

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: STEVE GAINES

SBC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President Steve Gaines

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SUPERNATURAL CHRISTIANITY

The first immigrants to America weren't seeking money or power; they came from England primarily because of persecution by the church and they desired to worship the Lord Jesus in freedom as they saw fit. Most of those early immigrants had a Puritan background and they were conservative, Bible-believing, godly Christians. A little over a century later, just before our nation was born, America experienced the First Great Awakening. Preachers like George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, and others preached across America and many people were converted to Jesus Christ. Then came the Revolutionary War in which America was aided by the French and together they defeated the armies of Great Britain, gaining freedom for our country. Although the French helped the Americans win the war against England, they also brought with them a philosophical "Trojan Horse." Many French leaders and citizens had jettisoned biblical Christianity for a liberally, tainted rationalism that caused many to become agnostic and atheistic. These people influenced many Americans in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, causing many of them to jettison the Puritan doctrines and practices of their parents and grandparents. Several well-known leaders in our country – whom we would consider founding fathers – embraced a heretical philosophy known as deism. Deists believe in a so-called "god" who is not active in the daily affairs of mankind. They view god as a benevolent watch-maker who created the "watch of the universe" by winding it up and then uncaringly setting it aside to run by itself. Because of this heretical philosophy, deists do not believe in the miracles of the Bible, most especially the supreme miracle – the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Two influential deists were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Franklin was a devout American patriot and famous in both America and Europe for his scientific inventions. Are you wearing bifocals today? Thank Benjamin Franklin. If you turn on a light today and use electricity, thank Benjamin Franklin. He was not only a renowned scientist and inventor, but also a prolific author and publisher, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and served as America's ambassador to France. Although he never became the president of the United States, he was an American hero because he helped forge our nation at its inception. However, Benjamin Franklin was a deist, not a born-again Christian. He was a man of science, not Scripture. He was a man of philosophy, not prayer. Although he was great friends with George Whitfield and published many of Whitfield's books, he never embraced Whitfield's God.

Unfortunately, Franklin influenced a younger friend who also became a deist – Thomas Jefferson. Not only was Jefferson the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, but he was also the third president of the United States. Jefferson was influenced heavily by French rationalism and was so opposed to the miracles mentioned in the Bible that he created his own bible and called it the Jefferson Bible. Taking a sharp knife, Jefferson cut various New Testament texts from the Latin, Greek, French, and English Bibles and left out anything that he referred to as "might be contrary to reason." Six years before his death, he created his own four column "new testament" – an 84-page volume that he entitled "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth." It contained Jesus' moral teachings, but none of his miracles. It also left out the only miracle of Jesus mentioned in all four Gospels – the feeding of the 5,000. Most

especially, the bible left out Jesus rising from the dead. Jefferson debunked any thought of a bodily resurrection and as far as he was concerned, his bible would leave Jesus in the tomb. He called his distilled version of the New Testament “the most sublime and benevolent code of morals ever offered to man.”

Both Franklin and Jefferson admired Jesus and His moral teachings, but they rejected His miracles. They rejected His eternity. They rejected His virginal birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, and all of His miracles. They rejected the very heart of the gospel. They did not believe in a supernatural Christianity and thus they did not believe in Christ at all. I want to know about you. Do you believe in a supernatural God? Do you believe in a God who created the heavens and the earth? Do you believe Jesus was born of virgin, freed from a sinful nature, lived a sinless life in the power of the Holy Spirit, died on the cross to save us from our sins, was buried but three days later rose bodily victoriously, and eternally from the grave, ascended back to the Father, and is seated at the right hand of God until the Father makes all of his enemies a footstool for His feet? Do you believe Jesus is coming back again? I want to know if you believe in a supernatural God!

In the book of Acts, you read about a bunch of folks who believe in a supernatural God. Spanning the first thirty years of the church, the book of Acts shows the early church traveling from Jerusalem to Rome and taking the gospel into areas that knew nothing of Christ and within a matter of years planting churches and leading thousands of people to follow Him. How did they do that? They believed in the miraculous power of God. They believed in the miraculous power of the gospel. They believed that the gospel could change anyone. They believed that the gospel of Jesus Christ could set sinners free. They believed that the gospel of Jesus Christ could change even communities. They believed in the power of Almighty God and they sought to pray like that and to witness like that and to live under an open heaven. I want to ask you, Southern Baptist Convention, what is going to be the solution for our decline? What can God do with us? Above all, you have to believe in a bigger God than you believe in right now. You need to believe in the God of the Bible and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to talk to you about supernatural Christianity.

