

Is This the Age of Miracles?

Selected Scriptures

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We're going to continue our series this morning studying the charismatic issue. And things have been getting a little interesting lately in the past few weeks. I've been getting mail from around the country and people saying they're praying for me, and I appreciate that. I received a letter this week from one man who said that I had so convinced his wife of the truth of this, that it had caused a great division in their home, which was not the intention, but he was writing me and asking me if I would share some further dialogue with him. I have received letters from people who have been very supportive, from people who've been rather upset. But we continue to do what we feel God wants us to do in working through the Scriptures relative to this movement so we can better understand it.

It was interesting this week at the seminary where I was, all week long, teaching classes and speaking, and lecturing, and everything, they asked me teach a session on this topic and run generally through the material to the faculty and students. And I did it, and I was interested to find that the response was very positive and that the thinking of many of those men of God was right along the very same lines, so it was very confirming to me and encouraged me to go right ahead and continue to do what we've been doing.

We come then to message number five. Picking up where we left off last week, we were talking about in terms of our introduction the book, "Why Should I Speak in Tongues?" by Charles and Frances Hunter, and I told you that in the introduction they made this statement and I'll repeat it. Quote, "In the 20th century, we don't have to settle for any less than the disciples did. God is pouring out His Holy Spirit in the same manner today as He did then, there is no difference." End quote. Now that is not just the statement of the Hunters, that is one of the cardinal tenets of the charismatic movement. They constantly affirm that there is no difference today from the way God's Spirit operated in apostolic times. It is very essential to them that they have a similarity. It is absolutely the basic bottom-line fact to a Pentecostal person, that what he reads in the New Testament be also happening in his life today. And in order to try to support that, they invariably will use the only Scripture that they have to grasp, and that is Hebrews 13:8, which as I told you last week says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever." And on the basis of that verse, they affirm that God is doing the same things today that He did then. But of course, as we noted last week briefly, that verse cannot substantiate that. The verse has absolutely nothing to do with what Jesus does. It has to do with who He is. It is a tremendous statement of the immutability, the unchangingness, the absolute constancy, the eternal deity of Jesus Christ. It is not saying anything about the way in which God may choose to work, which is varied, as any Bible student knows.

At one time God worked with man as king of the earth before the fall. After the fall, God worked through conscience, and then God set up government, and then God worked through the law. And frequently, God mediated His rule through judges, and often through kings, and priests, and prophets. Various things. In the New Testament God worked His rule on earth through the

incarnation of Jesus Christ living on earth. In this age, through the Holy Spirit and the life of the believer. In the age to come, through the king who reigns on the throne in the kingdom. God has had various ways in which He ruled, various dispensations as they're called, in which God worked in the world in unique ways, unique to that particular age and period of time. Once, Christ was the angel of the Lord. Once, He was the incarnate suffering servant. Future, He will be the king of kings and Lord of Lords. So there is not constancy to the operation of the God, but there is to the character of God, and that is what Hebrews 13:8 is saying: Jesus Christ is the perfect example of a leader. He never changes. He can be followed with no fear of failure, and that's the message of Hebrews 13, because Hebrews 13 is trying to say: follow those who have the rule over you, in verse 7. And as a perfect pattern of one who sets the example of an example, look at Jesus Christ whom you could follow with no fear of Him ever deviating from truth.

In the L.A. Times sports section this morning, I was glancing at an article by a new member of the Los Angeles, or the California Angels. He was saying that the people were criticizing him because he had a weak throwing arm, and he was saying, "Everybody has their weaknesses. If you look closely at Jesus Christ, you'll even see that He had His faults." Well, that was a pretty bad analogy, because if you look closely at Jesus Christ you'll find that as Pilate found, "I find in him," what? "No fault." And that's the reason He's used in Hebrews 13:8 as the perfect pattern of a life to follow. It's not saying that He always operates in the same way, because you can't support that scripturally. And so, that leaves them with no verses, basically, to support the idea that what the disciples experienced must be the norm for every Christian.

David du Plessis says, quote, "The New Testament is not a record of what happened in one generation, but it is a blueprint of what should happen in every generation till Jesus comes." End quote. Of course, he is probably the most well-known worldwide figure in the charismatic movement, and he says that what happened in the New Testament should happen all the time. Everything in the New Testament that was miraculous, and remarkable, and characterized by supernatural manifestation is deemed to be normative for all the church age. Bruner says, and Bruner is not a charismatic, in his theology of the Holy Spirit he says, quote, "The Pentecostals frequently refer to the movement as a faithful reproduction of the apostolic movement of the 1st century." End quote. And this is true. They feel that God hasn't changed, but that the church got organized, got ritualistic, got doctrinally oriented. And when it did, it forfeited and abandoned the power of the Holy Spirit which has finally, after 2,000 years, been recovered in the Pentecostal movement. And they demand that we accept the idea today that God is doing the things that He did in the 1st century: revelations, visions, signs, healings, mighty deeds, tongues, miracles, all of this because the 1st century power is always the standard mode for the Spirit's operation. That's the claim.

