

“WAITING FOR A MIRACLE”

- John 4:46-54 & Luke 41-44

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John 4:46-54 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." 49 The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" 50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. 51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" 52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. 54 This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

Luke 4:31-44 Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. 33 Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" 35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. 36 Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." 37 And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region. 38 Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. 39 So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them. 40 When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. 42 Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; 43 but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." 44 And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

In the Book of Job, chapter 2 verse 4, Satan made a statement that is dark but profound. He said that “*all that a man has he will give for his life.*” Indeed! Mankind seems to be extremely motivated by emotions, and while anger seems to be number one, certainly a close runner up in the number two position is *fear*. Both of these generally serve to be powerful motivators if not outright weapons at the hands of Satan, for he utilizes them both constantly and consistently for his own gain.

We live in an age of both great anger and great fear today. Much of mankind feels like it does not have any control over itself or its destiny and that it is so often being forced into the roll of the victim...where we can feel we are just trying to survive. Part of this thinking comes from the modern view of self-entitlement...that we *deserve* to be happy and we have a *right* to a certain quality of life...a slice of the American pie and a piece of the dream. But the other side of the issue is far more reasonable. For we can honestly feel so often that things are just out of control out there and our future and even our daily movements are being dictated, manipulated and leveraged.



The news is full of terrorist attacks, new biological battles and violent confrontations of every kind both abroad as well as in our own proverbial ‘back-yard.’ I believe that more and more we will see people afraid to travel to other countries and eventually fearing to even go out locally. Incidents of agoraphobia will skyrocket. (*Agoraphobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by anxiety in situations where the sufferer perceives the environment to be dangerous, uncomfortable, or unsafe. These situations can include wide-open spaces, uncontrollable social situations, unfamiliar places, shopping malls, airports, and bridges.*)

All of this will and *does* stretch us as believers into new and uncharted territories. Because as our faith and trust in mankind suffers, our faith and trust in God follows. Isn’t shouldn’t be that way, but frankly it is. This new world paradigm ultimately breeds great cynicism and causes us to withdrawal into ourselves and thus trust becomes scarce in a culture that fosters an island mentality. We naturally then become ‘materialists’...rejecting the realm of the supernatural and the concept of miracles. We have been lied to so much that we believe only what is physically before us that we can see and touch. And all of this is no doubt the patient “long game” of Satan, ...all to destroy faith, fellowship, community, and a belief in the continuing miraculous involvement of God in our lives and world.

On this developing dynamic, the curtain rises on these textual passages where we are presented with scenes of violence, terminal sickness, fear, an uncontrollable backdrop, chaos, and in the end, the *miraculous*.

Our first story presents a man who certainly had held political and cultural positions of power. As a “nobleman” he would have naturally enjoyed a level of safety, comfort, and ease. His life, in the scheme of *his* day and age, would have been further away from the edges of society than so many others. But, such a safety zone would prove to be an illusion, because like a virus in the wind, one day it all came looking for him.

There are moments and junctures in our lives where it doesn’t matter how important you may be, how good your health insurance is, how much cash you have on hand, or how comfortable your house and car happen to be. It all proves to be a false security. One that lulled us into a self assurance and the belief that we were perhaps invincible...untouchable. For these, this day comes as a serious shock. A desperate day of despair wherein we have no ‘hand,’ seemingly no relief and apparently no way out.

This man’s boy was going to die. And it didn’t matter who daddy was or what daddy had. It was just going to happen no matter what he threw at it. He was somewhere that he had maybe never been. Uncharted territory. An unexplored realm. He was desperate. We all have or will be there.

It is at these life junctures that we find a part of ourselves that we have never seen. We find we have potentials and aspects that we have never thus far exercised. We find we can lose that innate confidence that everyone says we are to have. We move to become painfully short-tempered and excruciatingly self centered and even downright mean. We find ourselves succumbing to our emotions. Erratic and unstable. Desperate and angry. Fearful and depressed. Such a plight can and often does drive us to act and do what we have never done before. This is the scene we see played out over and over in the news.

We call our folks. An old friend who always had it together and had good council and wise words. We watch more TV and spend hours alone in our thoughts. And these are the days that we inexplicably show up at church. Maybe we even try to pray when we have never done so before.

I am struck by the near universal pattern that occurs at the ‘ground zero’ of the climatic events of our world as of late. In the midst of, or immediately after the school shootings, the terrorist strikes, the home invasions and random violence. Invariably the news records the weeping, the emotional meltdowns, the grand life questions, and finally the *prayers*. Prayers from individuals and a people and a culture that does not even know to whom they are praying. But because of how we were created...with a innate and intimate knowledge of an existence of a Creator...a deity...a

supreme power, *we go there*, even if we have never been there before and we literally don't know our way or what to say when we get there.

It is the proverbial "hail mary" half-court-shot-at-the-buzzer. We got nothing to lose and the only thing we know is the hoop at the end of the court is all that can help us. And thus the desperate pleadings of this man before Jesus. A Jesus He did not know personally, but certainly by reputation. The word in the old KJ is "beseech." The NKV renders the word "implored." But the word ultimately means "beg." The nobleman begged Jesus to intervene...to not let his son die. He begged. *Help me...*

Verse 48 tells us the response: *Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."*

It's an astonishing thing to say. But how very true it was and is. Instead of believing in Christ and basing our faith in *HIM*, we want to see the stuff first. We'll believe in the stuff. We just want the stuff! We'll believe in the works as long as they serve us personally! And worse, we often live our lives as nobles...aloof from most of a spiritual paradigm and distant from a surrendered life, but we find our way to Him when the chips are down and our backs are against the wall! By all rights, Jesus could have told this guy to forget it. He could have done so nicely or with an edge to it, but either way most of us in our flesh would have supported Him dis'ing this guy. I mean...*come on*. He was out of line, right?

