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Bridgeway Church  
John 13-17 / #8  
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### Sermon Summary #8

#### The God Who Supplies the Spirit, or Miracles Re-Visited John 14:12 Galatians 3:1-5

What precisely is a miracle? What events in life would qualify as miracles? When you make a trip to Penn Square Mall on the day before Christmas and discover that the parking lot is not only completely full but has spilled out onto the grassy median and even across the street, do you pray for a miracle? And when you then make one more loop through the parking lot only to discover that a spot has suddenly opened up for you directly in front of the store where you planned on shopping, do you regard that as having happened by direct intervention from God? Was *that* a miracle?

There is nothing more majestic and awe-inspiring than the development of a human being in the womb of its mother. Science has now made it possible for us to peer inside the womb and see to some extent what David meant in Psalm 139 when he said that God had “formed” his “inward parts” and had “knitted” him “together” (v. 13). This is something that happens multiple times every moment of every day all across the globe. So, should we refer to this remarkable reality as a miracle? Can something that happens with such unbroken *regularity* qualify as a miracle?

When an EF-3 tornado is spotted heading directly for your home and you pray that God would redirect its path, and he does, and you and your home and the homes of your neighbors are all spared, is *that* a miracle?

Consider this scenario. You suffer a flat tire on Broadway Extension at midnight on Friday and then discover that you left your cell phone at home. It's more than a little scary being alone and without transportation, when suddenly one of your best friends just happens to drive by and sees you. He tells you that at 11:50 p.m. he had a sudden and irresistible craving for ice cream and rushed out to get some before the grocery store closed at midnight. Is *that* a miracle?

OK, one more. My friend Matt Chandler, Senior Pastor at the Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, and president of the Acts 29 network, was struck down by a malignant brain tumor just before Thanksgiving four years ago. Following surgery, he undergoes a rigorous regiment of radiation and chemotherapy and today has been repeatedly pronounced cancer free at every scheduled follow-up exam. During this time he has also been the recipient of thousands of passionate prayers in which men and women all around the globe asked God to heal him. Is that a miracle? If we should conclude that it was God who made effective the radiation and chemo that Matt received, and that without that medical treatment he would have died, do we call *that* a miracle?

What these examples show us is that the word *miracle* is used somewhat promiscuously and freely to describe everything from healing a paralytic to a simple answer to prayer to a providential coincidence when you run into an old friend at the airport whom you haven't seen in 20 years. So, what is a good, biblical working definition of a miracle? Max Turner, a professor of New Testament at London Bible College, uses the term to describe any event that combines the following traits:

- (1) it is an extraordinary or startling observable event,
- (2) it cannot reasonably be explained in terms of human abilities or other known forces in the world,
- (3) it is perceived as a direct act of God, and
- (4) it is usually understood to have symbolic or sign value (e.g., pointing to God as redeemer, judge, and Savior).

Part of the problem is that *many Christians envision God as remote from the world*, removed from any direct involvement in their lives on a daily basis. Yet there are numerous texts that assert God's immediate involvement in everything from the growth of a blade of grass (Ps. 104:14) to the sustaining of our very lives (Acts 17:28a; Col. 1:17). For this reason we must reject the definition of a miracle as a direct *intervention* of God into the world. The phrase

“intervention into” implies that God is *outside* the world and only occasionally *intrudes* in its affairs. And we know from Scripture that nothing could be further from the truth.

Some define a miracle as *God working in the world apart from means, or an instrument*, that would bring about the desired result. But God often uses instruments in performing the miraculous, as in the case of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand by means of multiplying one little boy’s lunch.

Others define a miracle as *God acting contrary to natural law*. But this implies there are forces (natural laws) that operate independently of God, forces or laws that God must violate or override to perform a miracle. But God is the author and providential Lord over all natural processes. So-called “natural law” is nothing more than the will and power of God imposed on the physical creation.

