

(Gifts) Purpose of Sign Gifts

by Dwight Pentecost

The purpose of sign gifts is to authenticate a messenger as having come from God and to authenticate a message as a divine message which necessitates obedience.

Duration: 40:47

Scripture: Matthew 4:17, Matthew 4:23-24, Mark 16:14

Topics: "Gifts"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Moses and his doubts about being accepted as a deliverer by his own people. Moses expresses his concern to God, who then asks him what he has in his hand. Moses replies that he has a rod. God instructs Moses to cast the rod on the ground, which turns into a serpent. The preacher connects this story to the message in Matthew 4:17, where Jesus calls for repentance because the kingdom of heaven is near. The preacher emphasizes that the nation of Israel had turned away from God and needed to repent in order to receive the blessings promised to them. The sermon also addresses the topic of speaking in tongues and the purpose of the signs performed by the apostles, which were meant to attract people to Jesus Christ and his message of salvation.

Transcript

We are, in the midst of a series, studying spiritual gifts. We want to consider particularly those gifts that have created so much confusion and about which there is so much question today. Gifted tongues and the gift of healing.

In 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. There is the wise, there is the scribe, there is the disputer of this world.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.

But unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. May

God add his blessing to the reading of this portion of his word.

In the study of the important teaching in the scripture on spiritual gifts, we've seen in past studies that there is one class of gifts that is called edifying gifts. These are gifts which God gives to men, that they in turn may become gifts to the church. But as they exercise that for which they have been gifted by God, the church is built up for edifying.

There are those who bring the truth to a new area and establish people in their newfound faith. These were apostles. There were prophets who received and proclaimed revelation from God to man.

There were evangelists who brought the gospel to those who were in darkness. There were pastor-teachers who shepherded those who had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There were those who had gifts of oversight or administration who could supervise the flock of God.

There were those who could show mercies, could meet and could respond to the needs of people. There were those who had gifts of discernment and could detect when a false teacher or false doctrine was being propagated. There were those who had gifts of giving so that the Lord's work should be supported.

There were those who had gifts of teacher to communicate the truth of God that had been communicated to them to others. And through the operation of this multiplicity of gifts, the needs of an assembly of believers were met, and God's people grew in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior came out of spiritual infancy to maturity. The apostle is very much concerned, as he writes, for instance, in Romans chapter 12 or in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, that these churches should avail themselves of the ministry of these gifted men of God who, as they exercised their gifts, contributed to the welfare of the body.

But in these translations that deal with spiritual gifts, we find there is a second class of gifts. They are what would be called sign gifts. The apostle refers to some of these in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

After he has mentioned some of the different gifts, he says in verse 9, to another faith by the same spirit, to another given the gifts of healing by the same spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning spirit, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But in the same chapter, in verse 29, he asks, Are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers? Then he asks this question, Are all workers of miracles, have all the gifts of healing, do all speak with tongues, do all interpret? We see that Paul has clearly in mind a second classification of gifts when he introduces these Corinthians to what we call the sign gifts. We find as we look into the closing portion of Mark's gospel that the coming of such sign gifts or miracle gifts was anticipated.

For our Lord said in Mark 16, 17, These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not fit them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

There, anticipating these gifts of the Spirit, our Lord told those assembled on that occasion that they would be given this capacity to perform miracles. The gifts that we call sign gifts were miracles, and the same power that Christ demonstrated when among men would be given to them so that they could duplicate in large measure the miracles that Christ had performed. We find, as Paul writes in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, that the Jewish people with whom the church began, to whom the message was first preached, had come to require signs before they believed.

Paul refers to that fact in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 22, when he says, The Jews require a sign. Now, there is historical background for this, for there were certain periods in Israel's history when God sent men with power to perform miracles. We have called attention to this line of teaching before, but I think it is necessary to point out certain facts about it again in connection with our study here.

When we go back into the book of Exodus, in the early chapters we find the children of Israel in bondage in Egypt. They were God's people. They had been related to God by the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Yet, God had predicted they would be out of the land for an extended period of time. The time had come for God to deliver that people and to bring them into their own land. The people cried unto God for deliverance because their oppression was so great, and God raised up a deliverer, the man Moses.

Moses was sent back to Pharaoh's court with a message to Pharaoh that he would deliberate the children of Israel from their bonding. Moses knew that the children of Israel would be reluctant to accept him, for although he had been born among them, he had been separated from them. Soon after his birth, he was taken from his parents and was put into the household of the Pharaoh, and he was brought up as Pharaoh's own son by Pharaoh's daughter.

