

A Continued Witness

Acts 5:12-42
August 17, 2008

Intro:

Acts 5:14-42 presents two points I'd like to meditate on as we look to refocus our identity and vision as a church.

A Community of Healing

Not just through the obvious healing in a "normal" sense- through the means of medicine or counseling or love that God has given us, though this is essential.

But through the miraculous. Christians of certain denominations will look at this passage and think not about how this happened some thousands of years ago, but they will think about how this can happen today. It's something challenging to wrestle with on an interpretation level, and on a actual practical level, especially in light of the fact that, unfortunately, the history of Christianity and the miraculous is a mixture of both good and bad experiences, real healings and total shams that can turn people completely away.

One theologian helps us think through it at a very basic level.

The Bible gives evidence that the abilities to heal and perform miracles were not constrained to just the original Apostles (Acts 6:8, 1 Cor. 12:10, Gal. 3:5). Theologian Wayne Grudem offers some helpful biblical insights into how to properly think about miracles:

a) A miracle is defined as a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself. This is contrasted with a common definition that define miracles as a direct intervention of God. This is problematic because God is always at work in our world, sustaining all things. (eg. Col. 1:17)

b) The purposes of miracles include:

- to authenticate/confirm the truthfulness of the gospel (Heb. 2:4, Acts 8:6-8)

- to bear witness that the kingdom of God has come and begun to bring it's benefit in people's lives (Matt. 12:28, Luke 4:18, 9:1-2)

- to help those in need (Matt. 14:14)

- to remove hindrances to people's ministries (Matt. 8:15, Phil. 2:25-30)

- to bring glory to God.

c) In regard to potential false miracles, the key is that false miracle workers deny some crucial element of the gospel.

Taken from Grudem's Systematic Theology. For more, visit Grudem's website via google.

I would add one more point: we are not guaranteed healing. Think of 2 Cor 12:7ff, John 11.

Two levels to think about it on:

- Our context- that is something some of us may be gifted in, and some of us may be in prayer for. That's good.

- Global context- But at the very least it's something we have to wrestle with if we are to be global church.

We need to also think about the global church, especially if we are looking to join in God's global move. The reason: the global church is experiencing a lot of this, especially among the poor. And note- this description here is of the miraculous among the poor.

The practice of healing is one of the strongest themes unifying the newer Southern churches, both mainstream and independent... Nowhere in the global South do the various spiritual healers find serious competition from modern scientific medicine, since this is so far beyond the reach of most of the poorest.

Philip Jenkins, *The New Christendom*, 124-126

So we need to be a community that heals. And we need to be a community that keeps proclaiming Jesus.

A community that keeps proclaiming Jesus

If you've been here for most of the talks on Acts, you will see this just seems to keep popping up, this theme of being a witness, proclaiming to others who Jesus is. And this is the bulk of our mission- even things like healing need to point to this.

Challenge:

Pray for a demonstration of God's work for the purposes mentioned by Grudem.

Pray for a proclamation opportunity.

Pray that you can know this Jesus.