Wayne Grudem has proposed a simple but helpful definition that I believe is faithful to the Scriptures: *“A miracle,” says Grudem, “is a less common kind of God’s activity in which he arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.”* What’s important for us to remember is that no matter how we define a miracle, *we must not think that a miracle means a typically absent God is now present*. Rather, the God who is always and everywhere present, upholding and sustaining and directing all things to their appointed consummation, is now working in *a surprising and unfamiliar way*. This also helps us answer the question of whether unusual answers to prayer are miracles. I would say yes, they are, if such answers are sufficiently unusual to arouse awe and wonder and to evoke acknowledgement of God’s power and activity (e.g., 1 Kings 18:24, 36-38; Acts 12:5-17; 28:8).

Last week we looked closely at the promise of Jesus that those who believe in him would do the same works or miracles he did. Today we are going to delve even more deeply into the nature of miracles and whether or not we can and should pray for them to happen. Our text is Galatians 3:1-5, with particular emphasis on v. 5.

#### *Galatians 3:1-5*

Let’s begin by reading the larger context, beginning with Galatians 3:1. Here the apostle Paul clearly describes both *the initial reception of the Spirit* at the moment of salvation (v. 2) and *the on-going supply and provision of the Spirit throughout the course of the Christian life* (v. 5). The initial gift of the Spirit to the Galatians (and to us as well) is described in v. 2 – “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” The on-going and continuous daily supply of the Spirit throughout the course of the Christian life is described in v. 5 – “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?”

I want to make several critically important observations about this and then try to explain why it is so important for us today as we think about the operation of the miraculous in our lives.

*First, God never gives his Spirit at any time because we have put him in our debt by doing good things.* Obedience to the law, or the doing of good works, says Paul, is not the reason why or the instrument through which God gives his Spirit to his people, whether that be at the point of their conversion or at any time during their Christian lives. In other words, Paul is ruling out any form of legalism or works-based approach to our experience of the Spirit. Twice in this paragraph, first in v. 2 and then again in v. 5, Paul rules out “works of the law” as the reason why we experience God’s Spirit.

So we need to put out of our minds altogether any suggestion or thought or expectation that if we will just try harder and grit our teeth and produce some good works that God will look on us and say: “Hey, that’s really impressive. Good job on all the good works. As a reward for your effort I’m going to give you more of my Spirit.” No!

We must never think that because we attended a Sunday church service at least 50% of the time over the past six months or because we supported someone going on a short term mission trip to Kenya, that God will be induced or influenced to supply us with more of his Spirit.

By what means, then, or on what grounds does God give his Spirit to us? That brings me to the second observation.

**Second, just as clearly as Paul ruled out works as the reason why we receive God's Spirit he affirms that faith is the cause, faith is the instrument, faith is the grounds for our experience of the Spirit.** Again, in both v. 2 and in v. 5 it is **“by hearing with faith”** that God bestows his Spirit. It is when we believe and trust God and his promises that he is pleased to pour out his Spirit, not only for the purpose of saving us and causing the Spirit to indwell us permanently (v. 2) but also for the purpose of working miracles in our midst.

**Third, the faith to which God responds by giving us his Spirit comes by “hearing”.** Hearing what? Christian songs on the radio? The prayers of other believers? Gossip that we overheard at the table next to us at Starbucks? No. Obviously we **“hear” the word of God when it is proclaimed or taught or read or communicated and made known in some other fashion.** Anytime the truth about God and the gospel of Jesus Christ is heard and believed and trusted and treasured and embraced, God responds by pouring out his Spirit.

**Fourth, merely “hearing” isn't enough. We must have “faith” in what we've heard.** Simply listening to a sermon isn't enough. Just reading your Bible isn't enough. Memorizing Scripture is wonderful, but if you don't believe what you've memorized it serves no good end. Reading theology books is wonderful, but if you never move beyond understanding to faith and trust in what you've read, it profits you nothing. God doesn't reward us with the Spirit simply because we're smart or well-educated. People can know a lot about the Bible and can out-argue anyone theologically and never be the recipient of the miracle-working power of the Spirit.