But Jesus did something staggering.

Jesus reached out...and from a distance of about 20 miles, He snatched the boy back from death. He did it out of love and grace and nothing more. He did it because He was and IS the God of the miraculous. Jesus DID miracles. And He still does if we are looking. But why do we live 99% of our time basically not believing that He does, and then get mad at the 1% when He won't? Isn't that a bit audacious, maybe even hypocritical?

I think about the story of Lazarus' death. Jesus wasn't there, but He knew Lazarus was dying. Distance wasn't an issue, for we already saw in the text for today that He had the ability to execute the miraculous from a distance. But He did not, and such was met by a level of angst by both Martha and Mary in Matthew 11, maybe one could even say they were angry. *"Jesus...if you had been here our brother would not have died!"*

They were *angry* that Jesus had not stepped up and did His stuff! Perhaps at this point, these two ladies were like so many in our world today as they pass through the fires of trial and pain: *they wanted the stuff...the magic 'pixy dust' of relief and need, more than they actually wanted Jesus and His will and plan*. We fail to embrace the fact that with Jesus comes the grand sovereign plan for which He is caretaker.

We can fail to see the miraculous of the cross, the resurrection, the redemption, the salvation. We miss the miracle of breathe of life as we awake in the morning, the staggering wonder of the love of a mate, the splendor of creation, the marvel of sight and sound and touch...the beauty of good friends and the spectacle of the nights sky. Miracle? Isn't it *all* a miracle? Albert Einstein was quoted as having once said the following: *"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is."* Well, I guess he should know, for he was certainly aware of the miraculous around *him*!

Yet we approach God seeking the fantastic instead of seeing our lives in Him as a miracle. We look for Him to throw the "supernatural" switch, when we are by all intensive purposes living every moment in the supernatural! Especially those who are His, and we should by all rights know this truth and walk in it, but we instead tend to seek God in the same fashion as the world. We want Him to show us the miracle, instead of realizing that it is all a miracle and that God is doing a miracle at every moment of our lives.

So how do we see these events? How do we accept these stories? As fiction? As biblical embellishment? Or do we see Christ exercising the supernatural to show us that with Him in us we walk in the supernatural every day. That our inexplicable redemption from the guilt of sin and the power of darkness in our world is not merely a momentary event but an eternal state.

Are we looking for a miracle today instead of realizing that we are one? That we are living the miracle? Will WE believe without the signs and wonders? Because the faith that God wants us to live is not one motivated by such but rather living in light of such. God desires that we have a faith that has confidence in Him with or without seeing our wants and desires and individual passions realized in our personal lives. Job poured himself out as an offering to God saying *“Though he slay me, yet I will trust Him...”* (Job 13:15)

Our passage in Luke speaks of Christ’s power over the darkness and over illness. Again, these are two times when we tend to desperately seek out a rescue. And Jesus proves He has the stuff. And He does often intervene, and He still does supernaturally heal. But what He came to give us and what He wants from us is much more than to be our genie in the bottle. In Luke 11:29-30 we read *“As the crowd pressed in on Jesus, he said, “This evil generation keeps asking me to show them a miraculous sign. But the only sign I will give them is the sign of Jonah. What happened to him was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. What happens to the Son of Man will be a sign to these people that he was sent by God.”* The sign of Jonah? “Three days and three nights in the belly of the whale.” His death and resurrection from death after 3 days. It was the greatest of miracles. Not a trick, not the slight of hand of a magician. But rather the triumph of Christ over the greatest of enemies, the enemy of death. That which seems to be our ultimate fear!

You see, the gospel is the greatest miracle the world has ever known. Oh how we forget! Oh we trivialize...if only inadvertently, the salvation and redemption we have been given. A “rebirth” as a new creature, with a new life, and new friends, and new future. One in which He gives us a “hundred-fold” in exchange for that which we have surrendered to follow Him. One that begins here and now, not in the everlasting life.

I am not minimizing the earthly pain of our loss when a loved one leaves here. But there is a stark difference in a believer getting on that train to eternity, than the anguish...the fight, the desperation of an unbeliever’s white knuckled clutch onto this world as the day of departure arrives! For those that know Him, there is a keen anticipation of seeing Jesus!

What is faith exactly? Is it the belief that God will give us our request, or is it the belief that God *can* and thus our desire and trust that He will do what is right by us through the love that He has already showed us? That He “has our back?” That He has the power over sickness, darkness and death and therefore He is to be trusted? Do we want only the *act* of the miracle or do we want the will and plan of the miracle man? When Paul asked that the “thorn in his flesh” be removed...many believing it was a debilitating physical ailment, God said ‘no’ and Paul went on to serve Him with all his passion and all his life. God said *“...my grace is enough.”* Is it for you and me?

I wonder about this man, the father. I wonder what the rest of his life was like? I hear those on the news who tell stories of how they dodged death by a moment, by a jammed gun, by not being noticed by the offenders or some inexplicable event even in the midst of violence and chaos. I wonder how they will now live? Will their life be different? Their priorities changed and their passions renewed?

Because you see, if you are born again today...*you are that man*. Out of the crowds...the masses of millions that throng the streets of the world every day, He found you and chose you and redeemed you from a desperate life, a terminal disease called sin and death, and gave you a precious gift...a so very precious gift. He gave you **life**. You and I are the miracle. We walked away from that catastrophic accident, from the terminal disease, from the “no way out” scenario. **How will you now live in light of such a redemption?**