For 40 years, he had been considered Pharaoh's heir or Pharaoh's son. Then, after he had slain an Egyptian, he had to flee in the wilderness, and for 40 years he again was separated from his own people. He was now 80 years of age, and he was a stranger to his own brethren and to the nation to which he was being sent as a deliverer.

Moses anticipated that the people would be unwilling to accept him. He also knew that Pharaoh would reject his message when he came as God's spokesman to command Pharaoh, let my people go, that they might be delivered from bonding. So, when we come into the fourth chapter of the book of Exodus, we find Moses in a discussion with God, and Moses answered and said, Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice, for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.

Moses is anticipating the fact that his own people will not know him, will not accept him as a deliverer, will be unwilling to follow him. Now, he said, How can I be authenticated before my people? And so God said to him, What's that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. God said, Cast it on the ground.

He cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent. Moses fled from before it. The Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail.

And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand, that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abram, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. Do you notice what God said to Moses? You will have the power to perform miracles, so that the children of Israel may believe that I have sent you unto them to be their deliverer. That's only the first problem.

He has the means now by which he can convince Israel that he is God's representative with God's message. But what about that godless man, Pharaoh? How will he come to believe that Moses is God's man? And so we look into chapter 5, and we read there, Afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

You see, Pharaoh challenged both Moses, and he challenged Moses' God. And so in chapter 6, verse 1, the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of the land. God sent unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord.

And God gave Moses miracles to perform in the presence of Pharaoh, to convince Pharaoh that he was God's representative, and that his command was God's command, and he was obligated to obey it. You see, the nation Israel had been born in the midst of miracles, and their deliverer authenticated himself to them by miracles, and he accomplished their deliverance from Egypt by the miracles that he performed. From that time on in Israel's history, when there was a new messenger with a new message, Israel had been skeptical, and they said to the messenger, You prove to us that you are God's man.

They asked for signs. Then I turn to another period in Israel's history, that is, into the period of Elijah and Elisha. The nation of Israel had gone into apostasy.

They had been led into a culminating apostasy as a result of the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel, and Jezebel had introduced the worship of a heathen god and goddess into the religious life of Israel. God sent Elijah with a message of judgment, a message of warning that God would deliver his people into bondage if they did not forsake their idolatry. And when I turn into 1 Kings chapter 17 and verse 1, I read, Elijah the Tishbite, who is of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years according to my work.

And for three and a half years there was not a drop of moisture that came on the land. And Elijah was vindicated before the king as God's man by the miracle of shutting up the heavens, just as Moses was vindicated before Pharaoh by the miracles that he performed. But then Elijah turned from his ministry to the king, and he began to minister among the people.

And if you read the succeeding chapters in 1 Kings, you will find a record of a number of miracles that Elijah performed. Those miracles were to the nation Israel to convince the nation that he was God's man, and that he had God's message, and that the nation must heed the warning, the upcoming judgment that he brought to them from God. And even though the nation repudiated the message of Elijah and his successor Elisha, they had testimony from God by the miracles that these men were God's men with God's message.

So Israel in the Old Testament had been given signs to prove that the messengers were God's messengers, and that the message that they brought was God's message to the nation. Now, when we turn into the New Testament, we find in the Gospels that our Lord performed a multiplicity of signs, and these signs were performed before the nation Israel for the same purpose that the miracles of Moses and of Elijah were performed in the days that had preceded. Our Lord came to the nation Israel with a message.

This message is given to us in Matthew chapter 4 verse 17, "...repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The nation Israel was guilty of sin. They were far from God. God had to turn his back upon them and set them aside from the blessings that he had promised to bring to them.

The only way they could receive blessing from God was to turn back to God and seek his face and confess their sin and turn to the ways of righteousness. Our Lord appeared to say to them, "...repent, turn to me, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand." All the blessings that had been promised to Israel through a

coming King would become theirs. So, our Lord had appeared as a man from God, as God's prophet with God's message.

Why would the nation Israel believe him? For there were, so the historians tell us, no less than 60 men who appeared at approximately the time our Lord appeared who claimed to be God's Messiah, the one who would bring blessings to the nation Israel. Ah, but it was one great difference, for not one of those 60 who claimed to be the fulfillment of prophecy could do what the Lord Jesus Christ did. For I look in verses 23 and 24 of Matthew 4, and I read Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

And his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, those which were possessed with demons, and those that were lunatic, and those that had palsy, and he healed them. Our Lord authenticated his call to repentance and his offer of blessing to the nation Israel by the signs that he performed. And multitudes in the nation Israel who saw his signs came to the conclusion that he must be the son of David, he must be the Messiah, he must be the one whom the prophets had foretold would come to redeem and to raise.

