

Signs and Wonders



So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” But one of them, Ca’iaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people... (John 11: 47-50a)

We can see from this that the signs that Jesus performed, didn’t exactly put him on top of the success list. Instead, they got him in trouble.

Now, Jesus promises that those who believe in him will do the works that he does and even greater works than these because he goes to the Father.

They will do signs and wonders.

He also promises that as the end of the age draws near, false Christ’s and false prophets will arise, and show great signs and wonders.

So both the false prophets and the true servants of the Lord have two things in common.

- Their word is accompanied by signs.**
- Their lives are inspired by an unusual boldness.**

Now the false prophets have a boldness which is really rooted in arrogance.

It has its source in a spirit of blasphemy which defies God.

Whereas, the servants of God have a boldness, which is based on faith in God. It pushes aside all fears of the authorities and powers of this world; to do and say what it has to do.

The boldness of faith is never arrogant.

But it is wonderfully free from fear.

It is the lack of this boldness which constitutes one of the most serious deficiencies in our lives.

The boldness of arrogance and the boldness of faith are BOTH attended by signs.

How can you tell which is which?

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:14-18)

On that day many will say to me, '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 then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.' (Matthew 7:22-23)

So when is our prophecy, our casting out of demons, our doing of mighty works....

in the name of Jesus?

When are these things truly signs of the Kingdom?

And when are our mighty utterances and deeds in the name of the Lord... works that one day will cause us to be banished from the face of the Lord?

Well, somebody says, "I don't want to get into that! I don't want to touch the issue of signs and wonders! If there are people around who have a witness that's so strong that signs come in behind and confirm it...well, that's beautiful.

And, if there are charlatans who go around doing mighty things looking like they're some kind of prophet, but are underneath evil doers, God will get to them in time. They will be judged. But, as for me- I just want to go on serving, washing feet, taking care of needs, and speaking the gospel as best I can."

And that sounds beautiful, but the only problem is...

If we speak the gospel and live the gospel with any integrity at all, sooner or later we're going to have to deal with signs and wonders. Because signs will sooner or later find their way into our ministries whether we ask for them or not.

Moreover, if we have any compassion for the people who come to us begging for some evidence of the mercy of God, (if we're concerned at all), we'll have to be going to our Father. I'm crying out to him the same as the man in our Lord's parable in Luke 11. He bangs on his friend's door at midnight and says "*lend me 3 loaves! A friend of mine is coming on a long journey and I don't have anything to give him.*"

And as we beg for that bread, the bread of the Holy Spirit will come, and with that bread will come signs of God for those who seek Him.

So what's a sign?

A sign is something which happens in the experience of the hearers of the word, which gives them a strong indication that the word they heard was really from God.

Often, it's some kind of healing; maybe the healing of the mind... or...

The removal of an attitude or an obsession which has been eating at their soul.

The restoring of a family.

The renewing of a wasted body.

But whatever it is, it's not some kind of cure that we can now package and sell.

It's a sign that Jesus, who died, is alive and *really cares about this needy person.*

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10)



Now this was not something that Peter and John had all planned out.

It was a gift that came from God.

It was a sign that Jesus is indeed Lord of Lords that he did die for our sins, that he did rise from the grave, and that he did pour out his Holy Spirit.

And signs from God are always in some way connected with a word from God.

So here comes the word...

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. (Acts 3: 11-16)

Now, how can we be sure that this preaching and this healing are really a sign of the Kingdom of God and that they are not just some other one of these works, for which people are going to be cast out of the Kingdom in the end?

Not everybody who says Lord, Lord enters the Kingdom of Heaven and not everybody who does mighty works in the name of Jesus enters the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus makes that clear.

If the works we do in the name of the Lord begin to tempt us and lure us to begin building our own Kingdom, so that we become the center, and that we are on the pedestal...

Then, these are no longer signs of the Kingdom and we are no longer servants of the Kingdom.

But, if when we speak a word from God, it is confirmed by healing and if when this healing takes place, it puts us on a road that leads us to a cross.

Then we can be sure... it's from God.

Every sign we perform in the name of Jesus in some way will lead us not on the road of great success, but always on the road to a cross.

