

THE GIFT OF MIRACLES

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SCRIPTURE: Moroni 7:35-43.

Christ hath said, If ye will have faith in me, ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. And he hath said, Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved. And now my beloved brethren, if this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, (and God will shew unto you with power and great glory at the last day that they are true;) and if they are true, has the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man on the face thereof to be saved? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men. Wherefore if these things have ceased, wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain, for no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; Wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man; for they are as though there had been no redemption made.

Behold I say unto you, that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ, it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth. -- Mormon 4:84.

Christianity is a religion of miracles. Christianity begins with the appearance of angels to a betrothed virgin and her husband-to-be, announcing the birth of the Son of God, who is to be the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah. His birth was a miracle. Miracles marked the ministry of this Messiah from beginning to end, and his resurrection from the dead (which we have discussed in a previous sermon) is the greatest miracle of all time. Miracles continued in the ministry of the apostles who followed him, and were promised to men of faith to the end of time.

Christianity is also a religion of salvation. If there are no miracles, there can be no salvation. If Christ was not the miraculously conceived Son of God, if he did not demonstrate by means of saving miracles his power to save, if he did not miraculously overcome death, and if his miraculous power is not still available to overcome sin and death, then there is no salvation. Yes, Christianity is a miraculous religion. Take the miraculous out of it, and there would be little or nothing left.

What is a miracle? Mr. C. S. Lewis, whose book "miracles" has been the source of much valuable thought for this sermon, points out that there are two ways of regarding the universe in which we live, the way of the Naturalist, and the way of the Supernaturalist. The Naturalist (to use Mr. Lewis' term) regards the universe as a great unified machine. Everything is a part of the one great whole which we call Nature. Everything in that whole is governed by the same law. Nothing can happen which will upset the smooth working of the laws of cause and effect; therefore if there is a God at all, he is simply a part of this great machine, bound by the laws of its operation, and therefore there can be no miracles which are departures from or variations of law.

There are some obvious flaws in this theory, or this method of looking at the universe. All rational thinking assumes, but cannot prove, the validity of human thought and reason. Where do thought and reason come from? Is reason the product

of the machine which we call Nature? Human experience teaches us that a machine which is built by reason may do fabulous feats of calculation that seem like reasoning; but the reasoning capacities of the machine depend on the reason of the man who makes and runs it, not on the machine. A non-reasoning universe which is simply a machine, could not have produced reason. If we assume the rationality of human thought, we must of necessity reject the theory that thought and reason grow out of the non-reasoning machine which we call Nature. Therefore, sooner or later we must admit that there is a Reason or Intelligence which did not grow out of irrationality, which is not a product of Nature, which is eternal and self-existent. This Reason or Intelligence we call God.

This brings us to the second theory of the Universe -- the theory of the supernaturalist. The supernaturalist agrees that there is law and order in Nature, but asks, "Who made this great machine? Who set it in motion? Who controls it? Who made its laws? Is He who made it the slave of the machine he has created, or are his reason and his intelligence superior to it?" The supernaturalist says that there is something outside of Nature -- its Creator, its Sustainer, its Ruler, its Lawgiver. Cosmic mind is the basic, self-existing fact of Nature. Therefore, there must be a God who is not a part of Nature, who is manifested in Nature but yet outside of and independent of Nature, to whose reason Nature was meant and made to be subject. When God comes into Nature, then, he comes not as an intruder, to upset and overthrow the law or the systems of Nature, but as a rightful sovereign, ordering, regulating, sustaining, modifying and ruling his created domain. He is "super," "above" Nature, therefore "supernatural."

Skeptics say that miracles are contrary to the laws of Nature, and that the laws of Nature simply cannot be broken. What we call a law of Nature is merely our human observation that insofar as we have been able to ascertain up to this moment, Nature always works in such and such a way. Therefore those who do not believe in miracles argue that if a certain phenomenon never has happened, it never can happen, because it is contrary to the laws of Nature. The fallacy of that reasoning has been proved over and over again as men have done things which were never done before. The steam engine, the telephone, the telegraph, the automobile, the incandescent light, the radio, the airplane, the television set in your home -- all were once declared to be impossible and against the laws of Nature because they had never been known to work before. Experience prolonged a million years can never prove with absolute certainty that any seeming impossibility is impossible, for the next try, the next moment, might bring to pass the things which have been regarded as impossible for a million years.