In fact, they talk about the restoration of New Testament Holy Ghost power. And, if we do not accept this, then we deny the reality as the church has been doing for centuries, they say. And we're part of the problem, not the solution. Now, that particular claim on their part, which is a very bottom-line major theme in the movement, is, in my mind, the third basic problem, the third crucial mistake that we must bring to the light of Scripture.

Now what's wrong in the charismatic movement? Number one, we saw the issue of revelation. The problem is they still have revelation going on, and there's no end to the Bible. The second thing we saw wrong was the issue of interpretation, and that is that they wrongly interpret the Word of God. They go as the great theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher did, who was a liberal. They go from experience to the Scripture, to let the Scripture validate their experience. And thus they misinterpret.

Now comes the third major error of the movement, and that is the issue of apostolic uniqueness. They will not allow for the uniqueness of the apostolic era, the age of the early church. They want to make that the norm for all the church age and the experience of the apostles, the norm for the experience of every believer in the history of the church. Now, that's what we're going to discuss this morning. Now, this is going to be academic a little bit this morning, so you're going to have to hang on. This is not the kind of message that goes out giving you spiritual goose bumps. You're not going to say, oh, was I blessed today. We're going to work on your brain today. Okay, so you're going to need to think along.

Now, the question we want to deal with is this: is the apostolic era, with all its elements, normal for every Christian? Is it the normative experience for all the ages of the church? Should we today be walking on water? Should we today be feeding 20,000 people by the miracle of the loaves and the fish? Should we today be doing miracle after miracle of healing people? Should John MacArthur walk down the street, and people who get in the shadow of his body be healed of all their diseases? Should the staff of this church or the pastor of any church send out handkerchiefs with which people might be healed? Is God doing all of those things that He did then today? Should we be receiving revelations, and visions, and voices, and tongues, and miracles, and so forth? Well, that's the question. Let's look at the answer.

The charismatic movement says absolutely, yes. Today we should see everything. Unfortunately, when it is examined, such a claim cannot be verified at all. They are not seeing those kinds of things, and yet they desperately hold on to the fact that they are.

Now, let's talk about several things and stay with me now as we try to answer this very essential question. Now, let's start in a general way by assuming that the major feature they're dealing with in the apostolic age is the miracle element. And I think that's a right assumption. They say that the miracle element of the apostolic age is to be the norm for every age. Well, let's look at the Bible and find out why and how God used miracles. Miracles in the Bible only occurred in three major periods of time: the time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Christ and the apostles. Each of those periods is something less than 100 years in all of human history. And it is during those three brief periods of time, and those alone, that the miracles proliferated, that the miracles were the norm, that the miracles were in abundance. Now, God can interject Himself into the human stream supernaturally anytime He wants. And we're not limiting Him; we're simply saying that He has chosen to limit Himself, to a great degree, to those three periods of time.

And there are four elements in all miracles that help us to understand why. Four purposes for miracles, and they are interwoven, and you'll see how helpful this will be when we've completed the four. Number one, when there is an age of miracles, whether it's the mosaic, or the prophetic age of Elijah and Elisha, or the New Testament apostolic era, the first reason is: to introduce a new era of revelation. To introduce a new era of revelation. God is speaking His revelation. The miracles, for example, that surrounding the life of Moses, were those which were to confirm the fact that God was speaking. It was at the time of Moses, for example, that the first five books of the Bible were written. Nothing had been written prior to that included in the canon. Perhaps the book of Job antedates it. We don't know yet. But Moses basically writes the first great composite of Scripture. It was at the time of Moses that God introduced the law, the Ten Commandments, the new nation of Israel, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and all of the mosaic revelation. God was giving revelation. And, in order to attend to that revelation with convincing argument, God accompanied it with miracles.

Secondly, you have the period of the Elijah and Elisha. And here is a revival of the prophetic office. Under Moses, God gives the law, and from Elijah and Elisha comes the voice of the prophets, and the Old Testament is the law and the prophets. And so, when God brings revelation through His prophets, He attends that with certain miraculous things. And so, both the law and the prophets are attested by miracles.