What are we going to do with this guy, there's no doubt that he's performing great signs and wonders, and if we let him go on like this the whole nation will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take our place and our nation.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Acts 4:1-4)

So, the result of the healing was not an Academy Award for Peter and John.

It was persecution. Jail.



5000 people are brought into the Kingdom, and these guys end up in jail.

As they sat in the cellblock, that night they could have been saying, *“Let’s see. This is ridiculous! We’re going to have to be more cautious next time. What good is this going to do if every time we preach and heal in the name of Jesus, we end up locked up?”*

But no. The next morning they go out there and do it again. Instead of pulling in their horns and playing it safe, they go out there and they ask for more.

On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Ca’iaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.

Acts 4:5-6

These are the same people who had put Jesus on the cross. These are the very fellows who one night just a few months before insisted that Jesus is going to have to die while Peter, this same Peter, was warming himself by the fire in the courtyard of their house insisting that he doesn't even know Jesus.

This time Peter is not in the courtyard. He's right up in front of them and when they had set him in their midst, they inquired *“by what power or by what name did you do this?”*

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:8-12



Now what we see here is boldness in the face of threats.

Boldness, to say to the very people who had the authority to put Jesus on the cross, and did it. And who still had the authority to do the same thing now to Peter. Boldness to tell them that Jesus is Lord.

It's this kind of boldness which exercises itself in the face of threats that brings signs and wonders down from God into this world.

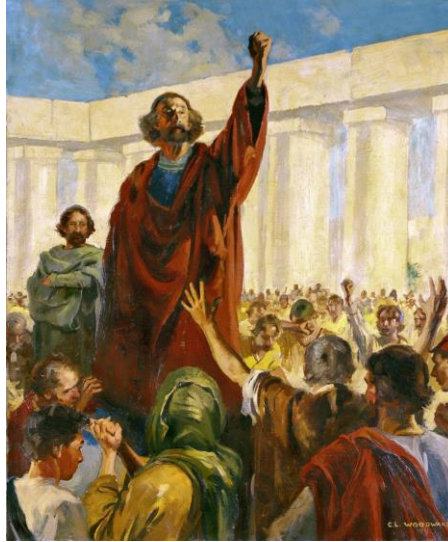
So after being threatened again, they're released and they're sent back to the brothers and sisters, and pretty soon the whole church is at prayer. Notice what they pray for.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:29-31

They pray for one thing.

Boldness.



They did not pray for power to perform signs and wonders.

Lord give us power? No, not in this instance...

They pray for boldness.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while YOU stretch forth thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus."

It's God who performs the signs.

It's the hand of the Lord that confirms the word and causes these things to happen while we go out under the anointing of the Spirit in boldness, in the midst of threats... to tell the world that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now, who of us can deny that we could use a few more signs and wonders to confirm our word? To back it up and convince the people we talked to.

But the great need in our lives is not for signs and wonders.

The great lack in our lives is boldness.

We need boldness to say what needs to be said when we're away from the safety of the body.

The courage, to say what we have to say ...even when it endangers our reputation, our job, or our very life.

The courage, the boldness, to live as people who really are convinced that Jesus is Lord. Knowing that he is with us, and that he is the only one in the world worth living for and dying for.

God help us to see our need for boldness.

God create in us a hunger for boldness



... a hunger for such boldness that we take no rest and we give him no rest. He pours out his Spirit upon us afresh and sends us forth into the world under the anointing of his Spirit in the face of threats to proclaim his word with all boldness while he stretches out his hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed in the name of his holy servant, Jesus.



Prayer-

Lord, you know how many of us are able to look back over our past and see foolish things that we've done. Unwise and stupid things that we've done that caused all kinds of fire to come out against us, and we know it wasn't really persecution, it was our own stupidity. And yet, ever since we've been so timid, So afraid to open our mouths and take a stand and to say what needs to be said. And we're just asking Lord God, that by the light of your Spirit you would enable us to see ourselves as you see us. Enable us, Lord God, to see today how timidity has really limited our vision of you and our ability to serve you. And, that you would just help us to stir up the gift that you long since have given us. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Message and Prayer: REB.1981 Edited for print 2022 by Maranatha Mirror
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HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN