

WITH SIGNS AND WONDERS

By Paul Penno Jr.

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We are told that the monks and priests of the Middle Ages regaled their congregations with endless tales of miracles. The credulity of the people must have been phenomenal in order for them to put up with them. Surely people living in an enlightened scientific age such as ours should not be obsessed with the paranormal.

Yet the popular press daily and weekly carries tales of miracles, and the faithful devotees of electronic religion feed on a never-ending TV diet of miracles. These are recounted for the purpose of validating the program's credentials from heaven. A glance at *TV Guide* reveals a partial listing of these religious stars whose message and methods in varying degrees appeal thus.

Roman Catholics have long appealed to miracles as proof that they are God's true church (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 172-175, 588). A host of their saints have enjoyed the distinction of levitation, such as Loyola, Neri, Joseph of Copertino, James of Illiyricum, Dunstan, Cajitan, Bernard of Clairveau. One authority lists seventy-two.

A French physician lists 312 cases of *stigmata* up to the end of the 19th century. Cases are reported today. A widely publicized photo shows Padre Pio of Italy with his *stigmata*.

Bilocation is another miracle Catholics revel in. Stories abound of statues of the Virgin Mary bleeding or weeping. Manifestations of the Virgin

are claimed to occur. Shrines of healing at Lourdes, Istanbul, Zeitoun, and Knock, Ireland, continue to draw large crowds.

You don't have to go to these distant shrines to witness miracles of healing. Just watch TV. You'll see people throw away their crutches, the lame walk, even shriveled limbs straighten out and lengthen before your eyes.

A very common form of miracle is glossolalia, talking in tongues, a supposedly fresh manifestation of the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Experience has shown that very seldom does anyone who has been immersed in this experience come to wholehearted acceptance of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

Spiritism's miracles often defy rational explanation. While undoubtedly trickery and sleight of hand are sometimes present, common sense requires us to recognize that undeniable wonders do occur. Anyone who believes the Bible must recognize that Satan's agents have power to "deceive them that dwell on the earth by the means of . . . miracles" and that "the spirits of devils working miracles, . . . go forth" in the last days (Rev. 13:14; 16:14).

The complete fulfillment of these ominous prophecies is still future. Whether the source of the miracles will be Catholicism, Eastern mysticism, Spiritism, or Protestantism, we must meet the challenge of modern religious miracles and know for sure their true source. "Wonderful scenes, with which Satan will be closely connected, will soon take place. God's word declares that Satan will work miracles. . . . These works of apparent healing

will bring Seventh-day Adventists to the test” (“Testimony to Our Leading Medical Workers,” Nov. 12, 1903).

Obviously, Satan has gone hi-tech. And that’s not news: he has always been hi-tech. The technology is not itself Satanic; but the devil uses it. Revelation 16:14 says that “the spirits of devils, working miracles, go forth unto . . . the whole world, to gather [the world] to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” It’s scary, when you think of Satan’s power to be manifested in the last days—which are right upon us.

But wait a moment: is there some Good News also? Yes, when Satan’s power is manifested, the Holy Spirit of God will manifest an even greater power to reach hearts. Please remember: Satan is not stronger than God! But it will be a message from God that will demonstrate that where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. But how can we proclaim such a gospel that is the power of God unto salvation unless we understand it? And how can we understand it as long as we feel rich and increased with goods in our present understanding of it? It’s time for serious thinking and serious study, and humbling of heart before the Lord.

Among Seventh-day Adventists today, reports of Adventist miracles are sure to attract enthusiastic reception. The further away the miracle took place, the more credibility the story seems to enjoy.

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mean that the Great Physician has virtually abdicated His healing role to the medical profession? Could there be a different circumstance today than there was 2000 years ago when Christ and His apostles did heal the sick, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind, even raised the dead?

We know that (a) the message of the cross was more vividly proclaimed then (1 Cor. 2:1-3; Gal. 6:14, etc), resulting in (b) deeper, more thorough conversions, (c) making it safer for the Lord to work these miracles because (d) the healed persons would “henceforth” be “constrained to live unto Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15).

Today a wise writer reminds us that “often some form of vice is the cause of feebleness of mind or body. Should these persons gain the blessing of health, many of them would continue to pursue the same course of heedless transgression of God’s natural and spiritual laws” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 227, 228). In other words, why bother pumping up a tire that has holes in it?

Nevertheless, we know Christ “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8), which means He is still compassionate. He doesn’t like to see people suffer, for He suffers with them (Isa. 63:9). Therefore we can only conclude that the most important ministry of healing is proclaiming the only message that can reconcile alienated hearts to God—the genuine gospel of His grace, unmixed with any element of legalism or Babylonian confusion.