First of all, **God's promises are supernatural.** Look at Acts 27 and 28. What's going on here? Paul was under arrest and being transported on a ship. He was en route to Rome with 275 other passengers and was to stand trial before Caesar. While sailing on the Mediterranean, the ship was caught in a terrible storm. Before they had set sail, Paul warned them not to go. He was a veteran traveler and knew better than to travel on the Mediterranean in the wintertime. Naturally though, the Roman commander put more stock in the opinion of the sailors rather than the opinion of the preacher named Paul. After setting sail, a strong nor'easter wind (*uerquillo* in Greek) rushed down and blew the ship off course. For days the ship was violently storm-tossed and it floated aimlessly in the sea. It was so dark that the sailors didn't know where they were. They even threw out the cargo so they could lighten their ship. Eventually they lost hope and didn't think they would survive.

The Bible says in Acts 27:20, “*Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.*” But in that dark hour, I want you to know, our God showed up. Paul must have been down in the hull praying. He got alone with God and suddenly God gave him a promise that encouraged him, along with everyone else. In Acts 27:21-26 we read these words:

When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst [it sounds a lot like Peter standing up on the Day of Pentecost] and said, 'Men, you ought to have followed my advice [you know, we preachers always like to remind people when they didn't follow our advice that they should've, amen?] and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.'

That promise encouraged Paul and then he shared it to encourage the others! Encouragement is putting courage back into people; discouragement is when the devil or the world pulls courage out of you. Paul encouraged them! He knew he had heard a word from God and they would indeed land safely. The Bible says in Acts 27:44, *"And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land."* God supernaturally gave Paul a promise and supernaturally fulfilled it. God's promises are supernatural. You say, "Well, that was the apostle Paul and the early first-century church. God is no longer doing those kind of supernatural things." I beg to differ. I believe Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I believe our God is still a miraculous God.

In 1985 when our son Grant was almost two years old, we began to notice bruising on his body. Donna set an appointment with the pediatrician who immediately referred Grant to Ft. Worth Children's Hospital because he thought our son had leukemia. The day that happened, I came home from class at Southwestern Seminary and called Donna from the church office. All she could muster was, "Come home." I knew something was wrong. We had an appointment early the next morning to drive 50 miles to Ft. Worth to Children's Hospital. In the meantime, we called all of our church deacons and they prayed for Grant. Neither Donna nor I could sleep. Although Donna finally fell asleep around 1 or 2 in the morning, I could not sleep. My son was sick. So, I picked up my Bible and started reading where I had left off the day before. I came to a text in Exodus 14:13-14. God speaks to me through His Word; not just for inspiration, but for revelation. Someone says "Have you ever heard God speak?" Yes, every time I read my Bible. In fact, I have heard God speak out loud because I have read my Bible out loud! Around 4:00 in the morning with tears in my eyes, I read these words, *"Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."* You may say, "that's not contextual." You can say whatever you want, but that was definitely God talking to a praying daddy. I cried and shouted and showed the verse to Donna. That morning we walked into the hospital; Grant had all types of tests, but all concluded that he didn't have leukemia. Grant has been preaching the gospel now for almost ten years. His church just had 23 people saved at their Vacation Bible School, they baptized 10 people on Father's Day, he's a soulwinner, a prayer warrior, living for Jesus, and has four of the most beautiful grandbabies you'll ever see in your life!

I can assure you that every promise of God comes true. If you have a need today, God has a promise in His Word. Do you need God to be close to you? *The Lord is your Shepherd; you shall not want.* Are you living in turmoil and strife? *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters.* Are you weary and worn out by life? *He restoreth my soul.* Do you need guidance and direction? *He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea thou I walk through the valley – are you walking through a valley of despair? – of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for Thou art with me.* Notice in the valley,

he stops talking about God and starts talking to God. *Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Do you need God to provide for you and your family? Look to Jehovah Jireh. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Are you worried about your future on earth? Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Are you worried about your future in eternity? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!*

If you have a need, God has a promise in His Word. Are you lost? Hear the promise of God – “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” Are you afraid? Hear the promise of God – “*Do not fear, I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you by my righteous right hand.*” Do you need direction? God says, “*I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.*” Are you sick? “*Beloved, I pray that in all respects, you may prosper and be in good health just as your soul prospers.*” Are you lonely or living by yourself; do you need a companion? The Bible says, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” I’m telling you, God’s promises are supernatural.

The second thing I would say to you is that **God’s protection is supernatural**. Look at Acts 28:1-2, “*...we found out that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.*” After being battered and broken up, Paul’s ship landed in Malta. However instead of the natives on the island feeling threatened by these 276 strangers, they were kind to them. Paul and all of the passengers were cold because they had to swim and float to the shore in icy water, but the natives gave them a warm welcome.

