

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - The Miracles of The New Testament Church

Sermon Text - Acts 5:12-16

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

"I still remember that first touch from Heaven. It changed me forever!"

When I think about the life that I was living and the life that God gave to me the night I asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins, to come into my heart and to save my soul, all I can say is it remains the greatest miracle of my life! I'm certainly not perfect and have so much to learn and so far to go to be all that God wants me to be, but my life has never been the same since that night! I was in every sense of the word, saved that night! My new life began and it has been filled with purpose and meaning and I would even say great adventure! People that knew me before I met Jesus and afterwards, also believe in miracles! Today we're going to talk about miracles that God did in the New Testament Church, but we're also going to talk about some miracles we need God to do right here at Northshore Church! Let's pray!

With the miracles of the New Testament we're not talking about the unlikely winning of a ball game. We're not talking about mere coincidence, happenstance, or unusual circumstance, we are talking about something that is unexplainable by human reason or experience. We're talking about God intervening in a supernatural way in the lives of people! Before we read our text I want to first set the stage for our message and don't get worried about the very long introduction! I've taken that into consideration with the rest of the sermon. So what is the definition of a miracle?

Miracle - An effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause.

Such an effect or event manifesting or considered as a work of God.

A fortunate happening that has no obvious natural cause or explanation.

A marvelous event manifesting a supernatural act of a divine agent.

Some do not believe in miracles simply because they do not believe in God or they do not believe God gets involved with the daily affairs of humankind. Some of our country's founders had this belief and were known as Deist. Deists believe that God wound up the world, set it in motion, and simply sits back and watches from a distance. Remember Bett Middler's song "From a distance"? However, if you believe the Bible is truly the Word of God, you cannot take such a view. Listen to what the Psalmist said...

Psa 145:17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.

Psa 145:18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Psa 145:19 He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

And then in chapter 146 we read these words...

Psa 146:7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,

Psa 146:8 the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

Psa 146:9 The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, ...

Does this sound like a God who doesn't get involved with the affairs of humankind? Someone might say, "Everything can be explained, eventually, by human reasoning and scientific exploration. Man will eventually solve his own problems without the help or miraculous intervention of a so-called God. Whatever you attribute to God, man will eventually be able to do." That's what I would call Humanism! Here's the definition of humanism according to the Oxford dictionary...

"an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rational ways of solving human problems."

Google also offers this bit of human thought on the subject...

"Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, recognizing that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone."

How many thousands of years will it take for humans to realize that human nature is a fallen nature and without redemption and salvation will not naturally move towards morality, but rather will move towards self! Self-preservation, self-motivation, self-obsession, self-made, self deceived, and all of that leads to Self-promotion over others and that pretty much always takes you away from the morality God wants you to live by! Now I want to tell you something ironic about humanism, which denies God and even the possibility of miracles. Here's the stated golden rule of humanism...ready for this? According to Understandinghumanism.org.uk their golden rule is...

'Do not treat others in a way you would not like to be treated yourself.'

Hmmm. I would say that's a form of plagiarism...Because they basically stole that from whom? Yes, Jesus. Jesus originated the golden rule and since they couldn't come up with one better they just reworded it a little bit. Jesus said...

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

And speaking of the origin of things, I heard this funny story that kind of showcases the basic problem of humanism. This is what I would call a modern day parable. A truth bearing story! Just a story though, not an actual event! So the story goes...

God and a well known scientist were debating. The discussion turned to creation. God stated that He could create life from the dust of the earth. The scientist said, "so can I!" There was to be a contest. As the contest started, they both had piles of dirt before them. It was then that God told the scientist, "Hey, get your own dirt!" That ended the contest, because the scientist couldn't create the basic materials."

Creation is a miracle in and of itself. The Bible doesn't tell us the mechanics of how God created the world, it just tells us that He did it! But there are those who would like to discount and disprove all forms of the miraculous. Philosopher David Hume sought to disprove the existence of miracles. Art Lindsley, Ph.D. who was a Senior Fellow, at the C.S. Lewis Institute, stated Hume's argument this way...

"In philosophical circles, it is common to argue that miracles are improbable. In fact, David Hume's famous argument against miracles maintains that it is always more likely that any particular claim to a miracle is false than that the miracle really took place. In other words, it is always easier in light of the "firm and unalterable" laws of nature to believe that those who testify to a miracle are in error than that they are telling the truth. For instance, there are billions of instances in which dead people stay dead and only occasional stories of dead people rising. The odds would be several billion to one (or two or three or so on) against such a report being true."

C.S. Lewis had this to say concerning Hume's statement...

"If anything extraordinary seems to have happened, we can always say that we have been the victims of an illusion. If we hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural, this is what we always shall say. What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience. It is therefore useless to appeal to experience before we have settled, as well as we can, the philosophical question."

And what would the philosophical question be? First and foremost, is this:

Is there a God?

And if we decide we believe there is, then we have some other basic questions to ask:

Do miracles really happen?

