

The Miracles of Jesus *He Has the Power to Change Your Life*

(Show clip from Bruce Almighty)

We're not so sure what to make of Jesus' miracles today. We live in an age of reason and scientific discovery. We don't look for supernatural explanations for everything we don't understand. On the other hand, there are a lot of superstitious people, and some see the supernatural in everything.

(Slide 1) How else do you explain a Virgin Mary grilled cheese sandwich selling on eBay for \$28,000.

(Slide 2) Did you know you can now buy a grilled sandwich press called the Grilled Cheesus?

We're not just sure what to do with the miracles of Jesus. Some treat them as myth and legend. Others use them as the punchline of a joke. While others water down the supernatural so much that almost anything is a miracle.

Over the next several weeks we are going to look at the miracles of Jesus. Specifically, we are going to consider the seven miraculous signs recorded in John's gospel. A few months ago we looked at Jesus' seven "I Am" statements in the gospel of John. In addition to these seven statements of identity and purpose, John also records seven signs. These aren't just seven miracles at random. These aren't the only miracles Jesus performed, but John chose these seven specifically for what they reveal about Jesus.

In John 20:30-31, John tells us exactly why he chose these seven signs:

30 Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life.

I. They Are Miracles

The first thing John's purpose statement tells us is that these signs are miracles. Jesus performed miraculous signs, not tricks, not gimmicks, not sleights of hand, not deceptions, but real acts of God intervening in the usual course of natural laws.

Some people throw the term miracle around rather loosely. "I was driving home, and this truck ran a red light and narrowly missed me. It was a miracle." "I was at the store and there was this awesome dress, and it was the only one left. Guess what? It was exactly my size. What a miracle?" We may use the term miracle to apply to highly dangerous and risky surgery that is successful or the moon landing.

Now, it's possible that God might be behind your narrow miss. God can work through all sorts of means. But when we talk about a biblical miracle, such as those in John's Gospel, we mean something more. Biblically, a miracle is more than an unexplained event, or a highly unlikely event. A miracle, in the biblical sense is something that happens because God intervenes in the natural world and does

something supernatural. Jesus didn't walk on the water because he knew where the rocks were. He didn't feed 5,000 because he used the boys lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish to inspire everyone in the crowd to share what they had. Jesus' miracles were very real supernatural interventions in the laws of nature.

Some people have a difficult time with this. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States and the author of the declaration of Independence, believed that Jesus was a good man and a wise teacher. Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to William Canby, "Of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern, which have come under my observation, none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus." However, Jefferson did not accept Jesus as the Son of God. In fact, Jefferson made his own version of the Gospels in which he cut out all of the miracles.

Today, more than 200 years after Jefferson's cut and paste Bible, his approach is still very attractive to many. We live in a day of scientific investigation and discovery. We live in a day of intellectual enlightenment. Talk of miracles smacks of a more primitive time, when peoples always gave divine explanations for things they couldn't understand.

Today, when we have things we can't explain we don't look to the supernatural, we investigate, we study, we experiment and research until an answer becomes clear. In fact, Richard Dawkins, an Oxford University professor and outspoken atheist believes the day is coming when everything in the universe will have a scientific explanation, 'Science is by no means complete -- there's a lot that we don't know -- but we're working on it... We're working on building up a complete picture of the universe, which if we succeed will be a complete understanding of the universe and everything that is in it.'" In Mr. Dawkins view there is no need for the supernatural.

German physicist, Max Planck said, "Faith in miracles must yield ground, step by step, before the steady and firm advance of the forces of science, and its total defeat is indubitably a mere matter of time."

A. Jesus was More than Just a Good Man

Like Jefferson, many are willing to look to the life and teachings of Jesus while not taking seriously his miracles and the supernatural. They will even concede that perhaps he was the best man who ever lived. They will accept him as a wise teacher, even conceding that he was perhaps the wisest teacher who ever taught.

One person identifying themselves as Betty M. wrote the following in blog post, "There was a person by the name of Jesus Christ. He probably lived a very good and moral life. I think he was an ethical person. Whether or not he was more is not important."

The problem is the very life and teaching of Jesus will not let us take this view. In his famous book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis makes this statement,

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. The miracle claims of the N.T. and the claims that Jesus makes about his own miracles will not allow us to accept him merely as a good man or wise teacher. The miracles of Jesus push the conversation onto a whole other level. A merely good man or wise teacher could not say and do the things Jesus said and did and still be good and wise...unless of course, they were absolutely true. Jesus was either all He claimed to be or he was a self-deranged lunatic or a charlatan perpetrating a fraud of the highest order. We must accept all that Jesus claimed to be, or accept nothing. The miracles of Jesus offer some of the most substantive proof that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be.

