



Miracles

Miracles draw attention. That is possibly most characteristic of the word *miracle*: because it breaks through the normal and expected course of things, a miracle is noteworthy. People are attracted to it, because deep down mankind continues to crave for God. This is because God made mankind. He assigned them their place, as Paul proclaimed on the Areopagus, “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27). The hankering for miracles betrays our origin. It is remarkable that one of the most influential marks of the current worldwide revival of religion explicitly speaks of miracles.

A course in miracles

The title of the book that has become somewhat of a rage – a world-wide success for some time – is *A Course in Miracles*. It was published and is distributed by the New Age publishing house Ankhhermes. Books promoting Gnosticism, occultism, esoteric knowledge, transcendental spirituality, yoga, theosophy, fortune-telling and any number of alternative medicines, produced in great numbers by this publisher, are very successful. Millions of copies of *A Course in Miracles* have been distributed. In conjunction with the book, courses and symposia are being organized. According to announcements concerning the book, the objective is instruction by a teacher who is to inform us how we will learn to walk the way of salvation by way of applying universal spiritual principles. According to the description of the book by Willem Glaudemans – a well-known Gnostic – the teacher is none other than Jesus. The course teaches you to live out of your own inner strength, and ensures that your happiness no longer depends on others. It is a combination of Gnosticism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. It points us to our return to God and our deliverance from this world. Naturally, that also implies a “subtle correction of a number of traditional Christian dogmas and images”....

It would be better to express it differently and to note that it is about “another Jesus” concerning which the apostle Paul already warned the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11: 4).

The way miracles are spoken of here is primarily aimed at man undergoing a process of change under the influence of these “lessons”, by which one becomes amazed at the “incredible depth and unlimited power sheltered within himself”. The word ‘miracle’, therefore, can take on quite a different meaning in comparison to the Bible’s wording. In this course on miracles, it is about a path of self-redemption, which is as far removed from the biblical speaking of salvation as darkness from light. An unsuspecting person might think that you are touching on the miracles spoken of in the Bible. You hear people talking about it, and perhaps someone sees these two as related. That would be a disappointment.

Already in the time of the Lord Jesus’ walk on earth, the desire of man for miracles was more often a road straying from rather than toward God.

Is God still doing miracles?

Rather – within the Christian church, the question arises repeatedly whether our Christian tradition has become too intellectual. Hasn’t faith become too much of a doctrine? Do we still know the glory of faith in a God who does miracles? Many tend to answer “yes” to this question. The attraction that charismatic groups have on reformed Christians, certainly has to do with the fact that they find it easier to speak about miracles.

Within churches of reformed confession regular remarks are heard that ministers or church members find something lacking in our manner of being reformed. There should be greater openness for the surprises that the Lord has in store for His church today. Not only openness for "forgotten" charisma (spiritual gifts), but also for the miracles that God is still able to do today. Sometimes it seems, it is said, that the God of the Bible is no longer the same God we know and confess.

When reformed people give the impression that their faith no longer knows a God who does miracles, there is unquestionably something wrong! We need to thoroughly examine ourselves on this. Don't we still confess, concerning the Lord God, that He commands and it is there, speaks and it is there? Don't we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God; that He rules all things; that to Him is given all power in heaven and on earth? Would He no longer be the same who, when He lived on earth, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, distributed food when people had none, and even raised the dead? Can He not do so anymore? Does He not wish to do so anymore?

Our answer to this question is clear. He is the same! The mighty Savior, who still blesses wonderfully, and allows His own to experience His help and power.

How different our prayers would be. We often do not pray for God's intervention, in times of sickness and sorrow. And are there not many examples of hearing, often of wondrous hearing, in which the Lord answers prayers in surprising manners? Christians know about healings, know about miraculous financial rescues, know about liberation from anguish, of radical changes in lives. Indeed, our prayers are not for nothing.

Perhaps the question should be asked whether we thank Him as emphatically when the Lord hears us as when we pray. The testimony about the hearing of prayer is often rather subtle, also in our worship services. We could hear more often that the Lord is indeed still the same God as of Elijah and the apostles. He is gracious to all who call upon Him! We ought seriously to examine ourselves in this regard, both personally and as churches.

Yet there is a good reason for a certain restraint when it comes to miracles. We do not discuss it daily. The church does not dwell most on those miracles that are most impressive, even if they do happen.

Biblical equilibrium

Already in the Gospels it is clear that many who came to Jesus to witness miracles continued to have wrong expectations of Him. He denounces the people in Cana (where the first miracle took place!) of not advancing beyond a seeking of miracles – "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe" (John 4:48). Apparently, in this they miss precisely what His purpose is! Even when the Lord performs another miracle and heals the son of an official, the bystanders take nothing from it other than the word that Jesus speaks: "Go; your son will live"! No other "sensation" than the Word.

The Lord Jesus' miracles time and again are significant signs of His authority. He is the promised Messiah. You must know that. We do not believe in miracles. Through the Word we believe in the Lord Jesus and in His Father, who also is powerful enough to do miracles. Between those two – faith in miracles and faith in the Lord Jesus – there may be a slight, but nonetheless very decisive, disconnect. When, after being sent out by the Lord Jesus, the disciples returned and reported what their hands had been able to perform, the Lord Jesus told them: "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The greatest miracle is: being eternally preserved! Those who breathe in the New Age climate would like to believe in miracles, not in the Lord Jesus. That is not new. Several times, Jesus said that His greatest work was by faith, to bring people from death into eternal life (John 5:24). To that end we have His Word! And conversely, there is the warning that at the return of the Lord there will be those who will say: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And that He will then declare to them, "I never

knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt. 7:22 - 23). With faith in miracles by itself we can still be lost people. But believing in a God of miracles – that is worthy of emphasis. Faith can never expect too much. We know who He is, in whom we may believe!

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