Next something unusual happened, look at verse 3. “*But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.*” Paul wrote half of the New Testament, had visions of God, was a spiritual man, but here we see he also was a practical man. I thank God for spiritual people, but don’t ever get too spiritual to do a little hard work. Paul was out there building a fire by bringing in the wood and all a sudden, a viper shows up. May I just make a statement? I HATE SNAKES. If you like snakes, you need counseling. Every snake is a bad snake. All of a sudden a snake comes out and grabs Paul by the hand. Imagine a snake hanging off your hand! I would be running and you’d never catch me! But notice what Paul does – he just shakes it off in the fire! THAT is a man of God. I’m gonna hire that guy, amen! That’s the guy I want on my staff – someone who can have a snake bite him and not be worried about it. Notice, though, what happens in verse 4, “*When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying [tweeting] to one another; ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’*” Justice should be capitalized here as it refers to the Greek goddess of vengeance. Even though this man didn’t drown in the sea, Justice would not let him go free. To the natives, the snake was Justice’s vengeance on this man who must be a murderer. However, it was not the Greek goddess Justice that was working in the life of the apostle Paul, it was the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5, “*However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.*” The natives thought Paul would be sick and die. Notice verse 6, “*But they were expecting that he was about to swell up [don’t you have some of those people in your church who always expect the worst?] or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds [all of a sudden they are Paul’s biggest fans] and began to say that he was a god.*” Paul was not a god, rather he was a servant of the only true God and that God would supernaturally protect him.

I love the book of Daniel and preached it at Bellevue about a year ago. In this book, we read about a man who lived well into his 80s or 90s. Daniel had been a prisoner, been sent as a teenager to a foreign land, had probably been made into a eunuch, and yet he never complained. All Daniel did was pray three times a day for about 60 to 70 years. In fact, he got arrested for praying. His punishment for praying was to be thrown into the lion's den. But even in the lion's den, Daniel kept right on praying. Daniel 6:19-22 says this:

Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?' [Some of you may remember that hymn, "He Is Able to Deliver Thee." This is where it comes from.] Then Daniel spoke to the king, 'O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.'

God supernaturally protected and vindicated Daniel. God showed him that He would give supernatural protection.

If you are following the Lord Jesus Christ and living for Him, God is going to protect you until it is your time to go to heaven. If you are walking with God and standing on His promises, He will protect you until it is your time. I love Psalm 91 – it's all about the protection of God. I pray it often. It says:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust!"
For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper
And from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with His pinions,
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.
You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;
Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.
A thousand may fall at your side
And ten thousand at your right hand,
But it shall not approach you.
You will only look on with your eyes
And see the recompense of the wicked.
For you have made the LORD, my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place.
No evil will befall you,
Nor will any plague come near your tent.
For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.
They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.*

*You will tread upon the lion and cobra,
 The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.
 "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him;
 I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name.
 "He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;
 I will be with him in trouble;
 I will rescue him and honor him.
 "With a long life I will satisfy him
 And let him see My salvation."*

God can protect your family. God can guard your marriage and spouse. He can guard and protect your children. He can defend His church and any city out there. He can safeguard your finances and your future. He can shield you from danger and even the evilest person. He can even shelter you from the devil and demons and Satanists and witches and warlocks and Wiccans and voodooists and all the others out there. God can protect you completely, absolutely, and in every way when you pray and seek to live under an open heaven. When you steadfastly obey the living God and trust in His Word, He will be your shield until it is time to take you home to heaven. No human is stronger than Almighty God. No religious movement is stronger than any part of our Living God. No demon or devil himself is greater than Almighty God. God's protection is supernatural.

Thirdly, **God's power is supernatural.** Look at Acts 28:7, "*Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.*" Publius owned the land of the beach where Paul and the other passengers swam ashore. He was the Roman governor of the island of Malta and he took Paul and his friends into his home; for three days he graciously entertained them. Here you see the favor of God on Paul. But God was up to more than hospitality. Look at verse 8, "*And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery...*" Malta was known for a fever that debilitated its victims and was caused by a microbe in goat's milk. That microbe, however, was no match for the Almighty Jehovah Rapha. The Bible goes on to say, "*...and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.*" After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to Him and were cured. Luke said that "*Publius welcomed us.*" Luke was a doctor and both he and Paul were seeing these sick people be healed by the miraculous power from God, as well as by medicine. It's important to pray for people to be healed, but we should also encourage people to go to doctor. Jesus said, "*It's not the people who are well who need a doctor, but it's the people who are sick that need a doctor.*" I believe there is nothing wrong with going to a doctor, but I also believe you should also go to the Great Physician and ask him for healing as well. Whatever happens, just leave the results with Him.