And finally, having summed up the Old Testament, God gave the New Testament, all at one period of time from the time of Christ, about 30 to 96, when the last book was written, that brief period in those years, the entire New Testament is given, and it also is attended by wonders and miracles.

So, three great periods of miracles, three great periods of revelatory history when God is giving new revelation. Miracles were used to introduce a new era of revelation. Secondly, to authenticate the messengers of that revelation. To authenticate the messengers of that revelation. If God is giving new revelation, Satan will confuse the issue by throwing in other people saying things, and so God accommodates that by making sure it is clear who His speakers are by giving them miraculous abilities. So, Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha, Christ and the apostles all had the ability to do certain signs and wonders, and these signs and wonders were geared to convince the people listening that these, in fact, are the messengers of the new era.

Now look at Exodus chapter 4 and I want to show you an illustration. Exodus chapter 4, and I want us to look about nine verses, because I think it will help us to see what I'm saying. God is authenticating the messengers of the new revelation. Verse 1, Exodus 4, "And Moses answered and said, but behold they will not believe me nor hearken to my voice. They'll say the Lord has not appeared to thee." He says, now I'm going to go to the people of Israel, I'm going to tell them that I saw God in a burning bush. I'm going to tell them God told me to lead them out of Egypt and they're going to say, "Who are you, fellow?" Well, why should we believe that? They're going to say, hey, we don't know that. How do we know the Lord appeared to you? All right? The Lord said, "What's in your hand?" He said, "A rod." He said, "Throw it on the ground." He threw it on the ground and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from before it. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Put forth your hand, take it by the tail.' He put forth his hand caught the snake by the tail and it became a rod.

In order that they may believe, the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has appeared unto thee." In other words, Moses, you'll be able to do wonders in order that people will know you are my messenger to bring my word. All right, verse 6: "And the Lord said furthermore to him put your hand into your bosom. He put his hand inside his tunic in his bosom, when he took it out it was leprous as snow," and leprosy turns it white. "He said, put your hand into your bosom again. He put his hand into his bosom again, plucked it out of his bosom, and it was turned again as his other flesh. And if it come to pass that they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass if they don't believe those two, nor hearken to your voice, thou shalt take the water of the river, pour on the dry land, the water which thou takest out the river shall become," what? "Blood." And God had to go to that extent in Egypt, didn't He?

But you see, He was giving Moses the ability to authenticate himself as the messenger of the new revelation. Now, when you come to Elijah and Elisha, you see the same thing. And I'll give you just one illustration and there could be many others, but 1 Kings 17:24. In 1 Kings 17:24, Elijah has just accomplished the healing of a dead son, the widow's son. And he brings the little fellow down from

upstairs, and delivers him to his mother and Elijah says, "See? Your son lives." Now, 1 Kings 17:24, watch. "And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now by this I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is,'" what? "Truth."

Now you see? God is authenticating the prophetic office of Elijah as the one who is speaking His new revelation. Now, when you come to the New Testament it's the same, John 10:25. The first bringer of new revelation the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. John 10:25, "Jesus answered them, 'I told you and you believed not.'" Now listen, "'The works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me.'" In other words, Jesus is authenticated by signs. And when Peter gets up on Pentecost in Acts 2:22, he says that it is Jesus of Nazareth who has been confirmed or authenticated by the Father through signs and wonders which were done by Him. And the apostles, the same way. In Acts 14:3, it says that, "God give testimony to the preaching of the apostles by signs and wonders. So God authenticates the messenger of new revelation in the mosaic time, the messenger of revelation in Elisha and Elijah's time, the messengers of revelation in the time of the New Testament. So miracles, then, have the purpose of declaring new revelation as being given and of showing who the messengers of that revelation are.

Thirdly, miracles are to, thirdly, authenticate the message that is given to show it's a period of new revelation, this is the messenger, and thirdly here is the message. Three periods of extensive revelation in the past: Moses and Joshua's time, the time of the prophets in the New Testament. And each time, the new message validated by miracles, to show this from God. These are God's messengers and God is speaking.

Then there's a fourth element. And that is that miracles, as a purpose, were to call the attention of those listening to hear the new revelation. New revelation is given, here are the messengers, here is the message, here's the response. This is what you are to do. For example, the miracles in Egypt were done by Moses, and their intention was to instruct two groups of people. Two groups of people.

