



It Is Always About The Word

*Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**"*

— John 20:27–29

I do not want to provide even the appearance of ungratefulness. It is truly difficult to express the personal comfort and sheer joy I feel when a professing Christian caught up in error is spiritually rescued and returns like the Prodigal Son to the Father. One such prominent brother was at one time involved with some of the most notorious false signs and wonders movements of recent history only to realize how ultimately unbiblical they were, came out, and is now a very effective and vocal critic of same. But while he presently seems to accurately and passionately debunk these activities, at the same time I have read statements from him which essentially say, "What the church needs is a **real** signs and wonders movement". Really? That is what we **need**? With all due respect, that is completely contrary to what Jesus taught in the midst of what was the most intense period of signs and wonders in the whole of human history.

I know that there are those who suggest the world is best understood as "cat people vs. dog people", or "left-brained vs. right-brained", or even liberal vs. conservative. I am thinking there may be some kind of category for which we can invent a pithy label to describe those who fixate on Christ's miracles to the exclusion of His teaching versus those who do not. Oh, wait...Christ did that Himself!

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign...

— Matthew 12:39a

Throughout His 3-1/2 year ministry in which are documented an incredible display of signs and miracles, what was Christ's repeated qualification of the difference between those who accept versus reject Him? The degree to which they put His Word into practice.

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

— John 8:31-32

"*The truth will make you free*" is a phrase which is not only quoted by Christians but has imbedded itself into the mainstream of secular thought as well. But I find that Christians quote it out of context almost as regularly as the unsaved, attempting to connect it to **any** truth. As with many things lifted out of Scripture, there may be a general principle which can be applied, but in the full context of the verses around it we often find that the catch phrases lifted from Scripture often do not align well with their originally intended meaning. This is not a reference to any and **all** truth no matter what it is, but only the truth that is derived by those who "*continue in My word*". If we re-worded this backwards to reinforce its meaning this verse might read, "For those who refuse to put My word into practice, you will **never** know the truth necessary to make you free".

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 – what is most often held up to be the centerpiece of Christ's teaching – is a very detailed teaching about the necessity of putting God's Word into practice. He begins with several examples of "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." to correct their misapplication of God's Word. And how does He wrap it all up?

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

– Matthew 7:24–27

What did Christ teach as being the price to qualify as a member of His family?

And it was reported to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.” But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

– Luke 8:20-21

In fact He goes so far as to state that the rejection of His Word is the basis by which He will likewise **reject** non-family members.

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

– Luke 9:26

It is not only a primary requirement for becoming a legitimate member of the Body of Christ in this life, but He repeatedly held it to be a determining qualification for the life to come.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

– John 5:24

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”

– John 8:51

*“He who rejects Me and **does not receive My sayings**, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.*

– John 12:48

I have just pulled these out as but a few examples. Open your concordance and look through the Gospels for each occurrence of “word(s)” and its variants. You cannot escape the fact that this is the teaching Jesus repeatedly comes back to and often uses to explain that a sign or miracle someone experienced is actually a reinforcement of a greater message to put His Word into practice.

The problem for those who live by the need for a sign is that one sign never seems to be enough. They need **another** sign and **another** sign and **another**. We see this over and over in Jesus’ ministry with Pharisees and Sadducees who witness a miracle and then immediately ask for yet another to prove His authority beyond a doubt. They represent those in every age who because they will not accept the authority of His Word can never appreciate and accept even the most awesome sign or wonder. And for the past thirty years we have witnessed efforts to produce a “signs and wonder movement” in Kansas City, Toronto, Brownsville, Pensecola, Lakeland, and others in an ever-expanding, embarrassing list. And it has never been enough for them. When the circus closes down in one place, they re-open in a new town and attempt to take it up a notch. It is never enough.

Look at the Old Testament revivals under Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah. They begin by a return to the Word. Look at what happened in Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s day after the return from Babylon; it was characterized by a return to the Word. Look at every revival in church history and it will be shaped in the earliest stages by a return to the Word.

Let us examine what is unquestionably the most significant and powerful sign and wonder ever to take place: the resurrection of Christ. The events beginning with the resurrection and those forty

days until His ascension were marked by all manner of signs and wonders. And this is what many will focus on when reading the account of what happened during that time, emphasizing the various signs and wonders. But is that what it was all about? For brevity's sake, I will use Luke's account as an example.

In Luke 24:1-12 the women visit the tomb, encounter two angels when they find it empty, and before they have actually seen Christ report back to His disciples that He has risen. What did they learn was the greater meaning of this sign?

*"He is not here, but He has risen. **Remember how He spoke** to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And **they remembered His words,***

— Luke 24:6–8

The only way the sign could be fully understood was in the context of the Word. The angels remind them of the Word, they remember for themselves the Word, and they now act in faith upon the Word – not because of the miracle in and of itself.

Then in Luke 24:13-35 Jesus joins the two men on the road to Emmaus. They are talking about the Word of Christ.

*And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was **a prophet mighty in deed and word** in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him.*

— Luke 24:19–20

The most the Pharisees and Sadducees would concede where Jesus was concerned was that He was a "teacher". These men grant that He was a "prophet" but fall short of assigning Him to be the "Son of David", an unmistakable title for the Messiah. They have fallen short of the women in that like them they remember His Word but have no

faith in it. So what does Jesus do to put all the signs and wonders they witnessed into the right perspective?

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

— Luke 24:25–27

It is very important to understand that Jesus miraculously appears on the road, but even more miraculously vanishes when He broke bread with them. Bread is one of the most prominent biblical metaphors for the Word. Once faith in the Word kicks in, the sign of His appearing is no longer necessary. When they finally accepted His Word, they finally absorbed the greater meaning not just of the immediate miracle taking place, but each and every one of them which transpired during the course of His earthly ministry.

Then in Luke 24:36-49 Jesus appears to the eleven. Does He allow them to just sit around stupefied by the miracle? How does Jesus place it all into the proper context?

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

— Luke 24:44–45

The greater meaning behind the sign of the empty tomb? The Word.
The greater meaning behind His appearance on the road? The Word.
The greater meaning behind His appearance to the Eleven? The Word.
The greater meaning of the whole of Christ's First Coming? The Word.

No, I strongly disagree with the assertion that what the church **needs** is a legitimate signs and wonders movement. What it needs is a return to the Word. Going back to the opening of this discussion, we can

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never forget what Jesus said to Thomas as a model for every age of Believer to come...

Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

– John 20:29

In the wake of His resurrection – the greatest sign, wonder, or miracle ever to take place – Christ concentrates His effort on bringing them back to the fundamental issue which He has been speaking to through the whole of His ministry and in the midst of the hundreds if not thousands of miracles He performed. This is because the defining characteristic for His true followers is not the need for a signs and wonders movement, but the kind of faith in His Word which actually puts it into practice.

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

– John 14:23-24

In His Love,

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