

Faith at Last

Have You Ever Witnessed a True Miracle?

My favorite sports team was really bad last year and so both the head coach and the quarterback, who did equally poorly, were let go. I immediately began to pray that a strong Christian head coach and strong a Christian quarterback would replace them. The owner of the team, as far as I can tell is not a Christian. So now the team has a new head coach and they are widely expected to pick an already selected new quarterback. Both openly profess their faith in Christ as their Savior. Is that a miracle? This past week, my son and I were watching a baseball game. Team USA was playing Mexico and the game was close. Mexico had a runner on base and was threatening to tie the score. I turned to Ben and told him the USA needed a double play. On the very next pitch, the batter for Mexico hit into a double play. Was that a miracle? There are many who have said that if they witnessed a miracle, they would believe in Jesus, but would they? One of the craziest passages in the Bible is the account of the people of Israel, just after they left slavery in Egypt. It was when Pharaoh and his army came upon them as they were camped at the edge of the Red Sea. Keep in mind that they had just witnessed ten tremendous miracles, including the water of the Nile being turned to blood and the death one night of every firstborn in every Egyptian household before the threat of the Egyptians arrived. But in Exodus 12 we discover that ten magnificent miracles were not enough to improve on the faith the Israelites had in God. Our big idea today is based on the account we have in John 4. Faith in Christ is your superpower in life.

After Jesus met with the woman at the well and shared salvation with the rest of the villagers, Christ and the disciples hiked up to Galilee. Keep in mind that as was discussed in a previous sermon, Jesus was on a mission, directed by the Father, to go through Samaria and make His way north to Galilee. Once there, He was approached by someone in desperate need. **Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.** (John 4: 46-47 NIV) Now it is reasonable to ask why Jesus was directed to Galilee after His time in Jerusalem. It would seem there are two reasons. 1. To help this man and his family in their time of great desperation. 2. To provide a miraculous sign to the people of Galilee and to His disciples who watched carefully everything He did. As far as miracles go, this is a very straightforward one but with a critical twist to it. Jesus did heal the son, but it came about in dramatic fashion. The royal official implored Jesus to go with him and heal his son. **The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."** (John 4: 49 NIV) However, Jesus did not go with the official; instead He sent him off with a promise. **Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."** (John 4: 50a NIV)

Something similar happened when Elisha the prophet was approached by someone also wanting a miracle. Naaman, the commander of the army of Aram had leprosy, but he heard there was a miracle working prophet in Israel who might be able to cure him. So he came with his chariots and a number of soldiers to Elisha's house looking for a miracle. Elisha did not even bother inviting Naaman in his house or take the time to go see him at the door. Instead he sent a message to him. **Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."** (2 Kings 5: 10 NIV) Naaman went into a rage when he got this directive. He was furious that Elisha did not heal him right there, didn't even bother to come out to see him. The miracle for Naaman awaited the soldier's faith. He had to go off before God would give him what he wanted. Fortunately for Naaman, he had a few clear-headed servants who convinced him to go ahead and do what Elisha told him to do. **Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'"** So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. (2 Kings 5: 13-14 NIV)

Notice the nature of this miracle. Naaman did not get to have the miracle take place immediately. He had to go before he gained it. More than that, Naaman was not even able to have the prophet, the physical manifestation of the presence of God, be there for him. In a sense, Naaman was all alone in his struggle of faith. Jesus responded to the royal official in a similar way. **Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."** (John 4: 50a NIV) The royal official faced a crisis of faith. Should he stay and try to get Jesus to go with him to touch his son, which he probably thought was the only way he could be healed, or would he trust Jesus at His word and go back home? He headed home and on the way, he discovered a miracle did take place. **While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the**

news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. (John 4: 51-53 NIV) Words cannot express the relief this man felt as his faith in Jesus was rewarded. This brings us to an important question. Do you believe in miracles, or do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe in God even if you never see a miracle?

Jesus wondered about this Himself. He looked at the royal official, but He really was addressing everyone there with Him and even us also. **"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."** (John 4: 48 NIV) The truth is that miracles do not guarantee faith in God. The Israelites, as I mentioned earlier, had twelve magnificent miracles to buoy their faith but when they were chased down by Pharaoh and his army, they stopped believing God was there to protect them. **As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"** (Exodus 14: 10-12 NIV) Moses literally had to tell his fellow Israelites to "shut up" to quiet their panicked screaming. Of course we know that God parted the Red Sea so they could triumphantly leave the Egyptians behind but at the moment of crisis, not one those witnesses to the mighty works of God had faith even of a tiny mustard seed to believe God was for them.

The disciples, after Jesus ascended to be with the Father, faced a great question. Now that Jesus was no longer present with them, could He or would He answer their prayers? All of the Church that continued after He ascended needed to know about this. That is why this account, which is found nowhere else in the Gospels, is included by John. Like the royal official, you do not need to have Jesus physically with you for Him to answer your prayers. It certainly takes faith to believe He will, but no more faith than that royal official needed to go on his way without despair. We need to have the proper perspective when it comes to faith. John states what we already know if we had been counting miracles. **This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.** (John 4: 54 NIV) Reflect back on the first of the miraculous signs; it was Jesus turning the water into wine. The need at that time was perhaps not as dire as what the royal official faced but it is a quirk of human nature that each person tends to see his or her own need as the biggest need there is. In the case of the Cana miracle, it was that the groom had run out of wine for his guests. Jesus' mother, who most surely was a close relative of the groom, became quite disturbed by this crisis. She went to her son, the Son of God and told Him about the terrible circumstance but notice how she did it. **When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."** (John 2: 3 NIV) No whining, no crying or complaining, no telling Jesus how to solve things. She just told Him what disturbed her. And then she showed the faith of saints, of true believers. **His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."** (John 2: 5 NIV)

Did you notice? Mary's faith was in Jesus altogether. Not in a miracle. Not in a specific direction she thought He must take about things. Her faith was in Jesus. Your life cannot improve on that simple approach. If you want peace that passes all understanding, if you want joy that cannot be swept away by trials or hardships, you follow in Mary's footsteps. Don't put your hope in miracles or in happy endings or in getting your wants given to you. Put your faith in Jesus and Him alone moment by moment and day by day. Remember the account of the great storm the disciples faced. As soon as the tempest hit, they immediately turned to Jesus. **Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"** (Matthew 8: 24-25 NIV) The disciples were in fact surprised when Jesus immediately calmed the storm. They were not prepared for a miracle but they did have faith in Jesus and that did save them. The big idea is most important for you. Faith in Christ is your superpower in life. Trust Him to do what is right and as you watch what happens, do anything He tells you to do for it is in obedience that God works out His plan for you. It is then that miracles are seen.