

Noteworthy

Prayer Requests: Jo Anderson (*ongoing medical*), Margaret Blackburn (*pancreas and hip*), Joe Brown (*cancer*), Mildred Church (*shut in*), Audrey Davis, Linda James (*ongoing medical*), Paul Lloyd (*still in LPMC*), Butch Morgan (*ongoing medical*).

Family and friends: Geraldean Day (*Bucky Day's mother*), Nell Goodall (*Charles Goodall's aunt*), Ned Hicks (*ongoing medical*), Brian James (*cancer*), John Marschall (*Bob Marschall's father*), Lindy McReedy (*Cindy Hicks' aunt, cancer*), Wayne Ryland (*ongoing medical*) and Ardis Tucker. Remember and encourage others who are struggling.

Out of Town: Larry & Cindy Hicks, Colby & Kaitlyn Sadler (and family), and Paula Sullivan.

Group Meeting: Group 1 will meet tonight after the evening worship service.

Ladies Bible Class: May 14th (*tomorrow*) at Cindy Hicks' home (at 7PM). In preparation, please do lesson number 7 titled "*Responsibility to Teach Children*" in the book provided for the class (Woman, Her Blessings and Responsibilities, by Irene S. Foy).

Gospel Meetings: The Trilacoochee Church of Christ—May 13th-18th, the Lake Wales Church of Christ—May 19th-20th. See bulletin board for details.

Third Sunday: Jordan Lawson will preach during the PM assembly next week (3-20-18), Lord willing!

Winter Bible Classes: Tues., May 22nd (*next week*) at the Rice's home. (*Church History*)

Men's Training Class: 4th Sunday of each month at 5 pm (*May 27th*).

Assignments for Worship Service

Wednesday Night: 5/16/18

Song Leader: Joe Brown
 Opening Prayer: Leon Miller
 Invitation: Larry Hicks
 Announcements: Larry Wisdom
 Closing Prayer: Jerry Williams
 Recordings: Bob Marschall
 Usher: Leon Miller

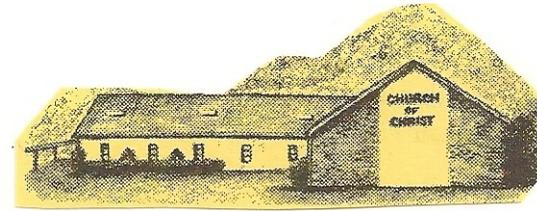
Sunday Evening: 5/20/18

Song Leader: Kirk Marschall
 Opening Prayer: Leon Miller
 Lord's Table: Joe Brown
 Announcements: Larry Wisdom
 Closing Prayer: Charles Goodall
 Recordings: Bob Marschall
 Usher: Gus Johnson

Sunday Morning: 5/20/18

Lord's Table: Joe Brown (B)
 Clay Sadler (C)
 Serving: Jim Abram
 Trent Stevens
 Song Leader: Keith Marschall

Opening Prayer: Jim Elliot
 Announcements: Larry Wisdom
 Closing Prayer: Mike Sadler
 Recordings: Bob Marschall
 Usher: Gus Johnson



**Lakeland Hills
 Leader**

LAKELAND HILLS CHURCH OF CHRIST

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ELDERS

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SERVICES

Sunday
 Bible Study 9:00 A.M.
 Morning Services 9:50 A.M.
 Evening Services 6:00 P.M.
 Wednesday
 Bible Study 7:30 P.M.

DEACONS:

Robert Marschall
 Michael Sadler
 Moses Stevens
 David Williams

EVANGELIST:

Ian Rice (863) 213-9795

“Signs, Providence and Chance”

The difference between miraculous and providential events is a topic of discussion for many Christians. We often have difficulty understanding how God can be active in the day by day affairs of this world without performing miracles. Likewise, we find it hard to grasp the idea of God granting a request for a specific temporal blessing without performing a miracle.

Because of this dilemma, some are prone to shout “it’s a miracle” when they see any natural wonder. A person survives a horrific airplane or automobile crash – “it’s a miracle.” Or, one falls 100 feet on to a concrete pavement, receiving only superficial wounds – “it’s a miracle that he was not killed.” Or, one is seriously ill, the doctors are doing their best, yet little or no noticeable improvement. Prayers are offered, the patient begins feeling better and is pronounced completely well – in a about two weeks or so – “it’s a miracle.”