We find, then, that the signs as they occurred in the gospels through the life of Christ had the same purpose as the signs in the Old Testament. They were signs to the nation Israel to authenticate a messenger as having come from God, and to authenticate his message as a divine message which necessitated obedience. We come now into the book of Acts, and we find throughout the book of Acts many, many signs occurring.

These signs were performed by the apostles, or those who ministered on several occasions by special apostolic authority. We look again into Mark, chapter 16, and recall that our Lord, speaking to the eleven as we read in verse 14, had said, "In my name they shall cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents. If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." As we open the book of Acts, we find the apostles to whom this word was given were engaged in a ministry to the nation Israel, and they are calling Israel to repentance as Peter did in Acts, chapter 2 and verse 38. In Acts, chapter 3 and verse 19, when Peter said, "'Ye men of Israel, repent, so that the seasons of refreshing shall come from the hand of the Lord,' Peter stood there on that occasion as God's man, as God's prophet with God's message, and he asked the nation Israel to believe on him. But as we move through the book of Acts, we find that the very men who announced this message to Israel performed miracles, so that the nation Israel might be convinced by the signs that they performed that they were God's men with God's message, and that the nation ought to respond to the message that God was delivering to them." May I point you out to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12 and verse 12.

Throughout these epistles, Paul's authority was being questioned, and there were those who repudiated his doctrine who came and said that Paul had no right to teach and to introduce such a doctrine as he proclaimed, because he was not God's man, he was not God's message. When I come to 2 Corinthians 12, I find Paul using a climactic argument to confirm that he was God's man and the gospel he preached was God's message, for Paul said, "The signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty to prove to the nation that he was God's man with God's message." The thing that I want you to understand as we come to the New Testament, and particularly to the book of

Acts, is that all of the signs that were performed were performed by apostles, or by their special representatives to confirm their apostolic message as they preached Christ as the Savior from sin. Now, when we go into 1 Corinthians chapter 14 and verse 22, we find that Paul refers there to signs that were wrought among the Gentiles.

In 1422, Paul says, "'Tongues are for a sign.' The so-called sign gifts are to be contrasted with the edifying gifts, for the edifying gifts were to be used for believers to build believers up in the faith. Sign gifts were not to be used in reference to believers. The sign gifts were to be used before unbelievers to convince unbelievers of the genuineness of the message and the authority of the messenger.

There was no place for using the sign gifts before believers, for Paul says, again I read 2 Corinthians 14.22, "'Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.' Now, what were some of these sign gifts that the apostles used to convince unbelievers of their authority as proclaimers of God's truth and the genuineness of their message? Well, let's look in the book of Acts, and we will see that what our Lord predicted in Mark 16 was fulfilled in the apostles in the early church. I go into Acts chapter 3, and there I find in the first verse that Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour, and a certain lame man from his mother's womb was carried whom they daily at the gate of the temple, which is called beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. And this beggar saw Peter and John, they evidently looked prosperous, so that he asked them for a gift.

And Peter said, "'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, and he leaping up stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God." The result of this miracle is all the people praised God. The sign had convinced the people that these two who had performed this were God's men with God's message, and our Lord had said you would heal the sick, and the lame man was healed.

For I look in Acts chapter 9, and there in verse 40, I find Peter coming into Joppa where a woman by the name of Dorcas had died. And word was brought to Peter concerning the death of Dorcas. Verse 39, "'Peter rose and went with them.

When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber, and all the widows stood by him, weeping, showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth and kneeled down and prayed, and turning him to the body, said, "'Survivor, arise!' and she opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up, and he gave her his hand and lifted her up.

When he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive, and it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believe in the law. Peter authenticated his authority as God's messenger by raising one who was dead, and the message of that went through Joppa, and many believe, not only because Peter preached, but because he authenticated his preaching by the miracle that he performed. And Christ had said, "'You will raise the dead.' Peter raised the dead." Or look at it again in Acts chapter 12.

I'm sorry, I want to go back to Acts chapter 5. We read there, "...by the hands of the apostles." Notice he didn't say, by the hands of the believers or by the hands of the members of the church in Jerusalem, but by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders brought among the people, and the result of this, verse 13, "...the people magnified them as believers, were the more avid under the Lord, both multitudes both of men and women, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of

them. There came also multitudes out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folk and them which were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one." Miracle of healing, regardless of the sickness, and without exception. They were all healed.

