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CHAPTER ONE



What We Signed Up For

*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . . I am with
you always, even unto the end of the world.*

MATTHEW 28:18-20

*Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. . .
And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name
shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;
. . . they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

MARK 16:15, 17-18

THE DAY AND TIME I FIRST received an inkling of what Jesus wanted to do in my life is unforgettable. It was 2:25 p.m. on October 19, 1967. I was sitting in the office of Professor Harris at the Bible College I attended looking at the clock on the wall behind his head.

I was a frustrated young man, and could not understand what God wanted for my life. Because of my Jewish background, I'd risked my relationship with my family in order to become a Christian, and now there seemed to be nothing I could do as a Believer. I was suffering from spiritual poverty and was unaware of it.

“I don’t like church,” I confessed to him. It seemed to be the only answer to what was wrong in my life. I sat through lessons, went to Bible studies, and attended services every time one was held, but I was still deeply dissatisfied. *Was this all there was to being a Christian?*

I talked a bit more with my professor as I fumbled in my efforts to better explain these feelings. At the end of voicing my dissatisfaction with much of what I had experienced as a Christian, he admonished me, “You’d better think twice about going into the ministry!” And then he added, “Let’s pray.”

As we bowed to pray, immediately the Lord reminded me, “If two or more shall agree as touching any one thing, I will do it.” (See Matthew 18:19.) Realizing this was an opportunity for such an agreement in prayer, I decided to hold nothing back. I surrendered all of my life to Christ in a way I’d never done before.

When my beloved professor and I finished praying, he said, “Mike, just find a church and be faithful.”

I nodded my head and left, determining in my heart to do much more with Christ’s promises than just being faithful to a local church.

Perhaps in expressing my dissatisfaction with all I had experienced of the Christian life in his office that day, I realized that if all I ever did was hear *about* Christ’s power and never *experience* it, I would be forever disillusioned—a condition in which many Christians find themselves today. I knew after all I had risked to enlist as one of Christ’s soldiers I could never simply fill a vacancy in the pew of my local church and feel that I’d accomplished anything at all. I became aware that He died for much more than my privilege to sit in church, sing a few songs, and listen to some “feel good” sermons. I wanted to do what I’d signed up for—to experience the life Jesus had lived!

TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK

Anyone who reads the Gospels realizes that, for the great majority of Christians today, we are experiencing very little of what happened regularly during the life and ministry of Jesus. Then, if you go on to read the book of Acts, you have to question what the Church did to become unplugged from the power that had been experienced. Miracles and visions were a regular part of first-century Christianity. Why doesn't the Church live like that today?

Many have said that it is simply because God ordained miracles for that era, and now we are living in a different time, or dispensation of God's activity, when we need to have faith without seeing miracles. That makes sense if you look at circumstances today. In fact it makes many wish they had lived in the times of Jesus so that they might receive the help they need. If we could just see Jesus—if we could just touch Him—then everything would be better. If we could just walk with Jesus as the disciples walked with Him, then maybe we would also have the power of God available the way it was to the twelve apostles. Many believe the reason we don't experience the help needed is that things are different than when Jesus walked the earth with His disciples.

Yet, if you read what Jesus said to His disciples on the night before He was crucified, you realize that things today are different, but not in the ways we may have traditionally thought. Jesus never said anything about the miracles He performed being just for that time or there being different eras of God's grace. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that God had much more power for them to walk in *after* He left than what they were experiencing as they walked with Him during His earthly ministry.

How can I say this? Because Jesus himself told them, "It is better for you that I go away," (John 16:7 NCV.) He also said, "He that

believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; *because I go unto my Father,*” (John 14:12, italics added.) There were no time limits set on this. It was something that those who believed on Him would experience, and it wouldn’t happen until *after* He ascended.

Look again at what Jesus said to His disciples at the end of the book of Matthew:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, (Matthew 28:18-20.)

Many of you are familiar with this passage called “the Great Commission,” Jesus’ instructions to His disciples—and to us—that we take the Gospel to the ends of the earth before He comes again. How many of us have heard this passage quoted in sermons about evangelism or missions and been told that this is God’s commandment to tell others about Jesus? When we deny the power of which He tells us, we deny the very basis and implication of the scripture: “All the power of heaven and earth has been given to me, *therefore you go* and make disciples . . . because I—and all of that power given to me—will always be with you, even until the end of the world.” Doesn’t this imply that it is *because* we have the power of God with us that we should go and make disciples, and not that we should go and make disciples without it?

Mark records this in a similar way:

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 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, (Mark 16:15-18.)

In other words, miraculous signs—devils cast out, people speaking in languages foreign to them, poisonous serpents being shaken off without causing harm (see Acts 28:3-6), and attempts made on the lives of His followers having no effect on them—would follow those that believed on Jesus' name.

Why is this? Jesus made it plain on that night before his crucifixion:

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. . . .

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you, (John 14:16, 25-26.)

I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you, (John 16:7.)

