

The Church Unleashed in Power 26.06.22 St Andrews

We are following a series of Spring Harvest Bible studies on the church. So far, we have looked at The Church unleashed as Family and the Church unleashed as Servant. Today we are considering the Church unleashed in Power.

When we think of the church acting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we tend to think of the miraculous in terms of healings, miracles and the casting out of demons. And, yes, all those manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit through the church were seen in the gospels and in Acts and are still seen in modern times, though possibly not so much in our nation.

However, let's always bear in mind that the priority was never signs and wonders, but the preaching of the gospel – whether to large crowds, or in synagogues, or courtrooms, or to small groups in houses, or one to one, whenever the opportunity arose.

The apostles, and others, proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God and signs and wonders followed. Sometimes the miracle of healing came first, as in our reading, and gave the opportunity to speak of the Lord God and the good news of the gospel.

The greatest miracle is when a person who is spiritually dead to God, hears through a believer that Jesus, God's Son, died in their place and the Holy Spirit convinces them of their sin and the truth of what they're hearing, so that they repent and believe and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and are born again of the Holy Spirit.

Did you notice the interweaving of the work of the believer and the Holy Spirit?

Dunamis Fellowship calls this the dance between the believer and the Holy Spirit? It is like a folk dance or those courtly dances, where people weave in and out, sometimes one person moving, sometimes another, sometimes in hold, sometimes moving together in a large group, in step with the Holy Spirit.

The believer speaks, the Holy Spirit convinces, the person believes and repents and is born again by the Holy Spirit.

That is the greatest miracle, and it is a sign and wonder to others.

Preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I wonder what picture this brings to mind. The big-name charismatic speaker, dynamic, loud, background music, laser lights, the altar call with hundreds making their way to the front?

But how about the faithful and faith-filled person telling a neighbour about what Jesus has done for them, or praying in the name of Jesus for someone they have been chatting to in a queue? Is that preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit? I think it is. Power does not necessarily equate with volume or bombasticness.

I think preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit, whether to a group or to an individual, is not about talking **at** them and browbeating them. There needs to be listening, respect and gentleness as well as boldness to actually speak. And there should be the expectation that the Holy Spirit will work in some way in the hearer's life.

Philip and the Ethiopian official

I like the NKJ rendering of Acts 8 v 35, the story of the Ethiopian official, because it says, 'Philip opened his mouth'. That's the first thing we have to do – open our mouths, trusting that God will help us to speak of

Jesus. But **we** have to open our mouths and engage our vocal cords and tongues and knowledge of the scriptures and experience of the Lord and speaking.

Philip, directed by the Holy Spirit, went to a particular highway and saw this important Ethiopian Official in his chariot, reading the scripture. Then the Holy Spirit told Philip to run and overtake the chariot, so he did, and asked the man if he understood what he was reading. It was a passage in Isaiah, and the official didn't understand it, so Philip started from there and told him about Jesus.

The Official believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptised on the spot and, presumably, took the gospel home with him to Ethiopia.

What is the point of signs and wonders?

The apostles and others who had followed Jesus and received the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost simply carried on doing what they had witnessed *Him* doing: preaching the Kingdom of God, healing people and dismissing demons, in His name i.e. with the authority He has given them.

In those days, there wasn't the medical expertise that we now enjoy, nor the social welfare – if you couldn't work, you had no money, so you had to beg for alms – like the man in our reading. Healing these people was much more than healing the body, it changed their whole lives.

But signs and wonders are about more than meeting needs: they point to Jesus' divinity, in that He has power over the natural order of things, and they demonstrate heaven meeting earth as the Kingdom of God comes in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, do we, the church, need to be unleashed in power today? Absolutely!

Are we expectant for opportunities to speak out the good news and to see people saved? Are we expectant that God will move in miraculous ways as we pray?

If not, why not?

We'll come to that later.

Errors of attitude and practice

There are a couple of dangers – errors of attitude and practice - that churches and individuals can fall into.

We can become focussed on the miracles, the healings, the strange manifestations, to the detriment of clearly preaching the gospel and making disciples.

There are quacks and charlatans. Motivated by pride, power, money.

Simon Magus in Acts wanted to buy Holy Spirit power to do miracles. It didn't end well for him.. There are still people whose motives are all wrong.

Beware if money is involved – 'Sow a faith seed of \$1,000 into our ministry and you will receive your healing'.

Satan can counterfeit miracles e.g. Pharaoh's magicians who could replicate the plagues, but couldn't reverse them!

When the Anti-Christ is manifested, he will be able to do miraculous things.

Be alert, be aware.

Is the ministry all about a personality / fame/power/ money? – Who is getting the glory? If it isn't God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit, - avoid it!

Yes, we must be very wise and cautious, but the other error is that we can ignore the miraculous, deciding it all stopped happening in 1st Century, or it was just through the apostles that the miraculous happened.

I don't think there is any suggestion in scripture that the miraculous should stop when the last apostle died.

And even in the early church, it wasn't just the apostles who were preaching with signs following:

The Holy Spirit prompted Ananias, just an ordinary brother, to go and pray for the man who was known for arresting Christians and threatening them with death and who had been complicit in Stephen's murder. Ananias was obedient and so was started the ministry of Paul, the apostle.

