [was] running around being persecuted with this group of twelve stragglers. So John is wondering, “I wonder... Surely this is the guy.” So he sent his disciples and they asked [Jesus], “You know, John wants to know if You’re the expected one or not.” [Do] you remember what Jesus told them? [In] Matthew 11:4–5, [He said]: “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.” Why did Jesus say this? [He said it] because that was what was prophesied. You see, a lot of false Christs and false prophets had come up [in] that time, but none of them did what

Jesus did. And so, this was verification to John because Jesus was fulfilling prophecy that He was, in fact, the Messiah, the Son of God.

In Acts 2:22, Peter is preaching at Pentecost and says: “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.” He’s preaching to this crowd, and he says, “You know He went to your town. You know He had that huge crowd. You were in the crowd. You saw Him do the miracles. You *know* it’s true. You *know* it. It’s undeniable. He *is* the Messiah.” But, then when you ask yourself, “OK, so Jesus did the miracles to show that He was the Son of God, to show that He was the Messiah, but what about the apostles?” Well, they were His messengers, so they did the miracles to affirm—to let people know—that they were His apostles and to say, “Hey, the message we’re telling you is true.”

Now, you’re [thinking], “Well, why was it such a big deal then and not now?” Think about this with me. What were the Jews like in that first century? Were they really accepting of those who wanted to change their religion, who wanted to call them hypocrites, “blind guides of the blind” [Matthew 15:14], those who “strained out gnats and swallowed camels” [see Matthew 23:24]? Think about it. I don’t know if you’ve had any experience with people from King James-only churches, but there are those who are into the King James-only movement, who think that the King James Bible is *the* Word of God and that it should be used to correct the Hebrew and Greek. I mean, it is *the* Word of God. [Doing what Jesus did to the Jews] would be like going into a [King James-only] church and saying, “You know, we’ve got a New Living Translation [of the Bible] for you. And you know what? A lot of the things you believe in—baptism, communion—we aren’t going to do those anymore.” Do you think [that church] would accept that? They’d go, “Get out of here, you false teacher!”

Well, that’s what Jesus and the apostles were up against. Jesus had to come in and the first thing He had to do was to let them know that, “Yes, the Law is good, holy, and just, and you aren’t keeping it. As a matter of

fact, you're sinners, [and] prostitutes and tax gatherers are going to get into the kingdom of heaven before you" [see Matthew 21:31]. Do you think [the Jewish leaders] accepted that well? [Jesus also had to say], "And, since you're such great sinners, you need a Savior, and guess what? I'm the guy. [Also], you've messed up the Law. You don't even understand what the Law is. You've messed up the whole intent of the Law. And, we're changing things. When I die, guess what? No more [ceremonial] sacrifices." Jesus was going to remanufacture their *entire religion*. That is why God, by His grace at [that] time, in love and compassion for the Jews, sent His only Son and performed all of those miracles in order to try and convince the Jews first—remember Paul says in Romans 1[:16], that salvation is to the Jew first and then to the Greek—to convince the chosen people of God that Jesus was the Messiah. And some believed, [but] most *did not*.

Turn to John 6. [There] you can see just how hardhearted [the Jews] were. John 6, look at verses 1–2: "After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick." "A large crowd"—the same terminology that is used in Luke. How many were there? Well, if you go down [to verses 10–12], He ends up feeding 5,000 men plus women and children. That is a lot of people. That is a pretty big miracle. That is a *huge* miracle. [That's like] feeding everybody in Dodger Stadium—one guy [saying], "Here, take this, take this, take this, take this, take this. . . ."

"Where's He getting it from?"

"I don't know. It's just appearing."

That's what happened. So [Christ] performs this huge miracle and then look down at John 6:14: "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" They're referencing Deuteronomy 18[:15], which promised that a prophet would come. They were looking for that prophet—the Messiah. [John 6:15] says, "So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain

by Himself alone.” You would think [that] these people—the whole mass of them—were believers, right? The whole mass saw the miracle and they were so riled up, so emotionally stirred [up], [that] they were ready to make—force—Jesus [to become king]. “You’ve got to be our king. Man, if we can have a guy who can wield the power of God like this, we want him. And You’re the guy.”