God is neither powerless nor dead. He is very much alive and active. It is truly “*in Him we live and move and have our being*” – despite some thinking of Him like a child’s stringed propelled toy top. The top is carefully wound with a string from bottom to top, then thrown, with a jerk backward on the string, leaving the top to spin itself out on the floor without

further action. The idea is that God created the world, started it in motion, and is now leaving it alone to run itself down.

On the other hand, some view it as puppets on a string. Every movement is precipitated by a direct pull on a string by a puppeteer. In their view God so determines every act of His creation without leaving room to act with no strings attached – i.e., freewill.

James tells of Elijah's praying to show the potency of the prayers of the righteous. This is an example of God's providential answer to prayer, as distinguished from a miraculous answer:

James 5:17 *Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

Here God answered two specific prayers of Elijah. One was for God to withhold rain from Israel and the other for Him to restore rain. Both requests were granted – but, were they miracles? We can go to the original account in 1 Kings for the details of this story and see providence at work:

1 Kings 17:1 *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was 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, but according to my word.*

1 Kings 18:41 *And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and*

he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, 43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. 44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, BEHOLD, THERE ARISETH A LITTLE CLOUD OUT OF THE SEA, LIKE A MAN'S HAND. And he said, GO UP, SAY UNTO AHAB, PREPARE THY CHARIOT, AND GET THEE DOWN, THAT THE RAIN STOP THEE NOT. 45 And it came to pass in the mean while, that THE HEAVEN WAS BLACK WITH CLOUDS AND WIND, AND THERE WAS A GREAT RAIN. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

To the casual observer, not endowed with revelation, these events would have been viewed as mere acts of nature – a very long dry spell followed by a monstrous rain storm that started as a small cloud out in the Mediterranean Sea building up into a huge storm. He would have seen no evidence of a direct sign from God because this is how rain always came to that land. Had it rained so heavily without any clouds (small or large) seen in the sky, then it would have been clearly a miracle.

There can be no doubt that both the beginning and end of the long drought were acts of God in answer to Elijah's prayers because we have God's history of the events recorded. It allows us to look back at see all the story. Those in Elijah's day were not privy to all this information. They only saw what went on, up

front, on the world stage. They did not see the backstage activities behind the curtain.

If these had been miracles, both the on-stage performance and the backstage support would have been clearly visible. They would not have needed to wait for someone to pull the curtain to expose the backstage crew – there would have been no certain.

The day that I cease to believe that God's providential care, for me, is not at work "behind the scenes" in answer to my prayers is the day that I will cease to pray. Trying to understand and explain all the nuances of providence often results in whittling at His end of the stick. The scriptures tell us that both miraculous and providential events are acts of God – just that a miracle is always obviously a sign from God at the time – while providence is not.

In the book of Esther we read of the king of Persia's issuing a decree to destroy all the Jews in all of his provinces. In an effort to save them, Esther's uncle, Mordecia, tries to persuade her to speak to the king about the matter. This might work, but Esther's life would be at risk. Her uncle asked "*who knows* whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Looking back, it is clearly the providence of God at work, but at time it was not so clear to Mordecia. A miracle would have been clear beyond doubt.

As for free will, God has fixed it so that neither miracle nor providence can set aside man's freedom to choose. Every biblical example of miracle or providence leaves man's freewill in tact. Freedom to choose is a fundamental trait of

man, having been created in the image of God. Just as God can not lie because it is against His very essence as God. He cannot set aside man's freedom of choice without going against the very nature of man as the crown of his creation. Hypothetically, If God were to sin, he would no longer be God. What makes Him – God – would be destroyed. Likewise, hypothetically, if man were stripped of his freewill, he would no longer be man. What makes him – man – would be destroyed.

A final word. True miracles have ceased because God no longer needs them to confirm His revelation to mankind. That revelation is complete. (Cf. Jude 3; 1 Cor. 13). In reading through the Bible it is easy to see that at times there seems to be flood of miraculous activity, with each accompanied by a period of new revelation from God. Three of these periods are easily seen – Moses' deliverance of the Israelites from bondage, the period of the great prophets of old, and the ministry of Jesus and the early days of the church. After the revelation was complete, so was the period of miracles.

As for God's providential work in the world, there is no evidence that it has or will cease. We will just have to be content to accept it as a matter faith – without receiving notices as to the nature of each occurrence – whether by God's design or "by chance." (See Luke 10:31).

- Edward Bragwell