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Sermon - What are Miracles?

There is an old joke that goes something like this. Jesus and another man are standing on the surface of a lake. Near the shore another man has sunk up to his neck and is reaching out for help. The man with Jesus turns to him and says, “should we tell him where the steppingstones are”?

The joke mirrors a reality that we live in a world that has grown deeply skeptical of the supernatural. We are trained and taught by modern science and everyday routine to believe what we can see, measure, and replicate.

So, when we open the Gospels and read about a man walking on stormy waves, multiplying five loaves to feed thousands, or speaking life back into a rotting corpse, we ask ourselves: Did this really happen? And even if it did, what does it have to do with my life today?

The topic of miracles is a flashpoint for many Christians. They still see science as a threat to their faith. God’s sovereign realm consists of the gaps that Science cannot explain. This is sometimes referred to as “God of the Gaps.” Science has no answer, the answer must be God. The more science can explain the world, the less relevant is our need of God.

On the flip side of the argument, many religious scholars believe that God is the author of the whole natural order. Science and faith do not have to fight over the unknown. Science reveals God’s creation and natural order.

In the Bible, signs are extraordinary events, physical markers, and miracles God uses to communicate God's power, seal a covenant, authenticate messengers. Signs and miracles point people to God's truth.

A miracle is a type of sign. In a long-standing debate, some theologians will tell you that the Biblical miracles as we understand their nature and frequency, ended after the apostles died. Others maintain that miracles still occur in our given day.

Miracles in the bible were actually quite rare. Signs and miracles were met with a wide mix of emotions and attitudes. Experiencing the immediate presence of divine power often terrifies people. In our Gospel reading, Jesus calmed a violent storm. His disciples were struck with great fear; they thought they saw a ghost. And as Peter attempted to walk to Jesus, Peter was distracted by the wind and was afraid.

Religious and political leaders saw miracles as a threat to the established religious order and their own power. And often miracles were met with skepticism. The Bible frequently mentions magicians, sorcerers, and practitioners of the occult. Jesus was even accused of driving out demons by the power of Satan.

If a miracle is a direct intervention by a loving God, there are also acts of supernatural harm or sorcery meant to cause ruin, illness or death for which there is no scientific explanation.

Let's return to the earlier question: Did MIRACLES really happen?

One can believe that people saw miracles because the accounts were written by eyewitnesses. They were recorded as public, historical events. The people in biblical times understood the normal laws of nature just like we do. They knew that dead people rising to life was abnormal, and so was turning water into wine, which is why they recorded them as extraordinary signs.

How we interpret Bible miracles? What do they mean?

Miracles point to something greater than themselves, like signboards.

Think about a highway sign that says "Disneyland." If you are driving down the interstate and you see that sign, you don't pull over, get out of your car, hug the signpost, and say, "We've arrived!" The sign is not the destination; the sign points to something greater than itself.

Key Truth: If we only marvel at the power of the miracle but miss the person or spiritual truth it points to, we have missed the entire point of the text.

Our passage today, Jesus calms the seas. What is the truth behind the miracle? God is sovereign over the physical world. Jesus recognizes our fears and says "why do you doubt? Don't be afraid." It is easy to marvel at the

miracle and miss the meaning. Well intended Christians have tested their faith and tried to replicate walking across water, only to sink below the surface. What does the miracle say about God. Jesus says. I am with you. You can't do this all on our own. I am here to walk with you.

When Jesus heals a blind man, the miracle isn't just about restoring physical eyesight—though that is a amazing act of compassion. The miracle is a sign pointing to the reality that Jesus is the Light of the World, come to cure our spiritual blindness.

Does God send signs to us today? 7:30

The Bible promises us God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. We long for a special assignment. We want to do God's will to accomplish that assignment, arrive at that goal. After all there are countless stories in the Bible, testimonies at church, online podcasts and books about God's leading. It all sounds promising, but Christians often struggle with anxiety about missing God's guidance, getting in wrong and veering off course from the path which God intends. How does one discern the Holy Spirit without Jesus in our midst? What are the signs and why don't I see them?

I will share the insight of Pastor Roy, who pastored a church I attended when I was 15-16 years. He gave some guidance about how God leads us. It is not the only answer as to how God leads, but this insight been helpful to me.

Pastor Roy said there are 2 types of guidance; General and Special guidance.

General guidance is God's preceptive word. These are God's laws, instructions that we read in the Bible. We don't have to look very far to see what God requires. Precepts are very general in nature, such as love your neighbor, honor your parents, do not kill, do not lie, feed the hungry, comfort the sorrowful. The Bible declares things that God approves to guide our daily lives. As long as we live within those parameters, we honor God with relative freedom and choice.

Special guidance is a hidden message when God intervenes with special insight or instruction. Special guidance is like a small car, run by a remote control. God has the remote and we are the car, God sends supernatural signals from the transmitter, our job is to detect and respond to those signals. Special guidance is where many Christians experience unnecessary stress. "God has a plan for you". Have you heard that before. Searching for special plan or instruction, we underestimate the importance of general guidance. The obedience required of us is the things we know, the general guidance, what find in the Bible. Special guidance is a rare event.

Think of general guidance as an Uber car driver. The driver cruises around town on their initiative. They stop at traffic lights and avoid crashing into parked vehicles and choose their own routes and sometimes change their minds. The constraints to the Uber driver's freedom are general: they understand traffic laws and highway codes. They have general instruction from their employer. They have accumulated experience, know places to find passengers, and know how to adapt to present circumstances, observing the weather, noting accidents and areas of construction. All correlate to what we

mean by General Guidance. The Uber driver lives in relative freedom, making a lot of choices with a wide range of responsibilities. The absence of specific instructions from their employer is not a problem. From time to time, the driver will get special guidance from his employer to pick up a passenger at a specific location. But the Uber driver doesn't fret if they don't get that special text from their employer.

Special guidance is rare, but we need to be open and ready to receive it. We don't need to feel paralyzed if there is no prompt, special nod, or encouragement. Special guidance may intervene every now and then, but most Christian living is freedom and responsibility within the circle of general guidance. We can respond to opportunities, and we can change our minds.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I started the sermon talking about signs and miracles. They were used by God to convey messages to God's people. I took a few minutes to share a view of how God speaks to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, and how we can live with confidence day to day.

Even though some scholars close the book on miracles, believing in miracles remains a personal choice shared by millions worldwide, even as modern science offers natural explanations for many extraordinary events. Miracles serve as symbols of hope, resilience and meaning in an unpredictable world, especially when are challenged

In the words of Jon Bon Jovi, "Miracles happen every day. Change your perception of what a miracle is, and you'll see them all around you."