

THE MAKING OF A MIRACLE

Exodus 13: 1-10; Matthew 14: 1-21

Both the parting of the Red Sea and the feeding of the 5000 were believed to have occurred through miracles. There are several events in the Bible that fall into the category of miracle. And I have witnessed some healings offered through prayer with some in our congregation that could easily be called miracles. One time I was called to Halifax Hospital after a church service. I had been called by a person who told me about a church member that had had a stroke. I went directly to the Emergency Room and stood by the side of the man in his bed. His wife was at the foot of the bed. We prayed together. I happened to be there later when the doctor came in. The doctor examined the man. His symptoms were gone! His wife said “It’s a miracle!” I replied, “Well, doctors have good medicines these days to deal with strokes.” And the doctor looked right at me and said: “He is not better because of anything *I did* or medicine did. You *can* call this a miracle!” The man recovered and lived many more years. Still people doubt that miracles still happen. Years ago I enjoyed the movie “Oh God!” with George Burns playing God. In “Oh God, Book II, a little girl—Tracy—had been contacted by God and asked to start a campaign to get people to “Think God” in a time when God had seemed to be forgotten. In one conversation Tracy asks God, “Why don’t you just do some of your miracles to prove you exist?” “Because” was the painful reply, “People remember the miracle and forget why I did it.” People today and down through the ages have approached the subject of miracles in vastly different ways. Some accept miracles as something that *happened*, past tense. It was astounding and it happened. Others read about miracles with doubts or questions. And still others believe that miracles still happen, in part because they have experienced one, or know someone who has. Noted English Bible teacher William Barclay wrote:

There are some people who read the miracles of Jesus and feel no need to understand. Let them remain undisturbed in the sweet simplicity of faith. There are others who read, and their minds question, and they feel they must understand. Let them take no shame in it, for God comes far more than halfway to meet the questioning mind. But in whatever way we approach the miracles of Jesus, one thing is certain. We must never be content to regard them as something which *happened*; we must always regard them as something which *happens*. They are not isolated events in history; they are demonstrations of the always and forever operative power of Jesus Christ.

Miracles are perceived as times when God breaks into our world in unbelievable ways. The story of the Exodus—the crossing of the Red Sea parted by the hands of God—is commemorated with the use of unleavened bread described in Exodus 13, because the Hebrews had to depart from Egypt in haste; there was no time for bread to rise. It commemorated a special event. The key for any amazing event is its perception- it was *seen* as a miracle. Noted Jewish scholar Martin Buber wrote: “The Children of Israel understood the Exodus event as an act of their God, which means they experienced it as such.” There are still times when miracles happen; they are not just locked in the annals of history. Some have said, “If miracles still happen, why don’t they happen to me?” They dismiss God if they don’t see the results they want from prayers. Some have not only decided to not believe in God, they have even thought there *is no God*. Back in the 1980s, scientists explored how winds and tides could coincide at the narrow part of the Red Sea—also known as the Sea of Reeds—creating the perfect timing for waters to recede, making dry land for people to cross over, but soon the phenomenon was over, and the water poured back, drowning the Egyptian soldiers. Jews call that the miracle of their deliverance from bondage.

When 5000 people were fed on the dreadful day Jesus learned about the gruesome death of John, what was the miracle of that event? Jesus was crushed by the news

and withdrew. But crowds followed him. Did they know he was in distress? Did their hearts open up just a little when such a huge crowd stayed in the midst of his distress? He even cured some people's illnesses, and members of the crowd were grateful. The disciples wanted the crowd to go away, but Jesus knew their eyes were *on him*. He asked his disciples to feed them; he needed their support badly in his exhausted state. They protested; they said they just had five loaves and two fish. Jesus told his disciples, "Bring them to me." He looked up to Heaven, blessed the food in the sight of all, and gave it to his disciples to pass out. *Then unbelievably, everyone ate until they were satisfied.* Did it multiply as it was passed out? Did people reach into their own basket and begin to share what they had with others as the bread was passed? There were broken pieces left over that filled 12 basket! In watching what happened when we have gathered on the beach with friends, I noticed that sometimes people get there and realize they forgot something they meant to bring. "That's okay" another family calls out, "We brought plenty. We will share." Could it be that no one in the biblical crowd thought they could feed 5000, but when the bread was passed, they said to these near them "We have some too. We will share." Would it still be miraculous if 5000 were fed on that day in *that* manner? *Consider that.* Many people were fed after Jesus blessed the food; maybe it multiplied by God; maybe others began to share. Either way, 5000 people ate food.

Two final true stories. A woman in our congregation had severe pain in one of her wrists and thumb. The pain was so great that she had scheduled a surgery to try to ease her pain. But she heard that I had laid hands on another person to pray for healing and healing came. So she came to ask me to hold her hand and wrist and pray that the pain would go away. *It did. The very next day. That was four years ago.* The pain has not returned. She is in this congregation.

In my final story, a man in the church was told last August that he had cancer; prostate cancer. After a surgical procedure to deal with his prostate issues, several weeks were needed for the site to heal. After the site was less tender, the doctor put twelve needles into locations around the original cancerous site. He sent all the tissue off to be biopsied. Before the biopsy results were complete, this man told me that he had been directed by a voice to come to me, hold my hands tightly, and pray that he didn't have cancer. We did that; he came to me, held my hands tightly, and I prayed for him. Later, the doctor called the man and shared the results of all twelve biopsies. *No cancer*. No cancer at all. "It's a miracle" the doctor said. "I don't believe it. You are cancer free." Today the man and his wife believe with all their hearts that his healing was a miracle. Today, the woman who was at the foot of the hospital bed in the ER, along with her husband and their family, believe to this day that her husband's healing was a miracle. More things have happened in that family that they have been "miraculous" too. And the woman who had terrible pain in her wrist has it no more. I am here to tell you that miracles still happen, even today.

Let us pray: O Mysterious God: give us minds of faith, hearts of hope, and an attitude of expectation for each day that unfolds before us. And Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting us now and in the Bible to believe that miracles have happened, and do happen. Amen.

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