

Have Angels Become a Distraction for Pentecostals?

We as Pentecostals and charismatics love sensational manifestations, but the downside is that we too often become enthralled with them and begin seeking them instead of the Lord and His Word. Angels are real, but they can become a distraction as in the case of the man at the Pool of Bethesda.

The Problem at the Pool

John 5:1-15 tells the story of Jesus healing a paralytic who had been lying at the Pool of Bethesda, probably for many years, waiting for an angel to come down and “stir up” the water. John says that when the angel “stirred up” the water, whoever stepped first into the pool was healed of whatever disease they had.

Any results at this pool were obviously minimal, for the place was crowded with a “multitude” of weak, sickly and helpless people. The man Jesus talked to had been in his paralytic condition for 38 years. Despite his unflagging preoccupation with this sensational angelic phenomenon, he had found no relief.

Jesus did not try to help the man into the pool. He did not encourage him to keep watching for the angel. Jesus, in fact, took his attention away from the pool and the angel to his own state of mind and heart. He asked the man, *Do you want to be made well?*

The Greek word for “want” in Jesus’ question does not refer to a mere wish, but to an “earnest desire.” In other words, does this man really want to be well or has he settled into an existence around the pool with other needy ones all mesmerized by the sensational, spiritual phenomena they find there?

God and His Word are Our Only Sure Hope

We must remember that this man, and all the others around the pool, were Jews with a healing covenant from God. All the Old Testament promises of healing belonged to them. Exodus 15:26 belonged to them, where God revealed Himself to Israel as *the LORD who heals you*. Psalm 103:2-3 was theirs, where David exhorted God's people to *forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases*.

It seems that the stirring of the water had become a distraction for this man and many others like him. They had placed their hope in an unpredictable, sensational phenomenon rather than the sure promises of God's Word. They were in the same place as the Colossian believers whom Paul, years later in Colossians 2:18, chided for their "worship" of angels.

The word "worship" in Colossians 2:18 is a translation of the Greek word *threskia* and is not the normal word for "worship." Besides Col. 2:18 it is found in only three other places in the New Testament—Acts 26:3 and James 1:26-27, where it is translated as "religion." The point seems to be that the Colossians had developed an unhealthy "religious" fascination with angels.

Is this not the problem with the man at the pool? It reminds me of how George Whitefield wrote to John Wesley and cautioned him not to make too much of the sensational outward phenomena that were occurring in their meetings, such as falling, weeping, visions, shouting, laughing and so on. He said,

That there is something of God in it, I doubt not. But the devil, I believe, does interpose. I think it will . . . take people away from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, etc., more than on the promises and precepts of the gospel.

In the case of the man at the pool, his enamored preoccupation

with the angel and the stirring of the water had taken him away from focusing on God and His covenant promises. Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us that we are to run this Christian race *looking to Jesus* (Heb. 12:2), not chasing every exciting sign and wonder that comes down the pike.

How I Learned This Lesson

I had to learn this lesson the hard way. In 1989 I became very ill while living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which at that time was the mecca of the charismatic/healing movement. Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborn, Kenneth Hagin and other renowned healing ministers all had their headquarters there.

God, however, would not allow me to lie around the pool (so to speak) hoping that a healing gift would be manifest for me. He made it very clear that I was to trust Him and His covenant promises. In the midst of the battle, He gave me three keys to answered prayer: promise, praise and perseverance.

He made it clear that I was to keep myself preoccupied with His promise, rather than running here and there hoping for a sensational miracle of healing. I was to surround myself with praise, for praise is the voice of faith. Finally, I was to persevere and not throw in the towel just because I did not see an immediate manifestation of healing.

So, I got my eyes off the pool and on God's promise. I praised and persevered and over the next 3.5 years, my faith became firmly rooted in God and His covenant promises. I was healed and 30 years later I am still well and taking no medication. Hallelujah!

If God chooses to manifest an angel to me, I have no problem with that. However, I have discovered something far superior and more exciting than any angel—God Himself and His covenant promises. That is where I have chosen to live. {eo}

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