While Jesus was on the earth, He had the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—without measure (see John 3:34)—all the power of God

and His wisdom wrapped up in one Man in one place—but once He ascended, the Holy Spirit would then live in the hearts of all Believers around the world. The implication is not only that the disciples would be better off when Jesus left, but also that those who believe on Jesus because of their preaching would be better off than when Jesus walked the earth. If we had walked with Jesus as His disciples did, we would have had access to the power of God whenever we were with Him, just as the woman with the issue of blood received her wholeness when she touched the hem of His garment (see Mark 5:25-34). But now that He has ascended to the right hand of the Father, we have that same power of God within each of us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. This is how we are to walk in the greater works—through the Holy Spirit who lives inside every Believer.

Has the Holy Spirit gone away? Had this been the case, then it would be logical to also say that so have the works He did through Jesus and the disciples. If the Holy Spirit is still here in our time as He was in theirs, then the gifts of the Holy Spirit in which they walked must be available to us as well.

But if this is true, why aren't we experiencing these gifts as they did? When was the last time any of us experienced this miracle-working power? It would seem logical to assume that something has changed because we don't see the miracles Jesus and the disciples manifested anymore.

I might well have agreed with those that say miracles are not for today, had my simple hunger for more of God—my dissatisfaction with the *status quo*—not led me, rather by accident, to experiences indicating that Jesus' words haven't changed through the centuries. Somehow, in spite of myself, I have seen Jesus operate the same today as He did when He walked the earth. This has led me to see that for those who will make themselves available, the Holy Spirit will work

just the same today as He has in every century since Jesus ascended to the Father.

GOD WANTS TO WORK THROUGH YOU AS HE DID THROUGH JESUS

In the late 1970s, I was asked to hold a one-night crusade in Lake Charles, Louisiana. This was after several weeks of travel, which had left me absolutely exhausted. A little girl with blue eyes and blonde pigtails, sat on the front row holding a bag on her lap. Her leg bones were so curved that her feet were twisted upward, forcing her to walk on her ankles.

Before she came that night, she had learned I was Jewish, which in her mind made me just like Jesus. Before the service, she insisted that her mother buy her a new pair of pink shoes to bring to the meeting. She believed she would need shoes to wear after her feet were healed. In the bag on her lap were those new shoes.

I had never witnessed a healing from such a severe deformity in any of my services. Did I have enough power or faith for her to be healed? What if she was disappointed when she evidently had such faith? At the close of the meeting, I prayed for everyone in the building leaving her for last, hoping many in the congregation would have left. When I looked, they were still there.

Finally, I picked her up and placed her on a little table next to me. I was so afraid of what was not going to happen that I closed my eyes as tightly as I could and at first silently prayed, "God I'm so exhausted and I don't feel as if I have an ounce of faith." My flesh, which had already assumed full responsibility, was telling me, "You're too tired to sense the Holy Spirit. Nothing is going to happen. You're going to be embarrassed. She'll go away disappointed."

Still, I prayed, asking God for her healing. The silence was

shattered by the screams and cries of those in attendance. I thought, “This congregation surely has compassion for this little girl.” I didn’t open my eyes because I was afraid to look. Suddenly, the pastor shook my arm saying, “Open your eyes, open your eyes, and see what God has done!”

When I did open my eyes, there in front of me was the little girl wearing her new pair of pink shoes. Her ankles and legs were straight and normal!

Why had I thought it had anything to do with me? The little girl had the faith and God was the miracle worker—not me. What a lesson I learned that evening as I fell to my knees and asked God to forgive me for thinking I had any power to heal.

Jamie Buckingham, a journalist and friend, invited me to join him on an eleven-day trip to the Sinai Desert to retrace the footsteps of Moses. On the sixth day, we came upon a Bedouin family. The Arab woman had heard that a doctor, Angus Sargeant, was in our group. As we approached the encampment, the woman ran to us in tears, clutching her child in her arms.

The little six-year-old girl had fallen into a fire, and approximately one-third of her head was covered with a huge abscess. As a result, she was burning up with fever, and in great pain. As the woman begged the doctor for medicine, he turned to us and said, “This is a hopeless situation. I have no medicine that I can give the girl. She needs surgery, or she may die.”

We learned that others in the Bedouin camp had taken hot knives to the child’s face in an attempt to kill the infection. Instead, the little girl’s face had been terribly scarred.

As I thought of my own three precious daughters, the compassion of Christ came upon me. I reached out my hand, and placed it on that green abscess, covered with flies. I began to intercede

earnestly for this mother's daughter. In the natural, nothing happened.

We left the camp, and headed toward Mount Sinai. Angus turned to the group, and said, "I must go back. I have to operate on that child, and try to save her." A professional photographer in our group, Skip Jones, had taken a picture of the little girl. He decided to return with Angus and me. Angus entered the tent, and within a few moments, we could hear him crying. Skip and I peeked in the tent, and saw Angus with a rusty cup filled with polluted water.

As the Arab mother wept, he had lifted the cup to Jesus, and was praying, "Lord, I don't want to offend this woman by not drinking from the cup she has offered me. It is all she has." The offering she had given to Angus was her best offering. It was her expression of gratitude, for by her side was the same little girl – except there was no abscess, there were no scars. The child had been completely and miraculously healed. Angus did not have to operate. Skip took a second picture of the child, and we leapt for joy, and blessed the Lord for His mercy and compassion.

Through such experiences, I began to realize that Jesus had other intentions for the way His Church should operate in this day and age. His plan was not that we would be so defeated and despondent that the world would look down on us—that we would be so full of spiritual poverty that you couldn't tell us from those in the world who live without hope.