

Miracles – What Should I Make of Them?

1. Warm up: Tell us something good or bad (large or small) that's happened this week.
2. As we continue our study of Moses, this week we're focusing on one of the Bible's most famous miracles – the parting of the Red Sea. Read Exodus 14:5-22, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Imagine the terror the Israelites felt when they saw Pharaoh's army approaching on the horizon. When in your life have you experienced a moment like that – a pure jolt of existential fear?
 - b. Moses told the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you." Exodus 14:13. Then he stretched out his hand over the Red Sea and the Lord drove back the waters by a strong wind, enabling them to pass through on dry ground. Imagine the pure exhilaration the Israelites felt when they passed through to the other side. When in your life have you experienced a great deliverance at the hand of God? How did that make you feel?
3. As one of the Bible's most famous miracles, the story of the Red Sea raises all kinds of questions about God's miracle-working power. On Sunday, Jeff invited us to tackle those questions, beginning with . . .
 - a. Should we, as thoughtful people, believe in miracles? What say you – and why?
 - b. Jeff said he believes in miracles because of all the empirical evidence, i.e., reliable stories of miracles not just from Bible times, but from our own. He gave an example of a Ugandan man who prayed for two years that God would send him someone from the Navigator's Ministry, then one day he ended up randomly sharing a hotel room with someone in Navigators who had traveled to Uganda. Are you aware of any modern-day miracle that you've either directly witnessed or that you've heard about from a trustworthy source? If so, tell us about it.
4. Although we wish miracles were a dime a dozen, we know they're rare. There are approximately 200 miracles in the Bible, but the Bible covers a period of a couple thousand years. So that's one miracle every ten years for the nation of Israel and the early Christian movement, raising the question: With all the challenges we face personally and the world faces collectively, why doesn't God intervene a lot more?
 - a. To help us think this through, Jeff suggested an analogy to the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" There, contestants were asked all kinds of questions and with each correct answer, their winnings accumulated. If they got stuck on a question, they could use their Phone-a-Friend Lifeline, but only once. Jeff asked us to imagine what would have happened to that game if you could phone as many friends as you wanted as many times as you wanted to bail you out. If that were the case, would anyone have watched the show? Would the game still have

had any meaning? How does this analogy bear on our question of why God rarely intervenes with flashy miracles?

- b. Jeff also suggested a second analogy. Imagine a chess match where all the chess pieces were given the gift of life – with each chess piece being given a brain, so that now the chess pieces themselves could play the game. But imagine every time a chess piece makes a bad move, the chess master intervenes, overrides them, and bails them out. Jeff suggested this would turn them into robots and deprive them of the gift of life. What are your thoughts about this analogy? Does it help explain why miracles are rare? Why or why not?
5. Although God rarely intervenes to abruptly change or reverse the circumstances of our life, that doesn't mean God isn't with us. Jeff said, "I hear God saying, 'Look, I'd love to do it all for you, but I can't. If I did you wouldn't be real. But here's what I can do. As often as you're willing, I can (and will) empower you to be the miracle.'" Jeff then suggested we need to recognize at least four different "categories" of miracles. Read through those categories together, as listed on p. 3.
- a. What do you think of this broader, four-part way of thinking about miracles? Does it resonate with you? Is it important? Why or why not?
 - b. Someone tell us about a time you've experienced a Category 2 Miracle.
 - c. Someone tell us about a time you've experienced a Category 3 Miracle.
 - d. Somone tell us about a Category 4 Miracle that bedazzles you.
 - e. Acts 17:28 says, "We live and move and have our being in God." What do you think that means?
6. So what should we make of all this? Jeff offered several suggestions:
- a. First, we shouldn't hesitate to ask for Category 1 Miracles. Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive." Matthew 7:7. Jesus' brother added, "You have not, because you ask not" James 4:2. What do you think these verses mean? Some people believe you can get anything from God if you ask with enough faith. What do you think?
 - b. Second, awaken to the Creation Miracles all around you. What are some practical ways we can cultivate a greater awareness of Creation Miracles? Why's that important?
 - c. Third, be a miracle. Let God's power flow through you in ways that deliver you – and others – triumphantly through difficult times. Do you feel God calling you to apply this third point to something happening in or around you? If so, what? And what might that look like?

Exodus 14:5-22, selected verses

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the Israelites had fled, the mind of Pharaoh changed. ⁶So he had his chariot made ready, and ⁷took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸And he pursued the Israelites.

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹³But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Four Categories of Miracles

Category 1 – Direct Intervention Miracles

Flashy miracles where God directly intervenes to *deliver us from* difficult circumstances.

Category 2 – Be Your Own Miracle

Miracles where God gives *us* the power to triumph *through* difficult circumstances, rather than delivering us out of those circumstances.

Category 3 – Be Somebody Else's Miracle

Miracles where God gives us *the power to help others* triumph through, or be delivered from, difficult circumstances.

Category 4 – Creation Miracles

Flabbergasting, amazing, incomprehensible miracles of creation that surround us every day.