B. Miracles and Science are not Contradictory

But don't miracles contradict our modern knowledge of the world? Aren't science and miracles contradictory? Can a rational and educated person be a Christian and believe in miracles? Or do Christians have to put our brains on a shelf, and our intellect on hold to believe?

Miracles lie outside of the realm of science, as they are not governed by natural laws, and they are not repeatable in controlled conditions. So, in that sense, miracles cannot be scientifically investigated. However, saying that miracles lie outside of science doesn't mean they contradict science. A reasonable Christian can believe that God created a world that operates according to certain laws. We believe there is a built-in design and structure to the universe that causes it to operate in an orderly fashion.

In fact, the very existence of science depends on the orderly design of nature. If nature did not behave according to a predictable, orderly, structured design, scientific investigation would not be possible. It is also this very orderly design that points to a Creator. If you walk through the woods and find a bunch of stones laid out in a very intricate pattern according to size, shape and color, and together forming a complex design, you think, "I wonder who made this? What a wonderful creation. What a magnificent work of art" You don't think, "Wow, I wonder how many thousands of years, and what sorts of winds and currents of water it took to arrange these stones in this pattern all by random chance?"

Science depends on design. Design points to a Designer. So a reasonable Christian can also believe that the same Designer that put those natural laws in place could also rework or suspend those laws if need be. It is rational to believe that the Designer could bypass or intervene in the very laws and principles He put into place. To intervene in the laws of nature doesn't violate them. We do it all the time.

(Throw an apple into the air, and catch it)

When I throw this apple up and catch it, I am using my human strength to intervene in the natural law of gravity. When Jesus performs a miracle, he is using his supernatural power to intervene in the laws of nature in the same way, just to a much greater degree: So, no, we don't need to put our brains on the shelf to believe in Jesus.

C. Science Points to a Creator

Not only do science and faith not contradict, but science is increasingly finding evidence that points to an intelligent designer. Listen to these quotes from secular, non-Christian scientists

Astronomer George Greenstein has said,

As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency or rather, Agency must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?

British Physicist, Paul Davies, once denied the possibility of a Creator, has slowly changed his mind after years of research, He writes,

The laws [of physics] ... seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design. The Universe must have a purpose... [I see] powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming.

Astronomer and agnostic Robert Jastrow, wrote a book called *God and the Astronomers*. Listen to how he describes the journey of his fellow astronomers:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance, he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

In fact, some of the brightest scientists today embrace both faith in Christ and science.

Astronomer Hugh Ross says, "The evidence for a universe designed, initiated, shaped, and sustained exactly as the Bible describes, by God, continues to mount.., the only rational response to the mountain of evidence accumulated thus far is to surrender one 's life to the God of the Bible." Francis Collins, director of the Human Genome Project says, "I am a scientist and a believer, and I find no conflict

between those world views.” Nuclear physicist Hugh Siefken says, “My faith can be summed up in this one paradox: I believe in science, and I believe in God. I plan to continue to testify to both.”

While it is true that a high number of scientists are atheist or agnostic, a 2009 Pew Research poll found that 33% of those scientists surveyed believed in God, while an additional 18% believed in some form of higher power. These numbers aren’t very different from similar surveys done in 1913. Science is not wiping out the need for belief in the supernatural. It is also reasonable that rational, educated person can believe that Jesus performed miracles.

D. Abundance of the Testimony Support Jesus’ Miracles

The testimony of Jesus' miracles is deep and wide. It is found in all of the gospel sources and early eyewitness accounts. Textual and archeological evidence has established that all four gospels were written at an early date, within years of Christ's life on earth. At the time of their writing, there were many thousands of eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry still alive. If these accounts were not true, there were many who could have objected, However, they did not.

In fact, all of the early accounts corroborate the fact that Jesus performed miracles. You have independent, multiple testimonies to these events. There are no early accounts of a non-miracle working Jesus. If Jesus' miracles were mythological, we would certainly find early accounts of his life that lack the supernatural elements, and we would find the later accounts adding them after the fact. But what we find are the miracles there from the very beginning. Rather, early Jewish and Roman sources refer to the wonders performed by Jesus.

