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***Do Miracles Really Happen?***

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***Matthew 11:1-6***

*After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.****2****When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples****3****to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”*

***4****Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see:****5****The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.****6****Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”*

***New International Version***

Our story today is about a simple question. It was asked by John the Baptist while he was sitting in a cold, dirty prison cell for speaking out against King Herod and his immoral relationship with a woman. John knows Herod is ruler only because Rome controlled Israel. But sitting in that dark cell, John is kind of hoping that God is sending someone quick to take out Rome and remove Herod from office.

That’s why he asked Jesus this simple question, *“are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?”* Now Jesus could have given him a very theological answer about his heritage, his virgin birth, his baptism. But instead as proof of who he was he chose to recite a litany of miracles he had performed. Miracles were his proof.

But then he throws in a little warning. *6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”* In other words, if those type of miracles aren’t what you’re looking for, I hope you don’t get impatient and do something that would cause you to stumble. I really don’t think those were the kind of miracles cousin John was looking for out of Jesus. Not when he was sitting in a cold prison cell because of an immoral ruler whom he thought should be overthrown.

Our story today is about this simple question people are asking all the time: is Jesus the answer to our problems or should we look for someone else? Jesus’ answer to us is going to be the same answer he gave to his cousin John. *“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.* Miracles were Jesus’ defense of himself.

But miracles are under attack today. Do they really happen? Maybe they’re not like they seem. Maybe they’re more psychological than real. If miracles are Jesus’ big defense of himself then what we think of miracles is kind of important. That’s what we’re going to look at today.

So what’s a miracle? A miracle has been and can be defined as a phenomenon that can’t be fully explained by known [laws of nature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_nature). For example, one of Jesus’ closest friends, Lazarus, died and was dead for four days before Jesus got to him (John 11). The laws of nature would say Lazarus’ body was now decaying and the life was absolutely gone. But Jesus defied the laws of nature and raised him from the dead.

Another example was a man described as evil who used to live in caves and no one could subdue him. Again, Jesus defied the laws of nature and cast multiple demons out of him. The demons escaped into a herd of swine. Afterwards the man returned to a right human frame of mind while the pigs, driven by the demons committed suicide (Mark 5).

The gospels record three sorts of miracles performed by Jesus: exorcisms, that is casting out demons, medical cures like healing the blind and lame, and nature wonders like turning water into wine. In John’s Gospel the miracles are referred to as "signs". Of course the greatest miracle in the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus himself.

Jesus said *"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 17:20). That’s a good example of a nature miracle. The book of Acts, Dr. Luke’s account of what happened after Jesus’ resurrection records the disciples of Jesus praying to God to grant that they be able to do miracles in his name, for the purpose of convincing onlookers that he was alive. (Acts 4:29–31).

But not all miracles in the Bible were confined to godly people. The Bible says that some were called [false prophets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_prophet) and were able to perform miracles to deceive God’s people (Matthew 24:24). 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says, *"9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,”* **Revelation 16:14** says, *"**14 They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.”* **Revelation 19:20** says, *" 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”* Remember the word for miracles with John who wrote Revelation was “signs.” Clearly, not all signs, wonders, or miracles are necessarily committed by God.

Miracles aren’t even confined to the Bible or ancient times. Pastor David Cho writes about the Asian experience with miracles in his book **The Fourth Dimension**. Cho built the largest membership church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea with some 500,000 members in one church. In his book he writes about miracles:

***“In America ministers do not have this kind of problem, but in the Orient I have real trouble in preaching about the miraculous power of God, for in Buddhism monks also have performed fantastic miracles…In Korea many people involved in yoga are healing the sick by yoga meditation. When attending meetings of the Japanese Sokagakkai, many are healed-some of stomach ulcers, the deaf and dumb hearing and speaking, and the blind seeing.”*** [[1]](#footnote-1) Cho goes on to describe what he calls the “fourth dimension” of human existence; the spirit realm which he believes can shape the material and human world.

Cho continues: ***“So naturally these yoga people and Buddhist believers could explore and develop their human fourth dimension, their spiritual sphere; with clear-cut visions and mental pictures of health they could incubate over their bodies. By natural order the fourth dimension has power over the third dimension, and the human spirit, within limitations, has the power to give order and creation. God gave power to human beings to control the material world and to have dominion over material things, a responsibility they can carry out through the fourth dimension. Now unbelievers, by exploring and developing their inner spiritual being in such a way as to carry out dominion upon their third dimension, which includes their physical sicknesses and diseases…”[[2]](#footnote-2)***

In other words Pastor Cho says life is more than the three dimensions of length, width and depth we’re used to experiencing. He believes there’s a spiritual dimension humans have sometimes entered regardless of their religious beliefs. It’s this fourth dimension that allows us to see a spiritual realm and not just a material realm.