In both Galatians 3:2 and 5 Paul says that our hearing must be the sort that leads to faith. In other words, we have to “believe in” and “trust” and “treasure” in our hearts what God has taught us or said to us in his Word. That's what pleases God. That's what serves as the instrument through which he pours out his Spirit. Look at how Paul makes this same point in 1 Thessalonians 1:4-8 –

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction [in other words, you didn't just “hear” the “word” but also believed it with “full conviction”; there was “faith” operative in your response and thus the power of the Holy Spirit was present]. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but *your faith in God* has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything” [again, their “faith” in God accompanied their proclamation of the “word of the Lord”] (1 Thess. 1:4-8).

We see much the same thing in Romans 15:13 –

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

If you and I hope to be filled with the “power of the Holy Spirit” and to abound in hope we must “believe”. We must have “faith”! But believe what? Clearly we are to believe what God has revealed to us about himself, his love, his character, his promises, and his power. Again, in both these texts and numerous others we see that “believing” what is heard and responding in “faith” to the message proclaimed is the **conduit** through which God abundantly provides us with more of the Spirit and powerfully works in us.

**Fifth, observe closely how God himself is described in Galatians 3:5. He is portrayed as “he who supplies the Spirit to you.”** This is a present tense participle. In other words, God is by his very nature and also by his choice a God who loves to give more of his Spirit to his people when they humble themselves and trust the truth of his Word. This is almost **a badge of identification.** God is saying, “This is who I am. This is what I do. I continually supply the Spirit to my people.”

**Sixth, don't forget that Paul is writing to Christians!** These people in Galatia have already trusted Christ for their salvation. Back in Galatians 3:2 Paul referred to the provision of the Spirit that God made to them when they first trusted Jesus for salvation. But now in Galatians 3:5 he is saying that God continues to make provision for believing men and women.

I stress this point simply because this is one verse that should forever put to rest the debate about whether God continues after our conversion to supply and provide us with more and more of the Spirit. He doesn't call this experience in Galatians 3:5 "Spirit baptism" or "Spirit filling". He doesn't use the word "anointing". But does it really matter? ***All that matters is that God is the sort of God whose very nature and purpose it is to give more of his Spirit on an on-going, daily basis to his people.***

Paul said much the same thing in Philippians 1:19. There he says, "for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance." I don't like that translation. I think it misses the point. The word translated "help" is the noun form of the same word translated "supplies" back in Galatians 3:5! In other words, I don't believe Paul is thinking so much of the Spirit's "help" but of the gift of the Spirit *himself*, whom God continually supplies to him. In other words, what God supplies to Paul during his time in prison is a greater manifestation of the Spirit himself. The phrase "the supply/provision of the Spirit" means that ***the Spirit is himself being given or supplied anew to Paul by God to assist him during the course of his imprisonment.***

We see again much the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 4:8 where the apostle speaks of the continuous exertion of strength from the Holy Spirit necessary for purity. He specifically says that God "gives his Holy Spirit to you" to strengthen you to resist sexual temptation. The use of the present tense again emphasizes the ongoing and continuous work of the Spirit in their/our lives. If Paul had in mind their conversion and thus their initial, past reception of the Spirit, he would probably have used the aorist tense of the verb (cf. 1:5-6). In context, Paul's point is that the call to sexual purity and holiness comes with the continuous provision of the Spirit to enable obedience. Thus the Spirit is portrayed as the ongoing divine companion, by whose power the believer lives in purity and holiness.

***Seventh, what specifically is it that God wants us to believe?*** In other words, what is the content or object of our "faith" to which God answers with the extraordinary supply and provision of his Spirit? We aren't told explicitly, but I think I know. There are several things Paul likely has in mind.

Given the larger context and purpose of the letter to the Galatians, he surely has in mind our ***faith in the finality of Christ's death and resurrection and our confidence in that gracious work of God as the only hope for salvation.*** In other words, believing that we are justified by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone is central to what we must believe. This is obvious when we read on in v. 6 of Galatians 5 where Paul speaks of Abraham "believing" God and being justified as a result.

I also think Paul has in mind our ***faith and confidence in the character of God.*** Do you believe God is the sort of God who loves to do wonderful things for his people? Do you believe God is the kind of God who delights to build up and restore and heal? Do you believe that God is of such a character and nature that he has compassion on his people and rejoices to do them good at all times? Believing this about God is crucial to our experience of the supernatural work of the Spirit.

