

Sermon Subject #17: THESE SIGNS SHALL FOLLOW

SCRITURE: Mormon 4:84-88 (Book of Mormon)

Behold I say unto you, that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ, it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth. For behold, thus saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God unto his disciples who should tarry; yea, and also to all his disciples in the hearing of the multitude; Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover; And whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth.

Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and signs shall follow them that believe in my name. (Ether 2:115, Book of Mormon)

One of the ancient teachings of the Jewish rabbis - a teaching which was still well known in Jesus' time, was that a prophet who was called of God would have his genuineness attested by certain signs or wonders or miracles. The Old Testament records an abundance of such signs. The principle of the signs following the believer was firmly established in ancient Israel.

The birth, the life, the death of Jesus were all marked by signs attesting his divinity and his deity -- signs which Matthew in particular takes pains to connect with prophetic promises of the Old Testament. His birth was marked by a new star and a chorus of angels; his death was marked by an earthquake which rent the veil of the temple, and a terrifying three hours of darkness. During his short ministry Jesus performed innumerable miracles -- miracles of supply such as turning water to wine or feeding the five thousand; miracles of raising the dead; miracles of healing, and of casting out devils; miracles of controlling the elements and calming wild waves on the lake. He called his first three apostles by giving them a sign -- the sign of the great draught of fishes; and Peter, James, and John left their boats and their nets and followed him.

The signs that confirmed Jesus' ministry are too numerous and too well known to Bible students to need detailed rehearsal here, but we sum up their purpose and effect with these two concluding verses from the twentieth chapter of John: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." And in Acts 2:22, Peter characterizes Jesus as a "man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs." The signs did follow in Jesus' ministry.

The principle of confirming signs following the believer did not cease with Jesus. He explicitly promised his disciples: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do ..." When he sent his apostles into all the world to preach the gospel, he promised that "These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they

cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

The apostles, when they entered upon their active ministry, expectantly sought for, prayed for, and claimed these promises of the signs following. After Peter and John had healed the lame beggar at the gate called Beautiful, they were arrested and thrown into prison over night. Next morning the priests held a sort of trial to determine what should be done with them. Because they could not deny the fact that the man who was once lame now stood beside Peter and John in perfect health, the Pharisees and priests had to be satisfied with ordering the apostles to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Did Peter and John acquiesce? No; according to the fourth chapter of Acts, they went back to the assembly of the saints, reported what had happened, and held a prayer meeting where they prayed: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

The Book of Acts makes frequent reference to the signs that followed the believer in the ministry of the apostles. We mention only these few. Acts 2:43 says that many signs and wonders were done by the apostles. The fifth chapter of Acts recounts that "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." The sixth chapter of Acts says that Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. The mission to the Gentiles was opened when Cornelius was commanded in a vision to go see Peter, and Peter was prepared in a similar vision to receive him. Paul, in vision, received a call to "come over into Macedonia and help us." Barnabas abode a long time at Iconium, speaking boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (See Acts 14:3) And when Paul and Barnabas returned to the council at Jerusalem, they rehearsed to the church there "what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." (Acts 15:12) There are many more references which could be cited, and many specific miracles which are recorded in the Book of Acts to attest the calling of the apostles and the power of the name which they invoked to accomplish these things; but these things are not only familiar to every Christian believer, but generally acknowledged and accepted as well.

And now it is time to ask the question, "Do the signs still follow the believer today?" Latter Day Saints believe that they do -- testify that they do. We believe that the promise made by Christ and fulfilled in the ministry of the early apostles, is still good for those who believe today, and for the apostles who are called and set in the church today.

If the signs do not follow today, it is because men have not fulfilled the prerequisites and requirements; they have not believed; they have not had faith. God has not changed; if he has, he has ceased to be God, for God is unchangeable, without variableness or shadow of turning. His laws are eternal. All science is based on the premise that law is dependable -- that identical causes will produce identical results for any man, any time, anywhere in the universe. It is preposterous to say that God's physical laws are stable and reliable, but that his spiritual laws are here today and gone tomorrow, or that they work to produce signs and wonders in one age, but can't be made to work in another. If obedience to certain laws produced certain results for Peter and John and Paul, the laws are still there; and the same quality of obedience under the same conditions will produce the same results today. God has not changed, nor have any of his laws passed away or become obsolete and outmoded.