Moreover, these miracles were performed publicly, in full view of everyone, including Jesus' fiercest opponents and those not inclined to believe in him. None of these people questioned the authenticity of Jesus' miracles. Even Jesus' enemies never denied his miracles. Of all the charges the leveled against Jesus, not one included that his miracles were in any way a fraud. They did accuse him of doing them with the aid of the devil (Mt 12:24). According to the Jewish Talmud, Jesus was crucified for being a sorcerer, that is he performed miraculous acts by demonic power, but they do not deny the miracles.

II. Jesus’ Miracles are Signs

Now that we’ve dealt with this question of miracles, let’s quickly look at the rest of John’s purpose statement. The second thing he tells us is that these miracles are signs. What do signs do? They identify and direct. They tell you what something is. They point you in a certain direction. Jesus’ miracles weren’t just to wow the crowds. They identified him as the Son of God. They pointed to his divine power and holy purpose.

Hebrews 2:3-4 talk about the purpose of miracles as signs. *“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*

III. **Miracles are a Reason to Believe**

Next John says these signs are written for one reason, *“that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah.”* The miracles of Jesus are the first thing so many want to throw out, but John says they should inspire belief and trust- what we commonly call saving faith. He wants us to have faith in Him. And what is it we are to believe? Not just that Jesus was a real person, that Jesus was a wise teacher, that Jesus did great things. No he wants us to believe that Jesus was the Messiah– the anointed one. He is the promised Son of God who was to come into the world to pay the penalty for our sins.

IV. **Belief Leads to Life**

The final thing these verses tell us is what happens when we believe. When we believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we will have life. John writes, *“By believing you may have life in his name.”* Life, not just existence, not just survival, but life, real and genuine, full of vitality. As Jesus says in John 10:10, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* The word used for *full* here means overflowing, super-abundantly.

Why do we strive so hard for a life that is only half full? Why do we think the empty things of this world will be able to satisfy us? The trinkets of this world are like a mouthful of cotton candy– sweet at first then they melt away into nothing leaving you with sick stomach. Why do we settle for less than when Jesus offers us life to the full? Life to the full is more than a devoted and loving family. Life to full is not a big paycheck and fat bank accounts. Life to the full is more than houses and cars and boats and clothes. Life to the full isn’t social media pages blowing up and your posts going viral. Life to the full isn’t exciting hobbies or vacations to amazing destinations. That’s the world’s definition of life to the full. But what the world calls full, Jesus tells us is mostly empty.

We have seen in recent months an amazing number of wealthy, famous, powerful celebrities take their own lives. People who have everything the world says gives you a full life deciding that life isn’t worth living. Kate Spade was at the top of the fashion world. She had a name and styles recognized from 5th Avenue in New York to the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris. And how about traveling to exotic locations and experiencing the best the world has to offer? Nobody is done that more than Anthony Bourdain. He didn’t have life to the full. Avicii could inspire throngs of people to dance to his music. He

was one of the most influential people in his field. It wasn't enough. None of it is ever enough. It can't fill you. It can't take the emptiness away. It's not what gives life.

Jesus didn't promise us a long life, a wealthy life, or even an easy life, but a full life, and abundant life. It's an abundance of peace and joy even in trying circumstances. It's overflowing love in a world awash in hate. It fills you with meaning and purpose while so many meander, wander, and drift aimlessly. It is a life defined by the high and holy calling that God has placed on your life. It is the promise of eternal life beyond the grave. It is the assurance of knowing that death will not have the last say. It is mercy in the presence of failure. It is grace in the wake of brokenness. It is patience that frees you from the clutches of now, now, now. It is hope in the time of darkness. It is a peace that passes understanding. It is a joy indescribable. It is every good and perfect gift from above. Most importantly a full life is a life filled with Jesus himself— his truth, his love, his word. In a world where so many just exist, Jesus has come that you might truly live. Live a life that's more than just what happens between birth and death.

The miracles of Jesus are not just remote historical events, distant from our lives today. They are important because they prove that Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Son of God, and that He can do just as He promised. He can give you life. His greatest miracle is not anything written here in the gospel of John. It's the wonders he can perform in your own heart. Knowing Jesus personally and seeing him transform your life is the greatest miracle of all. Jesus can transform your life, your attitudes, your relationships, your motivations, and your priorities through his very real presence in your life. When you experience the miracle of Jesus in your life, then you realize that all that other stuff like walking on water, or multiplying loaves and fishes, that's all child's play for a Savior who can do that.