Take your Bible and look at Exodus chapter 6, Exodus chapter 6, verse 6. Now in Exodus 7, God begins the plagues, the marvelous miracles of nature. "Wherefore – " Exodus 6:6 " – say to the children of Israel, I am the Lord." Now you could say that to them and they might say, "Yeah, we've heard that for 400 years, but what are we doing in Egypt?" It's a nice message, but it seems like our God is a little bit impotent, and the Egyptian gods are a little bit stronger, because we can't seem to get out of here. So you say, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians. I will rid you out of their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people. I will be to you a God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God which brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

In other words, in verse 6, He says, tell them I'm going to do it. And in verse 7, tell them they'll know it in just a little while. Why? Because miracles intended what God was doing and convinced them. They didn't really have any question when they began to see what God was doing. And so, the miracles were to call the children of Israel. The believing people to believe the truth, because even they had doubts. But the second group, Exodus 7:17, and here Moses is talking to Pharaoh and it says, "Thus saith the Lord, in this thou shalt know that I am the Lord." In other words, Pharaoh, you're going to know. "Behold, I will smite with the rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river and they shall be turned to blood."

Now, notice the second group, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the Pagans. And Exodus 8:19 says the

same thing: "The magician said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. This is the finger of God and he hearkened not unto them as the Lord had said." So what happens then? Miracles are to bring a time of new revelation to attest to the messenger, to attest to the message, and to instruct both the believing and the unbelieving people that this is the Word of God. The miracles of Elijah and Elisha did the same thing.

To a believing lady such as the widow in 1 Kings 17:24, the miracle was convincing. In 1 Kings 18:36: "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel.'" And then you know what God did? God sent fire from heaven and licked up the stones, and the altar, and the water, and defeated the priests of Baal, right?

So, here you have in the case of Moses miracles to prove to the believing people, miracles to prove to the unbelieving that God is speaking. In the time of Elijah, miracles to the believing people like the widow. Miracles to the unbelieving people to prove that God is speaking. When you come to the New Testament, it's identically the same thing. Look at John 20:30, and in John 20:30 it says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples." That's important and they're not written in the book.

Now listen, Jesus did signs in the presence of His disciples. In other words, He wanted the believing people to know that this was an age of revelation, that he was speaking. But look at verse 31: "And these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing, you might have life through His name." They are also recorded that unbelieving people might become believing people. You see? So, in all those cases, the miracles of Moses, number one, were to convince the children of Israel that their God was more powerful than the Gods of Egypt. Secondly, to convince Pharaoh and the Egyptians of the futility of worshipping their gods.

In fact, if you study Exodus 7:12, you will note a most interesting thing. And that is, that every single one of the plagues is directed right at a specific Egyptian god to counter that god. The god of Nile is destroyed when the river turns to blood. The god of the sun is attacked as well. And all the way down the line. They worshipped frogs in Egypt, and God takes care of that god with a proliferation of frogs. Every plague was directed right at one of the Egyptian gods. So, He is showing the Israelites that their God is superior, and the pagans. The time of Elijah and Elisha, the very same thing occurs. Convincing the people of God to return to God, and the pagans to hear God's new revelation. The time of Christ and the apostles to confirm the faith of those who already believe, and to make inexcusable of those who do not.

Just a couple of other passages on that last point to add to your thinking. Acts 5:12: "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. And of the rest dared no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them and believers were the more added to the Lord multitudes of men and women. God gave them the ability to do signs and wonders, and people heard, and people believed, and people were added to the church." Now beloved, those are the only times in the history of God's redemptive plan when miracles have been standard fair. And when the law, and the prophets, and the New Testament is complete, God's revelation is done: "God who at sundry times and diverse manners spake in time past by the fathers through the prophets has in these last days spoken by His Son." God has spoken twice, the law and the prophets and His Son, the New Testament. Those two things come together to make the Word of God.

And believe me, by all of those miracles, God has authenticated this book, hasn't He? And He doesn't need to reauthenticate the book. Now, if you understand that that is the intention of miracles, then you will realize that today, there is no reason to have a proliferation of miracles going on where these people are saying everybody gets his miracle, like the book I think Pat Boone wrote, "A Miracle A Day Keeps the Devil Away," where miracle, after miracle, after miracle is going on, when you understand that they were used by God three times in history, periods less than 100 years to authenticate new revelation.

And at least the charismatics today are consistent. If they're going to allow for miracles, then they're going to all for new revelation. But the problem is: both of them are wrong. We tried to point out the error of allowing new revelation in the last few months of study. What is God calling us to in this age? What is the order of this age? Look at John 20:29, "Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed.'" In other words, Jesus is saying it isn't going to be this way anymore, Thomas. It's going to be different. There's going to be another way. It isn't going to be the seers and the believers anymore; it's going to be those who haven't seen. And Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:7. He said, "We walk by," what? "Faith and not by sight, and that is the order of the new day." And Peter says, whom having not seen we love.