Related to the former point is our faith that God is ***able*** to do such things. You may think that goes without saying. Surely if you are a Christian you know and are confident that God ***can*** do miraculous things for us. But may I remind you that Jesus always responded to that sort of faith with healing and deliverance and blessing. Let me give you a couple of examples of this.

In Matthew 9:28-29 Jesus said this to two blind men: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then Jesus touched their eyes saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And they were instantly healed. According to what "faith"? What exactly had they believed that led Jesus to heal them? It wasn't their belief or faith that it was his "will" to heal them. Jesus never asked them, "Do you believe that I am willing to heal you?" He merely asked if they believed he was "able" to heal them and when they said Yes, he healed them.

"Jesus, I believe you are able to heal me" is the kind of faith that pleases him. I can almost hear Jesus say: "Yes! I was waiting to hear you say that. It's important to me that you truly believe that I am capable of doing this." The leper in Matthew 8 said to Jesus, ***"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean"*** (v. 2). The leper didn't question Christ's ability. He trusted that completely. He did have doubts about the willingness of Jesus to do it. But Jesus didn't rebuke him for such doubts, as if it were a shortcoming in his faith that might jeopardize his healing. He healed him because of his confidence that he ***could*** do it.

The woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5 was healed when she simply touched Jesus' garment. "Your faith has healed you" (v. 34), said Jesus. In other words, "What I enjoy and respond to is your simple confidence and trust in my ability to make a difference in your life."

There is a lot of false teaching about the role of faith today. There are many who would mislead you to think that "faith" is like a gun you put to God's head forcing him to give you whatever you ask for. But we must not let those who have abused the concept of faith lead us to abandon it altogether as if it doesn't matter at all. It *does* matter. It matters profoundly.

The reason is this: *faith glorifies God*. Faith points us away from ourselves to him. Faith turns us away from our own power and resources to his. Faith says, "Lord, I am nothing and you are everything. I entrust myself to your care. I cling to you alone. My confidence is in your word and character no matter what happens."

Faith is not a weapon by which we demand things from God or put him in subjection to us. *Faith is an act of self-denial. Faith is a renunciation of one's ability to do anything and a confession that God can do everything*. Faith derives its power not from the spiritual energy of the person who believes, but from the supernatural efficacy of the person who is believed: God! *It is not faith's act but its object that accounts for the miraculous*.

There are certainly numerous other things that are important for us to believe in order that we might see the miraculous in our midst. But time does not allow us to go there. I can sum it up simply by saying, "We must labor to believe and have faith in and trust and bank our souls on the truth of everything God has said in his Word." That is what Paul means when he speaks of the "hearing with faith" here in Galatians 5.

*Eighth, God is working miracles among and through these Galatian Christians in the absence of any apostolic influence*. As far as we know, there were no apostles present in Galatia when Paul wrote this. Thus contrary to what most cessationists say, miracles were not exclusively or even primarily the work of apostles but were typically found among ordinary, average Christians like those in first-century Galatia. I'll have more to say about this in a moment.

*Ninth, notice the close, intertwined, unbreakable connection between believing the word of God and experiencing the supernatural work of the Spirit*. Sadly, indeed tragically, many today want to create a dividing line between the mind and the ministry of the Spirit. They have bought into a terribly destructive lie which says, "If you want more of the Holy Spirit, put your mind in neutral. Don't clutter up your life with a lot of thinking and theology. Open up yourself to the Spirit by suspending or even suppressing your mental and intellectual activity. Your mind only gets in the way. Thinking does no good."

That is not what Paul says. In fact, he says just the opposite. He says that it is only when we "hear" God's Word and respond in "faith" to what we've heard and learned that God supplies the Spirit to work miracles in our midst. *Good theology is the soil in which the supernatural takes root and blossoms in miracles*.

*Tenth, in conclusion I want us to consider how this passage relates to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and the spiritual gift of "miracles"*. There he mentions one particular spiritual gift and calls it "the working of miracles."