God's power is supernatural. The Bible says that one day Jesus was coming to Jerusalem and he saw a fig tree that was barren and he cursed it. Outwardly, it didn't look like anything had happened, but something had happened underneath the ground. We read this in Mark 11:20, "*As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.*" I believe the moment Jesus cursed that fig tree that its roots withered, but the result didn't appear until the next day:

Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.' And Jesus answered saying to them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt

in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.’ (Mark 11:21-24)

God’s supernatural power is greater than any problem in the Southern Baptist Convention. God’s supernatural power is greater than any problem you have in your church. Stop talking about how big your problems are and start talking about how big your God is. Our God can still move mountains. Our God can still say “Hush – be still” to raging seas. Our God can still heal the sick and raise the dead. He can save you if you’re lost. He can sober you up if you’re an alcoholic. He can deliver you from cocaine or heroin or meth. He can deliver you from any type of sexual immorality – whether it’s fornication or adultery or homosexuality or lesbianism or pedophilia or pornography. Our God can supernaturally deliver you from any Satanic, sinful stronghold. God is still alive! God is still sovereign! God is the same yesterday, today, and forever! If you will exercise faith, God will exercise power. No shortage in heaven – God’s power is supernatural.

One more thing – **God’s provision is supernatural.** Look at verse 10, *“They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.”* Paul and the passengers had stayed on the island for three months and God had taken care of them. The weather finally cleared and it was safe to sail again. Malta had witnessed such a miraculous time with people being healed and saved and set free. Now they reciprocate, and out of gratitude, give 276 people – who they really hadn’t known but for a few months – everything that they needed. The people from the ship came with nothing; everything they owned was back there in the sea. They had nothing but God. I have news for you, that’s a good place to be. When you don’t have anything but God, you’ve got all you need. Some of you are always concerned about your resources. You look at your job, you look at your bank account, or you look at how other people might help you. I want to say this to you, God is your Source. Those other things are your resources. Sometimes God will dry up the brook of your resource so you won’t trust in it, but rather trust in Him – your Source. Only He can provide for you. His supernatural provision is available to you. The Psalmist said in Psalm 37:25, *“I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread.”*

I want to tell you how I define biblical prosperity and it works in every nation. God says “I will give you your needs and just a little bit left over to share with someone else.” That is biblical prosperity. God says in Romans 8:32, *“He who did not spare His Own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”* Philippians 4:19 says, *“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”* If you need a job, God can give you a job. If you need to work, God can help you work. Whatever it is, God will supply it if you will pray and believe that His provision is supernatural.

I believe that one of the greatest things we could walk out of here in a few days and tell the world is that God is still on His throne. The God who created the heavens and the earth, the God who came to us when we could not come to Him, the God who pulled us out of the miry clay and set our feet on a rock, and put a new song in our heart – that God is still on His throne. Please don’t be like Franklin and Jefferson, don’t cut up your Bible and dismiss its miracles. Is there something in your life that shows other people that there is a supernatural God active in your life? What is going on in your church or in your marriage that can only be explained by someone looking in and saying “They could not have pulled that off; only God could’ve done that.”

What is happening in the Southern Baptist Convention that only God can get the glory? Let me tell you something about the glory of God – He will not share it with anybody and that's because He knows good and well that we can't handle it. His glory would burn you and me up. I'm grateful to God for that because I don't want His glory; I want Him to get all the glory! What is God doing in your life that people say, "That is the hand of God"? I wonder if we as Southern Baptists really believe that God is still God? Do we really believe He is sovereign? Do we really believe the miracles in the Bible? Do we believe that God can save anyone? Do we believe God can set anyone free? Do we believe that God is still on His throne? Do we believe that our best days as a denomination are ahead? Do we believe that God can take and unify us around the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we believe that all of us could be just a little bit smaller so that God can be all that we want Him to be in our Southern Baptist Convention? Do we believe we could be just little enough for God to use us one more time? Do we believe the world needs a denomination like us to be able to say to them, "Yes there's a God and He is in the Southern Baptist Convention."

I want to say this to you – I believe in a supernatural God and I want you to pray like that. I want you to pray like Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. I've been preaching for almost 40 years and I thank God that the hero of our Bible is not dead. I thank God that Jesus is alive! I thank God that when they put Him in that tomb, death could not hold him, the grave could not handle Him, and he came out bodily, victoriously, and eternally alive! Jesus Christ is alive! He came out with the keys to death, hell, and the grave in His hand and He is alive and right now in this room! He is on His throne and He's coming again! Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead!

[President Gaines concludes in song – "He's Alive" by Don Francisco]