We are not running around looking for miracles today, because miracles had unique purpose: to authenticate revelation, its messengers, its message, and to instruct those who heard to respond. And new revelation is not being given, and we are called not to seek miracles to authenticate an already authenticated word. We are called upon to believe by faith that this is the Word of God, and to respond to it.

Now let me take it a step further in developing the uniqueness of the apostolic era by talking about the apostles themselves. The writers of the New Testament as we have seen in our past studies were the apostles and their close associates. They were completely unique, their age was unique because there's only one New Testament and it was only written once and there isn't anything to be added to it. Revelation 22:18 makes that very clear, that the Bible is not to be added to. Nothing in Scripture indicates that the things that occurred then are to occur today, that the things that happened to those Bible writers are to happen to us. That was a very unique time. In fact, the Bible indicates just the opposite. Did you know that in the entire New Testament, relative to the Holy Spirit, Paul only gives four commands? That's all. Quench not, grieve not, walk in, and pray in the Holy Spirit and that's it. And one other illusion: be being kept filled. He doesn't say anything about seeking a miracle or seeking any other manifestation of the Spirit. Don't grieve, don't quench, walk in, and pray in the Holy Spirit, which means, pray consistently with His will.

And yet charismatics believe that the spectacular, miraculous elements are given for edification, and they are to be continued even today. And clearly the Word of God says, take for example tongues, 1 Corinthians 14:22: "Tongues are for a sign not to those that believe, but to those who do not believe." They never were intended for edification. We'll see that when we get into the 14th Chapter. All of these miracles, including tongues and everything, were signs to authenticate an era of new revelation. When the revelation ceased, the signs ceased also. B.B. Warfield, a great reform theologian of 75 years ago, wrote, and his word is firm because of the scholar that he was. In fact, in the time in which he wrote this, nobody argued with him because it was pre-modern Pentecostalism. This is what he said. Quote: "Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here there and elsewhere indifferently without a signable reason. They belong to revelation periods and appear

only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the apostolic church is the mark of the richness of the apostolic age in revelation. And when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also as a mere matter of course.” End quote. He’s right. Joel Gerlach, who is a Lutheran writing in an article in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, in October 1973, an article entitled “Glossolalia” said, “Glossolalia was given primarily for an evidential purpose: to authenticate and substantiate some facet of God’s truth. This purpose is always distorted by those who shift the emphasis from objective sign to subjective experience.” End quote. The signed gifts, beloved, were given to authenticate new revelation. Look at Mark 16:20, let’s go back to Mark 16:20. We were there a little while last week talking about the snakes and the poison, but let’s go back and assuming that we leave Mark 16:9 to 20 in and say that perhaps it is authoritative.

I want you to notice something interesting here. Verse 14, “Afterward, He appeared to the eleven.” Now we know to whom He is speaking. He is speaking to the eleven, minus Judas, of course. And the rest of what He says is to them. Verse 19: “So then after the Lord had spoken to them,” and the them goes back to the eleven, “He was received into heaven and sat on the right-hand of God. And they went forth,” now watch, “and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following.” In other words, it is as clear as it can be that the signed gifts were given to the eleven to confirm their proclamation of the Word of God. That is what they were for.

Look at Acts 2:22. In Acts 2:22, it says: “Ye men of Israel hear these words.” I quoted this for you earlier, “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you.” And how did God put His approval on Christ? By miracles, and wonders, and signs. God is accrediting Christ. In Mark 16, God is accrediting the apostles.

Now, I want you to look at Acts 7 and the message of Stephen, and I’ll show you an interesting statement there. Acts 7:36, talking about Moses. Stephen says, “He brought them out, out of Egypt, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and the red sea, and in the wilderness 40 years. This is that Moses who said unto the children of Israel a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of brethren like me Him shall you hear. This is he that was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai with our fathers who received the living oracles to give unto us.” Now notice, Moses and his signs are attached to the living oracles. God attests to His messenger when He’s giving new revelation, whether it’s Moses, or the prophets, or Christ, or the apostles. A very essential thing, people, that you have to hold onto. Miracles are not something that just get splattered through all the history of God’s operation. They are those things to confirm His revelatory messengers.