Do I believe the miracles recorded in the Bible really happened?

Do I believe miracles still happen today?

And those questions lead us to ask several others...

Do I believe the Bible is reliable?

Do I believe the Bible is truth?

Do I believe the whole Bible is true?

There is a push today to get rid of the miracles of the Bible so it can be more believable. Of course they want to get rid of other difficult parts of the Bible, like the moral standards of God, and that's when we get to the real problem most humanists have with God! They don't like His moral standards so they want to come up with their own! Pretty convenient, but that never really works out very good for humanity. The more sophisticated we get with technology, the more sophisticated we get with sin! Cyber crime, cyber immorality, cyber bullying and the list goes on and on. And the humanists' hopes for utopia seem to end with more sophisticated warfare!

However, I want to submit to you this thought: If we want to see modern day miracles of true human transformation and people living by the golden rule, and a more peaceful world, we must replace our stubborn dependence on human wisdom and humble ourselves to accept the following passage from God's Word...

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

2 Tim 3:17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I believe this Scripture is true, therefore, I believe the Scripture I am about to read truly happened. Now that I've set the stage, let's read our text for today which is found in Acts 5:12-16...

Acts 5:12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 5:13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

Acts 5:14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Acts 5:15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

Acts 5:16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

Miracles Then

It wasn't the garment, the shadow, or the cloth that healed these people, it was their faith that God was working through the Apostles that led to their healing. Faith opens the door for miracles to happen. And remember, it wasn't how big their faith was, but how big the God was they put their faith in! Why did God use miracles so much in Bible times as compared to today? I'm not sure, but here's what I think. It was not a scientific world, but a world of superstition. God used miracles as a tool to convince people of His power over the things of this world and ultimately of His power over sin. The miracles of the New Testament Church were a continuation of the miraculous works of Jesus to not only heal but to forgive as we see in Mark's Gospel...

Mark 2:3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.

Mark 2:4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Mark 2:6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,

Mark 2:7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Mark 2:8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?"

Mark 2:9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?

Mark 2:10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .
." He said to the paralytic,

Mark 2:11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Mark 2:12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Important statement and question...

While miracles are many times tied to faith, it is not always a lack of faith that keeps a miracle from taking place. Why is it sometimes that a person with great faith, and after much prayer, does not get his or her miracle? God may be working on a bigger miracle we can't see. Do you remember the story of Lazarus in the Bible? Jesus had been told that Lazarus was sick, but He didn't go immediately to check on Lazarus. Why not? I have an idea...

John 11:1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

John 11:2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.)

John 11:3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

John 11:4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

There was a greater miracle coming. John continues...

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

John 11:6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,

His friend was sick, but He waited two more days. Why? He could have gone immediately and worked a miracle and Lazarus would not have had to die and Mary and Martha would not have had to grieve! But there was a greater miracle coming. Listen...

John 11:11 ...he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

John 11:12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."

John 11:13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

John 11:14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

John 11:15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Now, watch what happens when He gets there...

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

John 11:18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

John 11:19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

John 11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

John 11:21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

John 11:22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

John 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

John 11:24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

John 11:26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 11:27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Notice that she did not really answer His question. We need to ask ourselves this same question, Do we believe what Jesus said? "He who believes in me will live even though he dies!" Now for those of us who know the story, we know that Jesus would literally raise Lazarus from the tomb just moments later. But an even greater miracle was coming first...

John 11:28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

John 11:29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

John 11:30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

John 11:31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

John 11:32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

John 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

John 11:34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

John 11:36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

John 11:37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Of course He could have, but He didn't and the reason was they needed a greater miracle! God, the Creator of the universe, the Almighty God of heaven and earth had taken on human flesh, became a man and subjected Himself to the hurts, the pain, the grief, and the sorrow that human beings face. The greater miracle of this story is that Jesus wept! It's the miracle of God's revelation of His heart for humankind! He wanted us to know that He weeps for us, He hurts for us, He grieves for us, and He understands us and knows us even better than we know ourselves!

And that question,

John 11:37 ... “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

...is a question we all ask at times in some shape form or fashion! If God is God, could He not have prevented my loved one from dying? The answer is yes He could have and we don't know why He didn't, but we know this: the one thing we don't have to question is God's love for us because He proved His love for us when He allowed His One and Only Son Jesus to die on an old rugged cross to pay for our sins, so that we could have hope no matter what this old world throws our way! And here's something to remember, God doesn't get mad at us when we ask questions, because He is a loving Heavenly Father and what loving father gets mad at their children when they ask honest questions? They don't! Sometimes I believe God tells us to hold on to His hand and to trust Him and to understand that somethings we will only understand when we get to heaven. In the meantime, know this: God cares about your hurts, your grief, and your broken hearts. And we see this in our story. Even though Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus moments later, He still wept because He saw the pain that humanity suffers when they lose someone in this life to death. That touches the heart of God and God cares about that! And we know the rest of the story. Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead just moments after He wept, and Lazarus would face death in this world a second time, but another reason Jesus had allowed Lazarus to die in the first place was this...