The most literal translation of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is "*workings of powers*" (*energemata dunameon*). Although all gifts are "workings" (*energemata*) or "energizings" by divine power (compare with vv. 6, 11), the word is used here in conjunction with "powers" (*dunamis*) for a particular gift. The word often translated "miracles" in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is actually the Greek word for powers (*dunamis*). Thus we again have a double plural, "workings of powers," which probably points to a certain variety in these operations.

What are these "workings" or "effectings" or "productions" of "powers"? Whereas all the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are certainly miraculous, the gift of miracles must primarily encompass other supernatural phenomena as well. Simply put, whereas all healings and prophetic words are displays of power, not all displays of power result in healing or prophetic words.

Several possible manifestations of divine power may be included in what Paul means by "workings of powers" or "miracles." Consider the following:

- See Acts 9:40 where Peter raised Tabitha/Dorcas from the dead (although even this is a healing in the strictest sense of the term).
- See Acts 13:8-11 where Paul induced blindness on Elymas. One might also include here Peter's word of disciplinary judgment that resulted in the immediate death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
- Perhaps nature miracles would be included here, such as turning water to wine, stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, reproducing food, and causing the rain to cease (or commence), as with Elijah.
- Perhaps supernatural deliverances (exorcisms) are in view as well.

*Concluding Comments on the Paralyzing Power of the Fear of Man*

If the teaching of the Bible regarding miracles is so clear, and if we are to pray for and seek after the display of God's supernatural power in our lives, why don't more of us do that? And when God answers our prayers and does something truly miraculous, why are we so cynical or skeptical or filled with doubt about it? At least one answer to this question is found in John 9.

John 9 is the story of how Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. The method he employed is rather strange. Jesus spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing' (John 9:6-7).

For the very first time, ever, he can see! Forty years of blindness, gone in an instant. Forty years of darkness and groping and despair and anger, washed away in the cool waters of Siloam. The people stare intently, pointing at his face.

"Is this the one who sat here begging for food?"

"Yes! Of course it is."

"No," say others.

"The beggar was blind. It must be a twin brother we never knew about. Blind people don't just start seeing! That sort of thing just doesn't happen."

"No, it's me!" he shouts. "I'm the one! I'm the beggar. I used to be blind but now I can see. This man put mud on my eyes and told me to wash in the pool of Siloam and I did and look, I can see!"

The response of the religious elite is nothing short of stunning. They launch a full-scale investigation. After all, they can't have some guy going around restoring sight to the blind! And on the Sabbath at that. The Pharisees are divided. For some, healing on the Sabbath is wrong. Therefore, whoever did it can't be from God. Others argue that if you can heal someone blind from birth you must be from God, the Sabbath notwithstanding! Desperate for some answers, the Pharisees quiz the man's parents. They ask three short questions:

"Is he your son?"

"Was he really blind?"

"How is it that he now sees?"

To which they respond with three quick answers:

"Yes, he's our boy."

"Yes, he was born blind."

"We don't have a clue. He's an adult. Go ask him yourselves!"

Then we read this horrifying explanation of why they said what they did:

"His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22).

The fear of man may well be the most paralyzing power on earth. A fear so powerful that a mother and father who've just seen their own child miraculously healed of congenital blindness freeze when confronted by the religious authorities of their day. Too terrified to acknowledge a miracle. Too terrified to give God thanks for this magnificent and long-awaited display of mercy. Too terrified to celebrate with their son. Terrified of losing face with the religious establishment. Terrified of losing status in the temple.

Did two people ever have greater cause for celebration? Was ever there greater justification for throwing a party? Could joy and laughter and tears of sheer delight ever be more appropriate than now? Yet, all they could think about was what others will think of them should they acknowledge that this Jesus was really the Messiah after all. They can't even think of their son, of his joy and freedom and excitement.

My point is simply this: Don't let your fear of other people paralyze your faith in God. Don't let your fear that you might lose their respect or lose stature in the community blind you to the miracle working power of God. Have faith in God, trust in his Word, treasure all that he is for you in Jesus, and rejoice when he abundantly supplies his Spirit to you and works miracles in your midst.