We are told that in the final work, “miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed” (*Great Controversy*, p. 612). That must mean that in that same final work, the pure true gospel will again be recovered and proclaimed.

The “everlasting gospel” is such *Good News* that we sinful human beings have a difficult time believing how good it is. In fact, when Jesus tells us that His “yoke is easy, and [His] burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30), He is trying to tell us that our main problem is learning how to believe.

Ancient Israel could not enter their Promised Land because of unbelief (Heb. 3:18, 19; 4:6, 7). And Jesus speaks to all of us when He told the distraught father of the devil-possessed child, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk. 9:23). A few minutes later, He had to tell the disciples why they couldn’t cast out the devil in the child: “Because of your unbelief” (Mt. 17:20). He had already told the multitude that had gathered to watch that they were “faithless,” which means, they didn’t have it, and then He added that their unbelief was associated with “perversity,” meaning of course that unbelief is serious business (vs. 17).

This is a dangerous subject, for fanaticism lurks just around the corner. We so easily think that if we had proper “faith,” we could work miracles, speak with the tongues of angels, pick up poisonous snakes and let them bite us (Mk. 16:17, 18), “move mountains” (1 Cor. 13:2) and ride around in new Rolls Royce’s. But to be content to live in a humble

home, endure pain and poverty, and drive an old Honda Civic, is not necessarily “unbelief.”

Millions of Christians around the world like to study the topic of “Assurance” of salvation in Christ. They want to improve the spiritual stability of God’s church. Members who live in constant uncertainty whether God has “accepted” them can hardly exhibit the joy and confidence that the gospel teaches. And out of the millions and billions of people “in Babylon”, who wants to step out and join a fellowship that apparently lacks that joyous “assurance?” Who can have, and how does one obtain, that genuine “assurance?”

Jesus takes pains to warn us of the tragedy of a false “assurance”; “Many will say to Me in that [judgment] day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me” (Mt. 7:22, 23).

Sounds a bit scary! (1) These people “professed” to believe in John 3:16 for they called Him “Lord, Lord.” (2) They had a sort of “evidence” for their “assurance,” for they worked miracles “in His name.” (3) Their confidence in their “assurance” held them firm right through the final scenes of their lives. (4) Their awakening came only in the final day of judgment! (5) They had not “known” the true Christ at all; the one they thought they “knew” was the false Christ. (6)

Elsewhere, Scripture says that God will hold accountable the pastors, shepherds, evangelists, preachers, and writers who misled them with

teachings of a false assurance, and guided them to eternal ruin (see Jeremiah 23). Who has the moral right to a genuine assurance? Jesus answers: "Not everyone who saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21).

Jesus' powerful parable in Mt. 25:31-46 makes quite clear that those in the final day who are cocksure of themselves will be disappointed, while those who sense a humble, unworthy spirit will be happy. The same truth is underscored in Christ's final message to His church in Revelation 3:14-21: He says He feels like vomiting because of the cocksure, proud and arrogant spirit of those who assume that they are "rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing," but don't know their true pathetic spiritual condition. Is there Good News? Yes, for the humble in heart. Only those who feel hungry can be fed (Mt. 5:6). Yes, they will be fed!

Genuine, healthy faith is willing and happy to share with Christ His humiliation and sufferings. If you haven't succeeded in reducing Mt. Everest to the level of the Sahara, that doesn't mean you necessarily lack "faith." If you do work miracles, cast out devils, "prophecy" in Christ's name, and move mountains and do all kinds of "wonderful works" (see Mt. 7:22), you may still be "faithless" in that you have no genuine faith.

Satan is a genius at "deceiving the whole world" with "signs and wonders" (Mt. 24:24; Rev. 13:3). So, what is that genuine faith, true believing? It is "comprehending" the grand dimensions of the love that led Christ to His cross (Eph. 3:17-19),

identifying with Him there (Gal. 2:20), getting "married" to Him because you want nothing else (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7, 8), taking up your cross to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14:4, 5). Do you see why unbelief is the sin of sins? It's the only reason anyone will not enter heaven (Jn. 3:18, 19). Why? Because if he did enter in, he'd be miserable there.

When some Gentiles from Greece invited Jesus to come (probably) to Athens, He responded with His memorable words about a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying and then bearing "much fruit" (John 12:20-24). No, He must set His face steadfastly to suffer in Jerusalem and die there for the world. He made a great promise: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die," that is, on His cross (vss. 31, 32).