Signs are the result of Christian life and growth -- not the cause of it. Signs are granted only to those who can be trusted to use them for the good of all -- to those who "abide in the vine." The promise is that if ye abide in the vine ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Faith comes not by signs, but signs come by faith. When a man is born again, when he receives the new life which is resident within the body of Christ -- his church -- and when he becomes a living, functioning, cooperating part of that body, receiving its benefits and making his contribution to the general welfare, he may rightfully expect signs to follow -- just as when a body is properly constituted and organized and functioning under the direction of the life that is in it, certain signs of life must ensue. A body that had no pulse, no heartbeat, no respiration, no speech, no motion, no warmth, no reflexes, no intelligence manifested, could be nothing but a dead body. Any body or organization which purports to be the body of Christ, but which fails to manifest any of the signs of spiritual life which Jesus promised to the body, the church, is a dead church. When a man becomes a part of the body of Christ, he may rightfully expect to receive the life of that body, and to have that life attested by the signs which follow the believer.

What are some of the conditions which must be adhered to if the signs are to follow the believer? First let us note that signs always follow the believer. They may confirm and strengthen a weak faith, but signs are the result of faith, not the cause of faith. A man who wants to believe, who tries to believe, who has faith, and who couples that faith with obedience and his own best efforts, will receive results and confirming signs. His faith will thereby become strengthened, confirmed, and enlarged; it will eventually become knowledge. There are many examples of this sort of thing contained in scripture; but there is not a single instance which I can recall in which a skeptic or an unbeliever was ever converted by signs.

Unbelieving sign-seekers are universally condemned in scripture. Their example is Satan, who tempted Jesus to show him a sign. In the twelfth chapter of Matthew there is the story of Jesus healing a man both blind and dumb. The afflicted man had faith, and he was healed. The Pharisees -- skeptics and unbelievers -- could not deny the miracle, but maintained that it was done by the power of Beelzebub, prince of devils. And -- characteristic of their kind -- they ignored and rejected what they had just seen, and demanded that Jesus give them another sign. Jesus said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas...." Jesus used almost identical language on another occasion when the Pharisees and Sadducees came seeking a sign, though it was a matter of common knowledge and wonderment that Jesus had just previously fed the multitude with the loaves and fishes.

Men who demand that signs be given to make them believe, never believe after the signs are given. Pharaoh of Egypt had numerous signs that followed the faith of Moses proving that Moses was called of God; but his stubborn heart would not repent. The Pharisees and chief priests of Jerusalem crucified Jesus because although they had certain knowledge of the signs which attested his divinity, they could not bring themselves to accept those signs; they had either an easy explanation or a shrugging, unbelieving contempt for every one of them.

The signs that follow the believer are not for the selfish satisfaction of one man's curiosity, nor are they intended to inflate his pride or set him apart from his fellows. They are given that the church as a whole might be edified, and the faith of all strengthened. Speaking to this church through Joseph Smith the prophet, the Lord said in 1831, "Wherefore, I the Lord am not pleased with those among you, who have sought after signs and wonders for faith, and not for

the good of men to my glory." In another similar revelation we have been told that we should "seek earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given;" and that they are given "for the benefit of those who love me and keep my commandments," and not for those that seek signs that they may consume them upon their own lusts.

The Book of Mormon says that God works by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow and forever. (Moroni 10:7) If the signs do not follow the believer today, then there are no believers -- for God is still the same, and his law is still the same. If signs come by faith, then the lack of signs betokens a lack of faith; and if there is no faith, then all men are lost, for it is by faith in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that men are saved.

Do you believe that signs follow the believer today? Do you believe that the church still receives spiritual gifts such as were enjoyed under the ministry of Christ and the apostles? If there are no miracles today, then we have no hope, for the change that comes over the human heart when a man is born again is a miracle, and if there are no more miracles man cannot be changed today and must remain in his sins. Christian people all live in hope of a glorious resurrection; but the resurrection of all men will be the most astounding miracle of all time, and if there are no more miracles, if the day of miracles is past, there will be no resurrection. But God is still a God of miracles, and he has not ceased to work miracles among the children of men who have faith, who have obeyed his laws, and who use his gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.

We close by quoting the words of Moroni, which occur near the close of the Book of Mormon: "I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he (God) is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men And Christ truly said unto our fathers, If ye have faith, ye can do all things which are expedient unto me. And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth, that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief. And wo be unto the children of men, if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God...."