We know that reason enables man to change the course of Nature. By applying reason to the cultivation of plants, man speeds up the processes of selection and evolution, and makes a shasta daisy out of a wayside weed. Using the principle of the siphon, he makes water flow up hill. Using other perfectly natural principles discovered by reason, man takes electricity from Nature, where it is capable of performing no useful function, and uses it to light homes and drive factory wheels. Certainly it is not unreasonable to believe that God, the eternal, self-existent Intelligence or Reason, can change the course of Nature to an even greater extent than man can, not by breaking laws, but by applying laws which man has not as yet been able to apprehend.

Miracles do not violate the laws of Nature. If I hold a book in my hand, I have not repealed the law of gravity. I have momentarily stopped it from pulling the book to the floor. If I take my hand away, the law of gravity still operates. As Reason feeds into Nature new events, new causes, new forces, Nature is made to produce results which would have been impossible to Nature alone, which in our ignorance we call miracles.

Most Christian people today quite readily admit that the miracles recorded in the Bible were genuine. But "All miracles ceased with the apostles," they say. "We should not expect anything like that to happen today." Strangely enough, this has not been the belief of many religious leaders whose followers do not believe in miracles today. John Calvin, in his commentary on the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians points out that Paul predicts that spiritual gifts (including miracles) will some day perish when man's imperfection has ended, or "when that which is perfect is come." Then he adds, "We are far from having attained that perfection as yet." (Vol. 1, pp. 427-428; quoted p. 177 G.T. Griffiths "The Instructor") John Wesley in sermon 94 admits that spiritual gifts ceased in the Christian church after the time of Constantine, and then gives his opinion as to the reason: "'the love of many had waxed cold' and the Christians had no more of the Spirit than the heathen.... This was the real cause why the gifts of the Spirit were no longer retained in the church, because the Christians had turned heathen again, and had only a dead form left." (quoted p. 176, G.T. Griffiths, "The Instructor") Bishop Charles Gore, an Anglican historian of first rank says: "It has been a serious weakness in the latter church that it has ceased to expect or welcome or use such gifts as 'prophecy,' or 'miracles,' which inspired the courage and confirmed the faith of the earlier church." (Orders and Unity, page 109: quoted Miss. Sermon Studies, p. 195)

"God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." What God has set in the church should rightfully be found in the church to the end of time. God is an unchangeable God. His power is still the same. The only question is one of man's willingness and capacity to receive. The miracles which Christ wrought were evidences of the living power of God to save. The miracles which the apostles worked were evidence of the living power available through the name of the resurrected and living Savior, whose miraculous resurrection had attested his power to save. Has that power ceased? Do not men still need regeneration? Is not each spiritual rebirth a new miracle? Do not men still need and look forward to a miraculous resurrection? If the power of Christ is still present to save in the church, it will attest its presence by sign, wonders, and miracles -- by gifts of healing, by prophecies, by gifts of tongues. The signs reveal and attest a new, yet an old, and continuing source of power for the salvation of man.

But we believe that the day of miracles is not past; that the power of God is still the same; that the power of Christ to save and to bring us new life is still the same; that miracles and signs still follow them that believe. Jesus promised his disciples that they should do the same things he did, and even greater things they should do. He promised that if they would abide in the vine, they might ask what they would, and it should be given unto them. He promised them that if they had faith as a grain of mustard seed, they should be able to move mountains. He has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Are those promises false? Were they intended only for one age of the world, or are they good for all time? We believe they are true, and they are good for us today, if we fulfill the conditions and make ourselves worthy of them.

Miracles and other spiritual gifts are not given that men as individuals might be puffed up, or even that an entire denomination should boast. They are given in light, in intelligence, in wisdom, with restraint, to people who can be trusted to use them wisely and for the edification of the body of Christ. They are not given to satisfy the curiosity of a Pharaoh, who demanded a sign, or of a Herod, who demanded that Jesus put on a magician's act for him. Sign-seekers betray their origins by following the example of Satan, who demanded that Jesus work miracles to prove that he was the Son of God. Jesus specifically warned his disciples in Luke 10:20 against boasting of their powers. He said, "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." To Satan and his temptations he replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." In

modern revelation, this church has been commanded, "Require not miracles," (D.C. 23:6) And again we have been warned, that we "shall not boast of these things, neither speak them before the world; for these things are given unto you for your profit and for salvation." (D.C. 83:11)

Not boastingly, then, but humbly, because we recognize our inadequacy and our unworthiness to receive as much as God would gladly give us, we state our belief in the signs that follow the believer, which are to continue in the church until "that which is perfect is come," when men are perfected in Christ, and dwell with him and God in face-to-face presence, in a glorified body, on a glorified world.