Then we go down a little bit further [in the text], and in this section, Jesus walks on water, which is a pretty significant miracle [see 6:19–21]. In John 6:26—look there—He appears back to the people and the same crowd is still there waiting for Him. “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’” These people didn’t want to submit to Christ. They didn’t repent of their sins. They didn’t want to bow the knee to Jesus and receive Him as the Messiah. These people wanted a meal.

What’s really amazing [is], look down at verse 30: “So they said to Him, ‘What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?’”

“Hello! I just fed 5,000 people and walked on water.” [Did] the miracles compel anybody to believe? No. Now, the miracles do point [to Jesus], so they *aid* in belief. In other words, they do say, “This is the guy,” but, just like you might drive down the road and see a billboard, it doesn’t mean you’re going to shop at the place that’s advertising there. You are going to see the sign, and it is going to appeal to you, but it’s not *compelling*—it doesn’t *make* you go there. Neither do miracles—they don’t *make* anybody believe. They just point to the object of faith, or the messenger who has the message of faith.

This brings us to our last point: Know why God isn’t giving the ability to do signs and wonders today. There are always those who say, “You know, Jack, I understand what you’re saying, and I believe all this, and I agree with all this, but it seems to me that if God did miracles back then and people did come to the Lord, and a lot of people were healed, then why not do that today? I don’t see anything in the Bible that says miracles aren’t needed

anymore. So we should be doing them.” OK. Do them. Who’s stopping you? You see, what happens is [that] people think [like] that and then there are always [some] false teachers who come and say they have these gifts. But the problem is [that] when they wield the gifts, they don’t match up with what? The Bible. That is a problem.

There are reasons why God isn’t giving people miraculous gifts today. And, again, that’s not to say that He *can’t*—we know that in the Tribulation those gifts will be active again. First of all, Jesus had to fulfill prophecy. We already talked about that. That was one reason [He performed miracles]. He came, He fulfilled prophecy. Second, salvation is to the Jews first and Jews crave for signs. Paul even says that. When you go through [the New Testament, the Jews are] always [saying], “Give us a sign. Show us a sign.” First Corinthians 1:22 [says that] Greeks ask for wisdom, but Jews ask for a sign. They want a sign.

Third, the New Testament time was a unique time of transition. The New Testament was being written. That is, the teachings of Christ, which the apostles had learned, had not [yet] been written down and enscriptured in what is called the “canon of Scripture,” or the books of the New Testament. Because of this, when [the apostles and their disciples] went into a place, they didn’t have an authoritative book—the Bible—from which to preach. So God gave them the ability to do miracles to give credence and authority to the message and then they would preach. What you see is [that] at the beginning of the book of Acts, when none of the New Testament was written, there are how many miracles? Lots of them. And as the book of Acts continues and the New Testament is being written, what happens? Miracles become less and less [common]. Why? Because once you have the Word of God, you don’t need to have miracles anymore. Once you have the New Testament, the need to authenticate the message isn’t necessary because this Book is *self-authenticating*.

Let me show you how this is. Turn to Luke 16. (It’s going to be so fun when we get to Luke 16. I’m probably going to preach thirty sermons out of [it].) [Look at] Luke 16:19–31. This is a familiar story to many of us. It’s

the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Notice what it says, starting in verse 19:

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. [16:19–21]

You have this great contrast here. Verse 22 [and following says]:

Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us." [16:22–26]

Now, you've got this situation here. There's a rich man—[he's] super wealthy, living an indulgent life. There's a super poor man, who's barely scraping by, but loves God. Both die; [the] rich man is in hell; Lazarus, the poor man, is in Abraham's bosom and everything's great [for him]. The rich man is in agony in the flames. He knows he deserves to be there, but he is concerned for his brothers. He wants the situation remedied. And verses 27–28 are what the rich man, who is in hell, thinks Abraham should do:

And he said, “Then I beg you, father,” [(that is, Father Abraham)], “that you send him,” [(that is, Lazarus)], “to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” [16:27–28]

Now stop there for a moment. What is the rich man asking? “I want you to do a miracle. I want you to do the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead so he can become an evangelist and go to my brothers because when they see that a miracle has taken place, and they see this man who is risen from the dead, then they will believe because that miracle will be compelling.” See what Abraham says [in] verse 29: “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’” Or, “They have the Old Testament Scriptures; let them hear them.” Abraham’s response was: “Listen, they don’t need a miracle. What they need is to read the Bible.” Look at verse 30: “But he said”—the rich man is lobbying now—“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” [In other words], “If you just would allow a miracle to take place here, they’ll repent because of the miracle.”

“But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead’” [16:31]. What do we learn from that? The power to save people is where? [It is] in the Word of God, not [in] miracles. Miracles may point to the messenger of God’s Word, but it is the power of the Word of God that saves people.

You look in the Scriptures and you find all sorts of examples of people who saw lots of miracles. I mean, think about the people who saw all the miracles during the times of Moses. Did they have any miracles? Well, just the ten plagues, and the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire, and manna *every single day*. Their clothes never wore out, they never got sick. They saw the earth opened up, they saw all kinds of miracles all through the wilderness. And what does the author of Hebrews say in Hebrews 3:16–19? All of them dropped dead in the wilderness why? Unbelief. [Was it

because] they needed more miracles? No! The miracles are not *compelling*. They point, but they're not compelling.

So, where's the power? For instance, John in his gospel, speaking about the unbelieving multitude said, "But though he," that is, Jesus, "had performed many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him" [John 12:37]. Where is the power? Well, the power is in the Word of God. Jeremiah 23:29 [says], "'Is not My word like fire?' declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'" That's where the power is. Paul, speaking to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, says, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." The Word of God "performs its work in you who believe."

[In] Hebrews 4:12, we read: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." [The Bible] is not a dead book. [It] is a living, an active, a powerful book. In 1 Peter 1:23–25, Peter says:

For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

That is where the power is. Turn to 2 Peter. The theme of 2 Peter is false teachers. So, he's trying to equip his readers to deal with false teachers who, of course, come on the scene oftentimes with false wonders. Look at 2 Peter 1:2–3. It's the end of the introduction: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine

power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.” Isn’t that a great verse? I *love* that verse. God has given you everything you need for “life and godliness.” Well, where does it come from? “Through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” [1:3]. Where do you get “true knowledge” of God? [You get it] from the Bible. Verse 4: “For by these,” [meaning] knowledge, truths about God, “He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” Where are God’s “precious and magnificent promises” found? [They are] in the Bible.

And so then, in verses 5 all the way down to verse 11, Peter says, “So, since you have these promises, since you have everything ‘pertaining to life and godliness,’ in this Book, the Bible, then pursue righteousness.” Verse 12: “Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.” Where do you get truth? [You get it] from the Word of God. [Peter is] saying, “I’m just reminding you about this.” Do you ever need [to be] reminded of God’s truth? I do. There are times when I have read something 50 or 100 times—sometimes I’ve even taught things before—and I read it [again] and [think], “Wow! I never saw that!” or “Wow! I forgot that was in there!” So, Peter’s saying, “Yeah, you have these promises and guess what? It’s my job as a preacher—it’s every preacher’s job, it’s every minister’s job—to constantly remind people of the truths of God’s Word. These ‘precious and magnificent promises.’”

