



GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!

(#44)
In pursuit of the "greater." (Part 1)

Greatness

A Spirit-led focus on greatness!

In *all* of life, we should have a focus that goes *far beyond* what the sinful world offers us!



Being in pursuit of the **GREATER** things...
NOT preoccupied with **SECONDARY** things!

WHEN IT COMES TO THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN A SAVED PERSON'S LIFE...

We need to pursue the greater things... and NOT be preoccupied with secondary things!

→ **Primary (greater) things** – Expressions of love for God and neighbor. (These are our primary obligations in life, and are also a display of the Spirit's power in us.)

Secondary things – Miraculous displays of the Spirit's power. (Though they may be of value, they are not to be our preoccupation.)

ACTUALLY, THIS FOCUS APPLIES TO EVERYTHING IN LIFE!

COMPARED TO THE CREATOR, EVERYTHING IN CREATION IS "SECONDARY"!

ALL CREATION is a reflection of God and his glory.

From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in what he made. As a result, people have no excuse.
Romans 1:20 (GW)

The sinful world may like the things of creation... but it suppresses the glory of the Creator who is revealed in creation!
... those who in their wickedness suppress the truth.
Romans 1:18b (ISV)

(We need to focus on the PRIMARY things!)

It's NO WONDER SCRIPTURE TELLS US TO...

... seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness!
(And let him "worry" about our needs.)

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

>> AND <<

... do all things in a way that honors God!

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God.
1 Cor. 10:31 (GW)

THERE ARE MANY WAYS WE CAN LEARN FROM THE SECONDARY (EVEN WHEN ITS NON-MIRACULOUS).

"Consider the ravens, ..."
Luke 12:24a (NASB) → **Learning from nature**
God will take care of you.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, ..."
Matthew 13:31b (NASB) → **Parables**
God's kingdom... starting small, growing huge...

[Jesus] began to wash the disciples' feet, ...
John 13:5b (NASB) → **Symbolic actions**
Serving others.

PART 1

Responding to the secondary works of the Spirit – miracles and similar phenomenon –

which are designed to point to
something greater...
something of primary significance.

JESUS POINTED TO THE SECONDARY NATURE OF MIRACLES.

IF a person is unwilling to pay
attention to Scripture
(= of primary importance),

THEN

miracles will be
of no value
(= secondary).

If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't
listen even if someone rises from the dead.

Luke 16:31b (NLT)

JESUS DEMONSTRATED THE TRUTH OF THIS:

- 1) Jesus rose from the dead.
- 2) The religious leaders refused to listen and repent.

PEOPLE OF THE WORLD DON'T MIND MIRACLES, BUT THEY SUPPRESS THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.

Just like in Jesus' day... they enjoy the miracles;
but they don't want the truth that the miracles point to.

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their
presence, they still would not believe in him.

John 12:37 (NIV)

(His main emphasis was the Good News, not miracles.)

WE can accept miracles AND the greater "something" that
the miracles* point to!

* (We can have this focus regardless of what we call it
– a "miracle," or "an act of God's power," or "Providence" –
whichever may apply to the situation at hand.)

Section A: The WRONG focus.

**SCRIPTURE GIVES MANY EXAMPLES OF
A WRONG FOCUS ON MIRACULOUS THINGS.**

➤ **Some people wanted to DO miracles:** They looked
at them as a means of personal gain or power.

• SIMON THE MAGICIAN THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A WONDERFUL ADDITION TO HIS "BAG OF TRICKS."

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the
laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and
said, "Give me this power too, so that when I lay my hands on
someone, he will receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:18-19 (ISV)

(We aren't told how the Spirit's presence was visibly displayed
(so that Simon could see it). It may have been speaking in
tongues – which was a sign to the Jews that the Holy Spirit was
now available to those who were not "full-blooded" Jews.)

• OTHERS THOUGHT THEY COULD IMITATE THE MIRACLES... THEY EVEN TRIED TO USE JESUS' NAME AS A "MAGICAL INCANTATION."

Now some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists also attempted
to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who
had evil spirits, saying, "I command you by the Jesus that
Paul preaches!"

The evil spirit answered them, "I know Jesus, and I recognize
Paul—but who are you?"

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them,
overpowered them all, and prevailed against them, so that
they ran out of that house naked and wounded.

Acts 19:13, 15-16 (CSB)

(God used this (indirectly) to bring others to repentance!
See v. 17+.)

➤ **Some people wanted to SEE miracles:** But they weren't willing to learn from them.

