

Only You Believe in Miracles

I'm so glad you are here as we launch our new series, "The Supernatural Church" based on the one of the most exciting books in the entire Bible, "Acts." Before we dive in let's do a little word association. What's comes to mind when you hear:

Miracles.
Kingdom of God.
Overthrow of evil?
Healing?
Church growth.
Unstoppable Force?

Christianity is a faith steeped in the supernatural. If God is God and continually interacts within human history, how could in not be? Creation out of nothing. The Virgin Birth, the "Resurrection," and even the Church itself, speak of a faith that was, is, and always will be supernatural.

Acts: Nuts & Bolts

What is the Book of Acts why does it need to be a staple read in our personal devotional time? Genre wise, "Acts" written in 62 A.D., is an historical book which was penned by the historian/physician Luke as a sequel to the Gospel that bears his name. Luke's purpose in writing Acts was first to explain to the Roman world that Christianity wasn't a mystery religion but a miraculous one. Secondly, he wanted to show how the church was to continue the supernatural ministry of Jesus precisely how Jesus did: under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. In his Gospel, Luke was clear that everything Jesus did, he did through the Holy Spirit. For instance, at the age of 30, Jesus began his public ministry with the declaration from Isaiah 61:1 (Luke 4:18-19):

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Throughout the 24 chapters of his Gospel, Luke records 25 of Jesus' "Acts in the Holy Spirit" which included 14 healings, 5 exorcisms, 4 miracles, and 2 raisings of the dead. He concludes with Jesus' last words to his followers (Luke 24:45-49):

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

What was this promise of the Father that Jesus was going to send to his Church after he ascended into heaven? The Holy Spirit. Why would Jesus do that? To empower the Church to be his supernatural community so that they could be his "witnesses" (martyrs) and do "even greater things" than he did (John 14:12-volume). In other words, Acts is the historical record of the Church doing the Great Commission in the same way Jesus did his personal mission: under the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We see the expectation that the Church would continue Jesus' supernatural ministry in the opening verses of Acts. Here, Luke addresses Theophilus (God Lover) his good friend and high ranking official in the Roman government:

1 In my previous book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

The Problem of the "Justs"

Before the Church was to "commence the commission" however, it was to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit empowered it like he empowered Jesus before he began his mission. We'll look at the unique way the Holy Spirit did this in the upcoming weeks, but if this all seems outrageous or "fairytale-ish" this morning it's probably because we have surrendered to the dreaded "JUSTS." Here's what I mean:

Because we have largely become enlightened, rationalized, naturalists, we have reduced the church down to JUST a helping organization on par with "Good Will" or the local food pantry.

Because we have largely more faith in science than we do God, we have reduced the church to JUST a place of fellowship, worship, and teaching.

Because we have largely become JUST "Binitarians" (emphasize JUST the Father and Son) we have forgotten the Person and Work of the 3rd member of the Trinity, namely the Holy Spirit.

Because we have largely become JUST mainline evangelicals, we are suspicious of expressions, movements, or denominations, that claim to have dynamic participation in the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have polarized the Kingdom of God.

Of all the sins good Christ-followers commit, de-supernaturalizing the church may be the worst! Because of the “justs” we have largely become just like the big sister in William Barton’s parable, “Rising Above The Clouds”:

I rode upon a railway train; and we were in the Rocky Mountains. And we awoke in the morning, and the train was climbing, with two engines pulling us, and one pushing behind. And we were nigh unto twelve furlongs above the sea.

And it came to pass as we ascended, that there were clouds below us, and clouds upon the sides of mountains, but there were no clouds above us, only the clear shining of the morning sun. And there came unto me a small girl and her younger brother, who were also riding upon the train, and we talked about the clouds for so did John Ruskin and Aristophanes. Now the little lad was very happy, and he said, “I have never been above the clouds before.” And his sister was worldly-wise. And she said, “A cloud ain't nothing but just fog.” And he said, “Nay, but it is more.” “How then is a cloud just under us and we ride upon the top of it?”

And she replied, “We are on the rails, just as we always have been; and there can’t nobody ride on a cloud.” And the boy said, “Jesus can ride upon the clouds; for I saw a picture of him.” And the little girl said, “*Yes, but that ain't us.*”

Now the little girl may have been right; but I thought within myself that this world has too many people who look out on life through her windows. For they see no sunlit clouds, but only fog, and they have little faith in rising above clouds, but have confidence only in the rails.

Now I do not despise rails nor do I advise people to discard them and ride only upon clouds. Nevertheless, I have seen people rise above clouds and live in the sunlight of God. And I have known others who, whenever it is said unto them, “Thus have other people done or thus did the good Lord Jesus do,” make reply. “*Yes, but that ain't us.*” And if it is spoken concerning the house of God, “Thus did the church in Jonesville, and thus was it done by the house of God in Smithville,” they answer, “*Yes, but that ain't us.*” And if it be said,

“You should be a better man; for other men have risen above the clouds and their sin and infirmities, they say, *“Yes, but that ain't us.”* And when it is said, *“Thus hath the grace of God abounded in other lives they say, “Yes, but that ain't us.” But if it ain't, why ain't it?* For this cause did God dwell in human flesh that we should never count any good thing impossible. For he is the God of the impossible so that his people should no longer say, *“Yea, but that ain't us.”*”

How many do you know that the Book of Acts was written, not as scriptural idealism but for daily realism for the church today? God wants us to enjoy life in His Spirit and live with a supernatural expectation. I mean, if we believe in Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever” then how could we not?

Conclusion

As we prep up for the series let me recommend a few things. Read the “Book of Acts.” Romans 10:17 tells us that faith is generated by knowing the Word of God. Since Acts is the Word of God in the Word of God, the more we know it, the more faith we will have and the more we will experience God’s supernatural work in our lives.

Expect more from God. As famed missionary William Carey once put it, “Expect great things from God.” “Attempt great things for God.” God didn’t just send Jesus to save us. He also sent Jesus to give us the Holy Spirit so that we could experience big hairy audacious things! impossible things. God wants to do infinitely more for our families, churches, and world. Let’s ramp up our expectations!

It’s easy to trust God for the little things like, “food, clothing, shelter.”

However, are we also trusting him for the biggies like relational rescue and redemption?

Healing of bad diagnoses?

Financial jams and inflation?

Our church and country?

We can and we should. Let’s pray about these things now!