Go with me to Hebrews 2:3 and 4, which we’ve looked at in several connections, but must approach again because of its essentiality to what we’re saying. Hebrews 2:3 says: “How shall we escape,” and this is the writer writing to Jewish people. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” Now, that’s a great truth. How are you going to escape if you neglect salvation? You won’t. Then he discusses the salvation. “Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and confirmed unto us by them that heard Him.” Now, the Lord and the apostles. The apostles were the ones who associated with Christ, so here is a second generation Jewish congregation saying that they have received the first generation gospel. And God bearing them witness with signs and wonders, diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Not bearing us witness, the confirmed is an erroneous past-tense that occurred in the past. The participle must identify concurrently with the main verb; it too is past. It was confirmed to them and thus to us by the miracles and gifts and signs that

came. And so it is, then, that there is a clear biblical word that the miracles, and the wonders, and the signed gifts were confirming gifts given to first generation apostles, who were the messengers of new revelation, just as it was in the case of Elijah and Elisha, and Moses.

So, Warfield says in his book, "Counterfeit Miracles," as Abraham Kuyper figuratively expresses it: "It has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own to meet his separate needs. But, he has rather spread a common board for all and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He has given the world one organically complete revelation adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all. And from this one completed revelation, he requires each to draw his whole spiritual sustenance. Therefore, it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power, cannot be expected to continue after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed." End quote. All of that to say: you can't have miracles unless you have revelation.

The charismatics say God wants to go through and do everybody a special miracle. And you hear them say, "God has a special miracle just for you." Jack Nemeth did some research on this in the last two weeks. Took every single miracle in the Gospels, and his conclusion, taking every one of them and drawing a chart and a graph on them: none of them was ever done privately, never. God never does private miracles; they're pointless. They're only to authenticate new revelation and new revelation is never a private issue. But, at least they're consistent with their error in saying that if you're going to have miracles, you've got to have revelation. And if you're going to have revelation, you've got to have the messengers of revelation, who are the apostles. So, the charismatics today believe in new revelation, apostles, and miracles. In fact, one of them even told me recently that I was an apostle. And I said who, me? I said I'm not. He said yes, you're an apostle given to the church for this age. Not me. I have my definition very clearly outlined in Ephesians 4. I'm a teaching pastor, and also in the pastoral epistles where it said that I'm an elder, bishop or presbyter. Which all means the same thing, but not an apostle. The apostles were special, at a special time. The credentials, the authority of the first preachers of Christianity does not need continual repetition. One age of miracles fully authenticated as sufficient to establish the divine origin of the message, and the message is put together, and the message is sufficient to meet every need so that today, the Holy Spirit doesn't say, seek miracles. Paul doesn't say, seek the Spirit's manifestation, seek signs and wonders, he just says seek to walk in it in the energy of the Spirit. And he parallels it: let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Paul puts it this way and I think it's apt for us in 2 Timothy 3:15, he reminds Timothy of this, "That from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures," now listen, "which are able to make you wise unto salvation. And all Scripture is given by inspiration of God that the man of God maybe perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." So what do you need to be wise unto salvation? The Holy Scripture. What do you need to be perfect? The Holy Scripture. What do you need to be thoroughly furnished? The Holy Scripture. What do you need to do all good works? The Holy Scripture. So what do you need? The Holy Scripture. That's it.

In Romans 15 and verse 4, "For whatever things were written in earlier times," that is the Word of God, "were written for our learning that through patience and comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope." If we want hope, if we want an anchor, if we want something to carry us through the world, it isn't a miracle we need. It is the Scripture we need. In Revelation chapter 1, and Revelation incidentally, is the book full of visions and wonders and signs and everything. It'd be a perfect place for the writer to say, now, you should seek the same kind of things John saw here. But look what he

says: "Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep the things written in it." He doesn't seek for these experiences. He just says read, and learn, and obey. And in James chapter 1, verse 25, the same emphasis is made, "Whosoever looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." And what is the perfect law of liberty? It is the Word of God. And whoever looks into that will be a perfect man and his deeds will be blessed.

You don't need an infinite number of authenticating miracles to authenticate an already authenticated Scripture. We don't need more than two or three witnesses to confirm something. We only need to have a trial one time and when the decision is made, this is the Word of God, it is made, and it does not need to go to court again. And if God were doing miracles today as He did in the apostolic time, then either he would have felt that He did a lousy job of authenticating His Scripture, or He would be giving us new revelation and neither is possible. The new revelation period and the apostles are inextricably connected.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12 for a minute, verse 11. "I am become a fool in glorying," he says. "You have compelled me." In other words, Paul says, I have to keep defending my apostleship to you. I have to keep telling you that I'm an apostle and proving it to you. And he says, "I don't come behind the chief apostle." "Listen, I am every bit an apostle, even though personally I'm nothing. Officially, I am every bit as much as the chief apostle." And to prove it, he says, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, and signs, wonders, and mighty deeds." Now, listen to that. Could it be any clearer, beloved, than that? He says look, "These signs and wonders and miracles are the signs of an," what? "Apostle."

Now watch, think with this one. Paul is trying to prove he is an apostle. He proves it by doing signs, wonders, and miracles. If those kinds of things were common to all Christians, that would be a stupid way to prove you're an apostle, right? Wouldn't prove anything. But, those were unique to them. You see, the apostles had this miraculous power as the messengers of the Word of God, and others closely associated with them, who were commissioned by them, and it never went any further than that.

In fact, I'll tell you a startling truth, something you should never forget. After Pentecost, after Pentecost, no miracle, after the church is born, no miracle ever occurred in the entire New Testament, except in the presence of an apostle or one directly commissioned by an apostle. In the case of Stephen and Philip, both of whom were appointed and commissioned in Acts 6 by the apostles. They do not occur among all of the people. Not at all. No miracle after Pentecost ever occurs, except in the presence of an apostle or one directly commissioned by an apostle, such as Philip and Stephen. In fact, even the miraculous granting of the Holy Spirit in Samaria to Cornelius as a Gentile, and to the followers of John the Baptist in Acts 19, none of those miraculous things, tongues, could even occur until, who was there? The apostles, because those things were attached specifically to them. They were the signs of an apostle.

Now the charismatic person will say, all right, then we've still got apostles today. We still have apostles. And my answer to that is: no we don't. And I'll give you six reasons why, six fast reasons. Can't have apostles today for six reasons. Number one, the church was founded on them. Ephesians 2:20: "the foundation is the apostles and prophets." Charles Smith of Grace Seminary, in the Greek text there, says that the best rendering in his judgment would be the apostle prophets. That they're not anything different, but that they're the same thing, and that the apostle talks about the office, and

the prophet talks about the function. The apostle prophets. But whether they are or not, the point is that the apostles are there designated as the foundation of the church. You don't have to be a genius to know that in a metaphor like that, when you build a building, you put a foundation on the bottom, and that's the last time you lay the foundation. You don't keep laying foundations forever. They were foundations.

Second reason: an apostle had to be an eyewitness of what? The resurrection, Acts 1:22. Had to be a witness of the resurrection. And when Paul wants to prove his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9:1, he says, "Am I not of an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?" And in 15, he says the Lord appeared to so and so, and so and so, and so and so, and so. And last of all, He appeared unto me. I dare say today, there are no people who have personally seen the resurrected Lord. But, I would hasten to add, the charismatics will also claim that. But you see, Peter said, "Whom having not seen we love, and blessed are they who have not seen, but believe." This is the not-see age. This is the faith age, not the sight age. So an apostle was the foundation of the church, an eyewitness to the resurrection.

Thirdly, an apostle was directly chosen verbally by Jesus Christ. In Matthew chapter 10, very clear who the apostles are. It couldn't be any clearer. He called twelve disciples. He gave them power, and the names of the twelve apostles are these, and then He names them. That's the first time they're called apostles. He says, twelve of you come over here, you are now, bang, the apostles, and He names who they are. In Luke 6:13, it says, "The twelve whom He named apostles." They were those specifically chosen by Christ. You can surely add to the ranks, the apostle Paul, and perhaps Matthias of Acts, but they had to be specifically chosen by Christ. They were His authorized agents. The Hebrew word that Jesus may have used when He said apostles if He spoke in Hebrew rather than Aramaic, and we don't know which, but if He spoke in Hebrew, he would have said *sheliach*. And the Hebrew word, *sheliach*, the Rabbi said, "The *sheliach* of a man is as the man himself." He is the representative who stands with full authority to act on the behalf of a man. In legal terms, you would call him a proxy. They are the proxies of Jesus, appointed by Him, special agents so that they can say, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk. They were the original authoritative agents. They were the original agents of revelation. They were the apostles of the Lord. Yes, in the New Testament, others are called apostles, but if you check 2 Corinthians 8:23, it calls them the apostles of the church. It's one thing to be an apostle of the Lord sent by Him direct; it's another thing to be an apostle of the church, a sent one.

And incidentally, I hasten to add: no miracles are ever recorded as having been done by the apostles of the church. So the twelve, plus Paul, have a non-transferable commission to teach revelatory doctrine and found the church. And when it talks about the future of the church, and the pastorals, and how the church will be organized, it'll talk about bishops, and presbyters, and elders, and pastors, and deacons and deaconesses, but it never talks about apostles. So the first three reasons there can't be apostles today: they were the foundation of the church and it's already laid. Secondly, they were specially witnesses of the resurrection and thirdly, they were the authorized agents of Christ.