Peter didn't have to send some away unhealed, saying, "You didn't have the faith to believe, that's why you weren't healed.' They were all healed. It was an apostolic sign to confirm their authority and authenticate their message. We'll look at it again back in Luke 10.

We'll use this as a reference when Christ sent out the Seventy. He gave them power to perform miracles, and we read in verse 17, "The Seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through thy name.' Verse 19, "Behold, I have given unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Now, withstanding in this, rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' These apostles would be given this authority preceding the authority invested in them as apostles, and the day of Pentecost were able to deliver people who were demon-possessed. They could go into the realm of sickness, into the realm of death, into such crippling deformities as blindness and lameness, and they healed. They could call those who had died back to life again.

These were the signs that Christ gave them the power to perform, to authenticate to men that they were apostles, and to convince unbelievers that their message was a genuine message. When we turn to the second chapter of the book of Acts, we find another kind of miracle or sign that they could perform. Those that we have mentioned thus far have been in the realm of physical healing, and it had to do with the body.

But here is a different kind of sign in Acts 2. In verse 4, on the day of Pentecost, the apostles were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them uttering. These other tongues were known languages, for before the apostles on that occasion were men from a multitude of nations, as described in verses 9-11. These people had come together to observe the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

They were not able to communicate with each other because of a language barrier, but Peter was enabled to speak so that each one of these, from these many different nationalities, heard in their own mother tongue the glorious message that Peter had been sent to deliver. As a result of this miracle, we read that on this day, from verse 41, there were added unto them about three thousand souls. This was a miracle.

It was a sign to prove Peter's appointment as God's prophet, God's spokesman, and to convince them of the genuineness of his message. And when these who knew not Christ heard the message and saw the sign, they believed in Christ. They didn't believe in Peter to the salvation of their souls, they believed in Christ, and they joined themselves not to Peter, they were joined to Jesus Christ by being baptized in his name.

They were saved. What I want you to see, beloved, is this fact that when God had a new message, a message of deliverance to bring to the nation Israel when they were in bondage, he raised up a deliverer, a prophet, and that prophet delivered a message and authenticated the message by miracle. When God approached that nation in judgment, he warned of impending judgment, and he sent a prophet, and that prophet authenticated his message and his warning by miracle.

When the Lord Jesus Christ came with the good news that God had sent the Savior into the world and men were invited to put faith in him, that prophet, the Lord Jesus, was authenticated by miracle. When after the death and resurrection of Christ, God had a new message of salvation to deliver to man through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God sent messengers and he authenticated those prophets by miracle. When the apostles covered their world with the message of salvation by the grace of God through the death of Christ, based on the blood of Christ, they gained a hearing, and men were convinced of their message because it was authenticated by miracle.

These signed gifts were given to the apostles to be exercised before unbelievers, to bring believers, to bring unbelievers to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. Because the word of God has been authenticated, it no longer became necessary for these miracles and these signs to continue. Abundant evidence was given to the fact that these men were God's men, and this message was God's message, and we find that these signs began to diminish, to decline, and ultimately to disappear.

We're going to consider in subject and study, are these signed gifts for today? Do we look for men to perform miracles of healing? Do we look for men to speak in tongues? Or are these movements an attempt to revive what was temporary and transitory, and no longer serves a useful function? I trust that through this study this evening, you will see that God in this grace to convince men of the genuineness of his offer of salvation empowered the apostles to perform some. They did then not to attract attention to themselves, not to create a following by doing something spectacular. The signs they performed were designed to attract men to Jesus Christ, to attract men to a person that people might hear words from him as he said, I am no other in the way, I am no other in the sea, I am no other than the light, no man cometh under the fathom but by me.

This sign points to a person instead of to the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot be ignored signs. I point you to him, the one who was authenticated by signs and miracles, who invites men to himself as a saint.

We pray our Father that the Spirit of God may direct our understanding of these things to which we have been looking, that we might be instructed in the plan and purpose of God for signs. We might be able to fit them into the right place, the unfolding of revelation. We thank thee that the message was a message that was authenticated, which we have believed to the salvation of our souls.

We thank thee for the person whose death provided the basis for our salvation, that we might be drawn to thee. Dismissed are the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace upon us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Maybe something that you heard in this message has prompted a spiritual need in your life, and you would like to talk with someone about that. We have someone here ready to take your phone call, and we invite you to call our counseling line at 1-800-888-7077. Again, that's 1-800-888-7077.

I'd like to invite you to join us again tomorrow evening before the conference opens.

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