Now, going on down, after he says that—look at verse 16—he is going to explain something that is directly related to what we’re talking about: the purpose of signs and wonders, and why God isn’t doing miracles today. This seems to come out of the blue, because he’s talking about God’s Word and God’s promises, and abstaining from sin and pursuing righteousness, and then he seems to say something that at first glance seems totally unrelated to anything. [Second Peter 1:16–18 reads]:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Do you see what Peter is saying here? [He’s saying]: “You want to hear about something cool? You want to hear about a wonder, a sign, the greatest thing any mortal has ever seen? We got to see Jesus in His kingdom glory, and Elijah, and Moses, and we heard the very voice of God. No one has *ever* experienced a miracle like that. *Ever.*” He says, “Man, we saw the most incredible thing you could ever see.” But notice what he says in verse 19: “So we have the prophetic word made more sure.” Literally, “We have the more sure prophetic word.” More sure than what? [More sure] than the most incredible, miraculous [thing] you could ever experience. We have something more sure than that. What is it? The prophetic word. Verse 19 continues: “to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” You have something greater than miracles, signs, and wonders—you have the *Word of God*.

What makes the Word of God so special? [Second Peter 1:]20: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” That is why this Book, though written by men, is the Word of God. So you ask yourself, “Well, why don’t we need miracles today?” Man, we have [a] nuclear bomb here [in the Bible] compared to miracles. This is the only book that is like it in all of the world. It is the inspired Word of God. It is living, it is active, it is sharp, it is piercing, it is able to judge [see Hebrews 4:12], it is the fire, it

is the hammer [see Jeremiah 23:29], and on and on—all those things [that] the Word of God says of itself. It is the power.

That is why, when we go out and we share the gospel, yeah, miracles could be used, and, yes, it would draw people's attention, but you know what? We don't need them anymore because we have the "more sure" Word of God. And this Book is sufficient in and of itself when preached to save people and transform their lives. When you look even in the book of Acts, even during the New Testament times, even when the apostles were alive, they didn't go into every town and do miracles. Sometimes they just preached the Word. That is what we see.

Some people say, "Well, yeah, I don't know. I still think that God wants us to be having miracles." Well, just go back and read church history. Do it! Read Gonzales' *The Story of Christianity*. Read Philip Shaff's *History of the Christian Church*. Read LaTourette's [*A History of Christianity*]. [Read] any of those guys, any of their histories. Read them. Read [about] the first centuries [of the Church] and see how many people were wielding these powers. Zero! Zero! You could say, "Well, He's still [giving people these powers] today." Well, all I'm telling you is [those powers] better match up with the Word of God. And if [they don't], then don't fall for it, because it's a false sign and a false wonder used by a false teacher for wicked means.

So what have we learned? Yes, God has given us, in history, people with the sign gifts and the ability to do signs and wonders. Jesus, of course, had those powers. We've learned [that] the purpose of signs and wonders [is as] pointers—advertisements—[that point] to either Jesus or His messengers during the time when the New Testament was being written. [We also learned] that after the New Testament was completed, God chose to bring [the signs and wonders] to an end. Now, the Bible does say that during the Tribulation period these gifts will then come back. But for right now, they aren't happening, so don't get all psyched out. If you want to get excited about something, get excited about [the Bible]. [It] is something to get excited about, because [it] has the stories of miracles and [it] is the living,

active, powerful, piercing, judging, saving, sanctifying Word of God. [It] is what we need to go out and share with the world. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You have taught us so many good things from Your Word. Father, there's so much here in this passage. I just pray that if it be Your will and we come back next week, we will be able to learn some great things about discipleship from how we see Jesus training, sending, equipping, and modeling for His disciples. Father, until then, I just pray that all of us would have discernment. That we would not be deceived by those who come along saying they have certain miraculous powers but who either don't preach the truth or, Father, [who] don't model the same miraculous gifts that we see in Your Word. Father, help us to be cautious. Help us to be aware, because we know that in the latter times Satan will come on the scene with false signs and wonders "to deceive, if possible, even the elect" [see Matthew 24:24]. Help us not to be among them. And, Father, help us to preach Your Word, knowing that the proclamation of Jesus, the Son of God, His life, His death on the cross, His burial, His resurrection, and repentance and faith in Him is what brings people to salvation, which is the power of God for all who believe. So help us all to be faithful to do that. Help us to have discernment. Equip us that we might live for You and Your glory. We pray [in] Christ's name, Amen.