The Bible talks about an abyss or a separation between humans and God. We’re stuck in this finite three dimensional world that we know we can touch and feel. The spiritual realm is foreign to us.

Here’s where I stand on miracles: I’m not smart enough to prove that Jesus never did the miracles. I wasn’t there, someone else was. Did two fish from a little boy really turn into enough food to feed 5000 men and their families? I can try that experiment a thousand times and prove it can’t be done. But there is the slight possibility that on the one thousand first time I try it, it could be done.

So I go to the hospital and pray for a healing miracle every time I make a visit. I leave open the possibility that there’s a spiritual dimension that could have dominion over the physical. In that dimension, cancer cells can’t stand up against the name of Jesus. So I pray in the name of Jesus for healing. I name the healing that I believe the person needs. But even then sometimes they die of cancer cells that shouldn’t have been able to stand against the name of Jesus. Does that one example prove miracles don’t exist?

In Texas I was surrounded by a group of people who believed and lived in that Fourth Dimension we talked about earlier. Bill, one of the leaders of the group was married to a wonderful woman who badly needed a liver transplant to live. She was high up on the transplant list when I first met her. She was told that once she turned 60 and she still hadn’t gotten the transplant her chances of receiving one would diminish greatly. She was in her late 50’s when I met her. So we prayed regularly for her transplant, assured that a miracle was going to take place. We knew the transplant was just around the corner. But her name has never come up the liver transplant list. That was 1999 and yet she is alive and somehow by the grace of God thriving today.

Dr. Todd Wien was our family doctor and an elder in our church. He joined this prayer team and started asking his patients at each visit if he could pray for them on the spot there in his office. Those who wanted it received prayer. Those who didn’t want prayer he never pushed on them. He started collecting stories of healings that took place from people who had been prayed for. I was one of those stories because of a knee pain that wouldn’t subside. I couldn’t go running and even walking was getting difficult. But X-rays showed nothing wrong. Dr. Wien prayed for me. I don’t know what happened but I went running pain free that day and never had that particular problem again.

In 2007 I had written a strong stewardship sermon for this church and was scheduled to preach it one Sunday. All week my back had been in pain and was getting worse by the day. By Sunday morning my legs wouldn’t hold me up at all. I got out of bed and fell immediately. I crawled back in bed and told Martha she was going to have to preach the sermon. I went over it with her in the bed and her response was “oh no, turn over, I’m going to pray for you.” She prayed for me and I stepped out of bed to test it and never had a minute of pain like that again until she went out of town last week. I preached the sermon.

Do miracles really happen? All I can tell you is that I’ve personally experienced a number of them in my lifetime both to benefit myself and with others. The fact that it happened to me in the 20th and 21st centuries opens the possibility that it could have happened with Jesus in the 1st century. Regardless of whether you believe that the name of Jesus invokes miracles or not based on your own personal experiences doesn’t conclusively determine whether they happen or not. So when you’re sick and you see me come visit, know that I will be expecting a miracle that day. Would you want anything less from your pastor?

In her book ***I Dared to Call Him Father*** Bilquis Sheikh, who was Muslim at the time, writes about a conversation she had with a Christian friend, Dr. Pia Santiago who asked her ***“Madame Sheikh, what are you doing with a Bible?” “I am earnestly in search of God,” “Whatever happens…I must find God, but I’m confused about your faith.” “You seem to make God so…I don’t know…personal.” The little nun’s eyes filled with compassion as she leaned forward. “Madame Sheikh,” she said, her voice full of emotion, “there is only one way to find out why we feel this way. And that is to find out for yourself, strange as that may seem. Why don’t you pray to the God you are searching for? Ask Him to show you His way. Talk to Him as if He were your friend.”***

Bilquis Sheikh continues *“I smiled.* ***She might as well suggest that I talk to the Taj Majhal. But then Dr. Santiago said something that shot through my being like electricity. She leaned closer and took my hand in hers, tears streaming down her cheeks. “talk to Him,” she said very quietly, “as if He were your father.”[[3]](#footnote-3)***

This week let’s talk to God as if he were our loving parent. More importantly let’s listen to God as if we believe his advice will help us. If you’ve trusted in Jesus Christ as the way to God, and you want to be his disciple then you can’t avoid Him for days at a time. There is a real gap between us and God but Jesus laid down his life to build a bridge across that gap. But you’ve got to turn off the TV, put the cell phone away, take out the ear phones, and get by yourself with God. It has to happen on a regular, daily basis. Then start taking note of what you hear in prayer because eventually you’re going to start noticing thoughts that could only come from God. Then maybe, or even probably you’ll start to experience something outside the laws of nature. How about getting started today?

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Small Group – call the church office for times and location 510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*

1. Quote taken from Prayer That Shapes the Future p.47 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quote taken from Prayer That Shapes the Future p.48 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bilguis Sheikh, I Dared to Call Him Father pp. 48-49 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)