John 11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

John 11:39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

John 11:40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

John 11:41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

John 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

John 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

John 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

John 11:45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

The bigger miracle was that people who did not believe would come to faith in Jesus! Sometimes God uses the worst of circumstances in our lives to work greater miracles of eternal salvation. God knows what is best and I’ve learned and am still learning to trust His wisdom. I believe in miracles, and I pray for miracles, but I know when I don’t get the miracle I want I need to ask God to show me the miracles of His presence, His power, His provision and His peace in the midst of the storms of life!

Paul the Apostle, who became one of the greatest disciples of Jesus of all times, wrote as many as 13 books of the New Testament and would spread the Good News to the Gentile nations had this to say in Ephesians 3...

Eph 3:7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Eph 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Eph 3:9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Even with Paul’s amazing calling, he was not always healed when he prayed, and there was a Godly reason. Paul said this to the Corinthian Church...

2 Cor 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

2 Cor 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

2 Cor 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Paul was not delivered, because he needed the bigger miracle “that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

We are not always delivered, but God may be working the bigger miracle of Christ’s power resting on us! Many times the disciple’s were miraculously delivered from prison, persecution, and even death. But not always, because God was sometimes working a bigger miracle. Okay, that was then, this is now!

Miracles In the Modern World

I believe life itself is still a miracle. We understand a lot more about our physical bodies and what makes life possible, but any respectable physician or scientist will tell you that we're not even close to understanding it all. Birth is still a miracle and the fact that we are able to sustain life for the years we live is miraculous. I went back into a-fib on November 1st. I'm meeting with an electrophysiologist Tuesday! I'm on blood thinners and beta blockers to prevent a stroke. I've been wondering, how has humankind survived without the modern day medicines we have? Had I been born a couple hundred years ago, I probably wouldn't have made it out of my twenties! God knew what century I needed to be born in health wise and that I would also need a sound system and a computer monitor for my style of preaching! But back to the miracle of our physical lives. I know there are scientific and medical explanations for many things, but there are still so many mysteries. And when it comes to other physical realities, we may understand the physics of sunrises, sunsets, lightning storms, and many other natural phenomena, but what makes it all possible is still a divine mystery. How the earth got to be just the right distance from the sun, and how the moon orbits the earth in just the right way to cause the rise and fall of the tides, which is so important to the ebb and flow of life on this planet, is still a mystery and I might add, a miracle. When it comes to sickness, I believe that God still works miracles today! He sometimes works a miracle of Biblical proportions. He sometimes sets aside the natural laws of nature and confounds the scientific and medical community and provides an unexplainable healing. At other times God may choose to give a miracle through modern medicine or the wisdom of highly trained and educated doctors. Thank God for their years of training! God is using them in my life right now! However, sometimes God chooses to give a miraculous grace and strength and then grants the miracle of graduation to Glory where healing is permanent, forever, and the person never has to face death again. Death may seem to conquer a person in this life, but if it is a Christian who dies, victory has been achieved and death has been defeated. Jesus took away the sting of death and the power of the grave when He died on the Cross and then was resurrected from the grave! Paul said this...

1 Cor 15:53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

1 Cor 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

1 Cor 15:55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

1 Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

1 Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

A few years ago, one of our dear church members, met me after the service in the foyer. She had been diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer. She was smiling and said she was

ready if the Lord was ready for her. I told her If God still had a work for her to do here on this earth, God would give her the health to do it, but then I reminded her of what Paul said...

Phil 1:20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

I told her that Scripture means we win either way! She said amen! She went home to be with Jesus not too many weeks later. I believe it's okay to ask God for a miracle, but I believe we should always pray like Jesus prayed, "Not my will but Your will be done!" We must remember that God may have a bigger miracle for us than the one we ask for. If God works a miracle you can be sure it is to reveal His love for you, to lead you to know Him personally, and to help you fulfill your God-given purpose in life! When you pray for a miracle, according to God's will, trust that He has heard your prayer and will respond in some way, even if it's not the way you thought. So if you pray for rain, go ahead and bring your umbrella! (Mrs. Barbra Weigle shared that with me some years ago!)

Now I'll close with these thoughts and a Scripture: The New Testament Church survived opposition, persecution, no building, limited finances, a lack of clout, and no political connections, but this relatively small band of men and women changed the known world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. It was a true miracle. They faced many obstacles as they moved out into the world with the gospel but as Dr. Jeff Nave says...

"When God tells us to move we may find obstacles, we then have to move forward and trust God to move the obstacles"

Northshore Church is not a mega church, but I believe we should ask God to grant us a modern day miracle of being able to achieve our purpose which is

"To see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!"

And then the miracle of accepting our mission of...

"Transforming worship, people and the world!"

and accomplishing our vision...

"To raise up a healthy church that will impact the north shore and ultimately the world with the life changing message of Jesus Christ!"

The Psalmist put it this way...

Psa 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

Psa 40:4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

Psa 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

Let's pray!