Acts 6 v 8 tells us that Stephen, who was not an apostle, was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people.

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul makes it clear that the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit, including healings and working miracles, are distributed among the church as the Holy Spirit wills.

Ducking the issue?

I don't think that we, as a church, are in danger of going overboard on the miraculous and strange – that is not our church personality, but I think we are more likely to duck the issue.

When the apostles were threatened with prison and worse if they continued to preach in the name of Jesus, they prayed, not for safety, but for boldness to carry on.

We might not be very bold naturally. We might be quite timid by nature, but we can pray for boldness to speak as we have opportunity. Then it's just a case of opening our mouths and speaking.

What if..?

We might be fearful that we will pray and nothing will happen and the person we've prayed for will be turned away from the Lord. We told a service engineer we would pray for his sick mother; when he came again, we offered to pray for a different sick relative, he said, 'No thanks, my mother died!'

This sort of thing can rock our faith and confidence. We don't understand it, but I think it is because we live in the Kingdom now and not yet – things are not yet perfected, and the world is still very much affected by the Fall. We need to leave these things with the Lord and not lose heart

On the other hand, we prayed for our hairdresser who had a large ovarian cyst and when they came to operate it had completely gone. Praise the Lord! We prayed for her son through various difficulties, and they were all resolved. These are things we must remember.

Rev. Sandy Millar, who was vicar at Holy Trinity Brompton, said that when they prayed for people, healings sometimes happened; when they didn't pray for people, nothing happened.

Incidentally, he gave wise advice, I think, when he said, 'Don't tell people they're healed, let them go to their doctor and come back and tell you they've been healed. And don't shut the door on further prayer, if necessary.'

We have grown up in a world which is very focussed on science and very sceptical of anything which cannot be explained by science. There's nothing wrong with science, which is about discovery and investigation of God's creation, unless it becomes a god which cannot be questioned, challenged or doubted.

We need to overcome a worldly mind-set and let the Lord renew our minds as we read His Word.

It also helps to talk to the Street Pastors about the amazing ways they've been guided to people who need help, or to Healing on the Streets people about their experiences. To Kidz Klub people about the children who learn about Jesus and pray.

If we have been healed or experienced some other miracle, let's talk about it – tell the church - build up faith in others. Tell people you meet and give the credit to Jesus!

What opportunities do we make at St Andrews?

We offer to pray for people after the service. We try to listen to the Holy Spirit's prompting and pray accordingly.

If people would like a longer time of prayer ministry, we have a prayer ministry team who are ready to pray with anyone who would like it. We have been trained in the Dunamis way of prayer ministry, where we seek to listen to Holy Spirit and let Him guide the prayer. It's very gentle and calm and quiet, and effective - the Lord works in people's lives. We've seen it!

Café staff pray for and with people as they have opportunity.

We have regular worship in Littlebourne chapel and are looking for openings to speak to people about Jesus in that village.

We open our doors and the Worship Area on Wednesday lunchtimes, as a Quiet Space, and are ready to listen, if someone wants to talk, and to pray for them if they would like that.

We need to get out of this building and into the community in some way; we are making contact with workers in Whitefriars and looking for opportunities there. Get involved in this if you can.

Conclusion

Peter and John didn't make a big fuss at the Temple Gate. I feel sure Peter spoke in a normal voice; he didn't shout or use a strange quavery voice ...

He didn't need to.

He spoke in the Name of the Lord Jesus – in the authority of the Son of God!

And the Holy Spirit worked through him to heal.

Peter had seen what Jesus did and knew he was commissioned and empowered to do the same. He had faith in God to act.

I think he probably had an inner prompting from the Holy Spirit when the man spoke to him, because they went to the Temple daily – they probably took the same route every day – surely, they had seen the man before and perhaps given him some money, but this day they were prompted by Holy Spirit to give him something much, much better.

So, Peter spoke to the man in the name of Jesus and helped him up. (Isn't that lovely?)

Then, there was a great commotion as the lame man capered about praising God. Of course, a big crowd gathered – they all knew the healed man, they saw him begging at the gate every day. Peter took the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

Remember

It's His authority and His power – all we have to do is listen to Him, open our mouths and speak in His name.

The responsibility is His

The power is His

The authority is His

All the glory goes to Him

Peter and John got arrested by the Temple authorities, but about 5,000 men put their faith in Jesus the Messiah and were saved that day.

Watchman Nee said that if we want to see apostolic results, we need to have apostolic consecration and power, and we can expect apostolic trials.

You know, don't you, that I am speaking to myself as much as to you – perhaps more?

So, together, let's build up our faith in the Lord, forgetting past disappointments, and be expectant that God will act in amazing ways.

I'm going to use an old song as a consecration prayer. I'll pray slowly, so you can pray it too, if you want to.

Jesus, take me as I am. I can come no other way.

Take me deeper into You, let my flesh life melt away.

Make me like a precious stone, crystal clear and finely honed.

Life of Jesus shining through, giving glory back to you.

Amen

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