- **JESUS REFERRED TO SOME OF THESE PEOPLE AS "ADULTEROUS SIGN-SEEKERS" (REFERRING TO "SPIRITUAL ADULTERY").**

A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

Matthew 16:4 (NIV)

In this example, **THEY WERE GUILTY ON TWO ACCOUNTS:**

- 1) **REFUSED LEARNING:** They had seen many miraculous signs, and were unwilling to learn from them.
- 2) **BACKWARDS VALUES:** They were willing to learn the "signs of the sky" (indicating the weather), but weren't interested in the "signs of the times" (pointing to Jesus and the kingdom of God).

- **SOME PEOPLE JUST ENJOYED THE "SPECTACULAR" EVENTS. THEY FOLLOWED JESUS AROUND, HOPING TO SEE MORE.**

Jesus fed over 5000 people.
The next day, they came back for more...

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

John 6:26-27 (NIV)

They did not consider it a "miraculous sign" to be heeded, but a "free food opportunity" that was just there to be enjoyed.

➤ **The devil likes to IMITATE miracles:** He will use FAKE "greatness" (in secondary matters) to distract and kill.

- **WHEN THE WORLD IS LOOKING FOR ANSWERS, THE DEVIL'S SERVANTS WILL OFFER ANSWERS... THE WRONG ANSWERS.**

For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform **great** miraculous signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones.

Matthew 24:24 (NLT)

HOW GREAT WILL THESE MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND WONDERS BE?

They will be so spectacular, that even God's people would be deceived by them, if that were possible! (It isn't possible.)

Many in the church – the fakes and imitators – will be deceived.

- **CLEAR TO THE END, THE DEVIL WILL BE PERFORMING "GREAT" MIRACLES THROUGH HIS SERVANTS.**

[The Devil-controlled human "beast"] performed **great** and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. ... he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

Rev. 13:13, 14b (NIV)

He will gain control over the very souls of people, and will kill those who don't bow down.

God's people will look beyond these "secondary" matters that the world becomes mesmerized with, and recognize them for the evil they are.

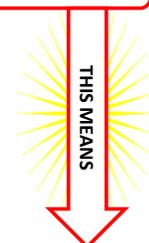
Section B: The RIGHT focus.

**FOCUSING ON THE PRIMARY MATTERS,
REGARDLESS OF WHAT SECONDARY MATTERS MAY
(OR MAY NOT) BE PRESENT.**

**WE PREVIOUSLY NOTED THAT THERE WERE
ONLY THREE "MIRACLE CLUSTERS"
IN THE BIBLE**

Throughout the rest of history, miracles
have been only random and occasional.

- ✓ Moses and Joshua (~13th century BC)
- ✓ Elijah and Elisha (9th century BC)
- ✓ Jesus and the Apostles (1st century AD)



**IN MOST OF HUMAN HISTORY,*
the focus is NOT on miracles...
but on God's trustworthiness**

The theme *isn't*: "Miracles are happening."

Instead, it is: "God has done great things in the past, so we can trust him for what he has promised, both for now and in the future."

* (In most of the Bible, as well as in church history.)

WE CAN TRUST GOD
>> Like this example shows us <<

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of **what was promised**, he **confirmed it with an oath**. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Hebrews 6:17-19a (NIV)

When the God who CANNOT lie: ✓ Promises something, and
✓ Confirms it with an oath...

YOU KNOW: You can trust him to do what he said!

SO WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

Suppose God chooses to **DO** something miraculous in your life. That's OK!

Suppose God chooses to **NOT DO** something miraculous in your life. That's also OK!

Just make sure that, regardless of what happens, you have the right focus!

- God has already promised us that he will use *all things* to accomplish good in our lives (Romans 8:28). *But that "all things" does not always include miracles and healing.* It can include trials and death (v. 35-36).

**IF YOU CHOOSE TO PURSUE
THE THINGS
THAT GOD CALLS "GREAT" ...**

**GOD CAN ACCOMPLISH
GREAT THINGS EVEN
WITHOUT MIRACLES!**

In fact, the absence of miracles can be a good thing!

* It can glorify God as much as the presence of miracles. *

... there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so **that Christ's power may rest on me**. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

2 Cor. 12:7b-10 (NIV)

CONCLUSION (PART 1)

We pursue greatness
when we look beyond the miraculous,
secondary expressions of the Spirit's power.

NEXT TIME (PART 2)

We plan to look at some of the primary expressions
of the Spirit's power –
the things that are truly great!

Credits

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