KEY ADVERTISING / Signs, Wonders, Miracles, Love

As we follow the ministry of Jesus, we see the emphasis he had on **teaching, preaching** and **healing.** Jesus had no access to TV, radio, mass media, the printing press, Facebook etc. How did he attract the attention of the people? First of all, he spoke with a **unique authority**, as if He was from another world. (He was!) He also displayed a **great compassion** for the downtrodden of society. Signs, wonders and miracles were not just to prove his power but to bring hope and healing to the hurting masses who were then naturally drawn to Him.

The life of Jesus was marked by signs even from his birth. They would point to his being the promised Savior and Messiah. His life and ministry aroused a **sense of wonder** among those who came in contact with him. Jesus also performed miracles, those things which go beyond explanation in the natural or scientific realm. All true Christians believe in the deity of Jesus, the historical fact of his supernatural life and in the miracles that he performed.

In the early 1980's, I realized that there was more that God wanted me to believe and teach. Signs, wonders and miracles were not meant just to be things of the first century in the days of Jesus and His apostles. It is true that before the Bible was fully written, God used supernatural gifts to confirm that his apostles were truly from him. Hebrews 2:3,4. But I began to see that God still wanted to do supernatural things in the church, even in our day.

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE HIGHEST KIND

I had been getting uneasy feeling in my stomach for about one and a half years whenever Pastor J. spoke at church. I sensed there was something wrong in his message and life. (I will share another time how I came to realize that the Pastor was not even born again! His wife was like a thorn in my side. One time she called me over to the parsonage for a meeting. She told me I was too evangelistic and that she did not even like Billy Graham!)

I still remember the Sunday morning when God spoke clearly to me. It was not an audible voice, but I knew that I knew that God had spoken. It was a late spring day in 1979 about 10:20 AM and I was standing at my kitchen sink. I was getting ready to walk across the road to attend the rural Reformed Church on Clymer Hill which I had attended most of my life. God spoke these words very clearly to me:

"Stop going where your fire is being quenched."

The next Sunday I went to an Assembly of God church in Jamestown, N.Y. and I still remember the message. It was on the following verses from the end of the gospel of Mark. A passage I had never heard before in a church service.

> **"Jesus said unto them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe; In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well"**
> **After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his Word by the signs that accompanied it.**
> **- Mark 16:15-20 NIV**

Over the next several years I would experience some of those signs in my life. The scripture that really opened my eyes was another great commission passage in Matthew given by Jesus to his disciples just before he ascended to heaven.

> **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age."** - Matthew 28:18-19

The apostle Paul demonstrated the gospel message with power - Romans 15:15-20. So did John G. Lake (see our Kingdom Wisdom section). So did T.L. Osborn in the mid-20th century, and more recently Reinhard Bonnke, who recorded over 70 million converted through his massive African crusades which included masses healed just listening in the crowd.

Note: In light of the parable of the soils of Mark 4, we realize that not every decision is a true conversion but we are thankful for those who truly went on to follow Jesus!

Jesus commissioned his first disciples to do the things that he did - drive out evil spirits, heal the sick, raise the dead, love your enemies, live by faith etc. The apostles were to pass **all of Jesus' teachings** to the next generation and so on. One caveat; as mature Christians we are not to follow signs, but signs should follow us! It is important to know that those in the world can be drawn to Christ when they see God do supernatural things. Many Muslims in the world are coming to Christ through supernatural dreams and visions that reveal to them the truth about Jesus. Sucha was a Sikh university student who came to Christ at our Baptist Church at a healing service. I had the privilege of discipling him later.

Israel limited God and so have Christians today - Psalm 78:41

One of the most detrimental teachings that entered the church a few centuries after Christ was cessationism. Some began to teach that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and miracles ceased after the last apostle of Jesus died. St. Augustine did teach this and later the Reformers adopted this teaching. However, they neglected to note that near the end of his life, Augustine changed his mind after he saw many wonderful miracles in N. Africa. William DeArteaga has written a valuable book called **Quenching the Spirit.** He gives a detailed history of the ministry of the Holy Spirit from the days of Jesus up into the 1990's and the story of those who sought to limit God (the spirit of the religious Pharisees). O.

I usually do not name names when bringing up wrong teaching, but in this case I will do so. John MacArthur wrote a book called ***Strange Fire*** which defended cessationism.

"Healing miracles of the kind recorded in the Gospels and Acts were unique to the first century church. After the time of the apostles, healings such as those ceased and have never since been part of church history. While the Lord still answers prayer and works in providential ways to heal people according to his will, there is no evidence that miraculous healings are occurring today as they did during the apostolic age (except regeneration and salvations). The apostolic gift of healing has ceased." -Strange Fire pg. 175 / John MacArthur

When I read the words "no evidence', I realized that the author must live in a very limited Christian world; God is doing amazing miracles around the world today. He also has overlooked the record of miracles in the church in every generation since Christ. How sad. It is difficult for teachers of God's Word to admit that they may be wrong. I believe it can be explained by four words: **Resistance, Repetition, Reputation, Riches.** First of all, they are resistant to the Holy Spirit activity because they may be afraid of excesses or afraid of what others may think, or they may not want to lose control. Another reason is repetition. If one has taught something for many years, that belief system is ingrained in their thinking. Even if they discover they may be wrong, they will find it hard to admit it. Their reputation is at stake. If they admit they were wrong, their followers may wonder if they are wrong about other things too and drop their support for their ministry. MacArthur has been influenced in many good ways by the teaching and ministry of the late D. Martyn Lloyd Jones of London, a great expository preacher. However, MacArthur apparently missed the part of being open to the moving of the Holy Spirit that Dr. Jones accepted.

"The Bible was not given to replace the miraculous but to correct abuses."
- Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones

Note: I still respect many of MacArthur's teachings and in fact consider his book, **The Gospel According to Jesus** one of the best on the presentation of the basic gospel message of Jesus as Lord. However, I think his teaching on cessation is false. This does not make him a false teacher. That would only be true if he denied the fundamental and basic truths of the faith pertaining to salvation and to who God is.

RT Kendall, a balanced teacher on the Word and the Spirit has a good response.

Holy Fire - by RT Kendall (An American who took the pulpit at Westminster Chapel in London after Martyn Lloyd Jones