Fourthly, and we've seen this so I'll just mention it, they were authenticated by miraculous signs. It's foolish to say to me that I'm an apostle of the church. People do not get healed in my shadow. They don't. They just get the sun out of their eyes. I do not have the signs of an apostle.

Fifthly, a fifth thing that sets them apart as unique is they had absolute authority. They had absolute authority. They weren't even like the prophets. Do you remember when a prophet of the New Testament age spoke in 1 Corinthians 14, it said, "When the prophets speak, let the spirit of the

prophets be subject to the prophets.” You know, in other words, you guys have got to judge about these prophets, but when an Apostle spoke, it wasn’t any discussion. They were the revelatory agents of God. And Jude 17 says, remember what was spoken by the apostles. And Paul says, “If any man says he’s prophet or spiritual, you judge him on the basis of whether or not he says that the things that I command are the Word of God.” 1 Corinthians 14:37. They had special authority.

And sixth, and this is to me the *coup de grace*. They have a unique place forever. You say what do you mean by that? I’ll show you. In the new Jerusalem heaven, John in 21 of Revelation is looking at heaven. Look at what he sees. “And a wall of the city,” that fantastic wall of the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, “had twelve foundations and in them the names of the,” what? “Twelve apostles.” Forever, they’re unique. For always, they’re unique. They’re non-transferable, non-reproducible. Revelation is done, apostles are done, miracles are done until the next new era when God speaks again in His kingdom.

And the history of the second century of the church confirms this. Alva McClain says, “When the church appears in the second century, the situation relative to miracles is so changed that we seem to be in another world.” End quote. Samuel Green in the “Handbook of Church History” says, and this was published in 1913 in London, he says, “When we emerge in the second century, we are to a great extent in a changed world. Apostolic authority lives no longer in the Christian community. Apostolic miracles have passed. We cannot doubt there was a divine purpose in thus marking off the age of inspiration, and of miracles by so broad and definite a boundary from succeeding times.”

It just ended. History says it. Exegesis says it. Theology says it. And you can even see it as you study the book of Acts. In Acts 5, it says, “Everyone was healed by the apostles.” 25 years later, the greatest apostle of all can’t get healed of a sickness. And as we near the end of his life, he tells Timothy to take a little wine for his often illnesses. And later on, at the very end of his life, he leaves a dear beloved brother sick at Miletus. Something changed. From everybody getting healed to a whole lot of sick people at the end of the book of Acts. In the early chapters of Acts, people are proclaiming Christ everywhere and no one dies, and then all of a sudden in chapter 7 Stephen dies, and then in chapter 12, James dies, and something’s changing. In the early pages of the book of Acts, Jerusalem is filled with miracles, and after the martyrdom of Stephen there is never another recorded miracle to occur in the city of Jerusalem. Something’s changing.

The apostolic age was marvelously unique and it ended. And what happened then is not the normal thing for every Christian. The normal thing for every Christian is to study the Word of God, which is able to make us wise and perfect, is to live by faith and not by sight.

It doesn’t really bother me when Russell Bixler says, “Many Christians have a faith which gives no room to a Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. They’re quite comfortable with a distant God who hasn’t done anything significant in 2,000 years.” End quote. Well, Russell, God has done some significant things in 2,000 years. I’m sorry you don’t see that. When I look around me today and I see Him doing plenty more, don’t you?

Jerry Horner, the associate professor of biblical literature at Oral Roberts University says in his testimony, “Who in the world would want a God who’s lost all His zip? Could God do one thing in one century and not in another century? Has God lost all His power?” End quote. I say to you Jerry, God hasn’t lost any of His power, but don’t shove God into your box. The Bible says in Ephesians 3:20, there is a promise for this age and it is this, that, “He is able to do exceeding, abundantly, above all

you can ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.” And it won’t be what He did in the apostolic age, but it’ll be marvelous because He’s God and what He does is always marvelous.

Let’s pray. Thank you, Father, for our time this morning. Thank you for speaking with your word. Help us to realize, Lord, that we have to just bring everything to the text to see if these things be so. Make us like the noble Bereans who search the Scriptures. Help our brothers and sisters, who perhaps need to do this a little more to see the truth. Most of all, help us to be loving in sharing those things. Thank you for calling us together this morning for this time, enriching us so much. We give you the praise in Jesus’ name, whom we love and serve. Amen.

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