That big "IF" and that universal promise of "drawing all" meets its fulfillment in Revelation 18:1-4. "Another angel" will finally "come down from heaven, having great power" (that's the "drawing" that will be some people "lifting up Christ on His cross" as He has never before been "lifted up"). To "draw all" does not mean necessarily to WIN all. "All" will sense His drawing but not all will respond favorably; many will resist and reject. "Precious ones" are to be called forth from "Babylon." A compelling power will move the honest in heart and God will bring a restraint upon unbelieving relatives and friends so that they will dare not nor find it possible to hinder those who feel the work of the Spirit of God upon them.

The last call will be carried even to the most downtrodden of humanity. Signs and wonders will follow the believers. God will be in the work, and every saint, fearless of consequences, will follow the convictions of his own conscience. The gospel message will close with power and strength. Servants of God will be endowed with power from on high to declare the message “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,” and souls scattered everywhere will answer the call.

What will give power to the message? Lifting up “Christ and Him crucified” in a clearer way than any movie, play-acting, or pictures can do. Why hasn’t Revelation 18 yet been fulfilled? We can’t lift up Christ crucified while we also lift up self uncrucified. But the Holy Spirit will solve that problem (see Zechariah 12:10 to 11:1). There is Good News before us.

What do you think of the modern faith healing movements? There are people who claim to have been given the so-called “gift of healing,” so they can lay their hands on the sick and they recover. And undeniable miracles are claimed. Is faith an important element in healing? The Bible says absolutely, YES. But we need to understand what faith is, because the Bible says that “the devils believe also, and tremble” (James 2:19).

The story of the Roman centurion in Luke 7:2-10 may help us understand. This Gentile military officer believed that Jesus could just say the word and his mortally sick servant would be healed. Jesus “marvelled, . . . and said . . . I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.” Now what was that

faith? The belief that Jesus had the power to heal by simply saying a word? If you say yes, then you get yourself into trouble, for the devils also believe that Jesus can heal by just saying a word. Such confidence comes short of a true definition of faith, if the devils also have it!

But as we read the story in its context, we begin to see that the Roman soldier’s faith was more than that. (1) He had begun to understand his sinfulness in the light of Christ’s righteousness, for he said two things—“I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof” and “neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee.” Now, the devils have no such feelings of humility and grace! The centurion’s faith was not a mere mental trust, but a heart-appreciation. (2) An unusual love had filled this Roman soldier’s heart for he was concerned for his servant (or slave), and not for himself. The faith he had already had transformed him and delivered him from selfishness. And that is not the experience of the devils!

And so this story does help us understand the essential ingredient of all true miracle healing: faith is a heart-appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ. And as soon as I say that, I realize anew how weak and childish my little faith is, how much I need to grow. Do you realize it too?

The greatest drought in the history of ancient Israel prevailed in the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. No rain, not even a drop of dew, fell on the parched land for three years and a half; people were dying everywhere in consequence of the national disaster.

Even the king took his trusted “Cabinet member” Obadiah and with him searched the land for some spots where the royal livestock could forage for a little water and grass in order to survive—national security depended on it (1 Kings 18:5). It was equivalent to our national security crisis if our supplies of gasoline and diesel were to become non-existent.

Likewise, a crisis faces the Lord’s church in the last days if there is no “rain” of the Holy Spirit falling upon it worldwide in copious showers of grace. As many Israelites died in Ahab’s days of drought, so many in modern Israel suffer; lacking Heaven’s true showers of “rain” they fall prey to the clever counterfeits that the Enemy in the great controversy with Christ foists upon them. Youth and teens especially perish spiritually if they are deprived of fresh “bread of life.” Every wind of doctrine is blowing. Jesus’ words are, “If anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Matt. 24:23-25). Common sense is precious.

Most perilous of these deceptions will be the clever invention of a false and counterfeit holy spirit. The truth makes sense: if Satan can invent a false Christ, he can also invent a false holy spirit. In the “time of the end” “knowledge shall be increased” (Dan. 12:4). If we can conceive of a progression of deceptions, each generation witnessing a new development like “alpha” panentheism unfolding on,

imagine the almost overwhelming impact of what its “omega” will be!

In Ahab’s day, a true prophet of God named Elijah arose and commanded the king to call a national crisis-convocation at Carmel. The universal deception was unmasked publicly. Every Israelite with an honest heart was undeceived. At last the true Holy Spirit had a voice.

The next item on God’s agenda for today is His sending “Elijah” “before the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” He will lead the honest in the world church into the one true miracle of His much more abounding grace: “turning hearts” in the great Day of Atonement (Mal. 4:5, 6; Dan. 8:14). At last, Christ crucified and risen will be “lifted up” as He said He must be (John 12:32, 33).

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