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Series: *Joshua: A Call to Faith*

Title: *The Longest Day: Do Miracles Really Happen?*

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Scripture: Joshua 10:1-15

Several years ago, a hungry Siberian fisherman left his home in Siberia to look for food. As he walked along, he prayed to any god who might hear him to help. He also asked for a sign that his prayer had been heard. He had just finished his prayer when---POW---a Bible fell from the sky and landed near him. He picked it up and went back into town saying, *"I have received a sign."*

He apparently read that Bible because today, he is part of a church in his town where there are now 30 Christians. He was the first---proof that as Romans 10:17 says, ***"Faith comes by hearing---and hearing by the Word of God."***

What the villager did not know is that a helicopter had flown high overhead the day he got his sign. In that helicopter were two government officials bringing relief aid to needy areas. As they flew, they sorted through their cargo. One said to the other, *"The cans of food are good, but what do we need with these books?"* So, he began throwing the books---copies of the Bible published by Gideons like our guest this morning---out the window.

I count that as a miracle---don't you?

And while we're on the subject, how do you feel about miracles? Do you believe the miracles of the Bible really happened, and do miracles still happen today?

Our text for this morning gives us a perfect opportunity to deal with this issue. Take your Bibles and turn to Joshua chapter 10:5-10 and you'll see what I mean.

5 – The five kings of the Amorites---the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon---joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

6 – The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us."

7 – So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.

8 – The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

9 – After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise.

10 – The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah.

Okay, remember the Gibeonites from last week? They very cleverly tricked the Israelites into making a peace treaty with them by disguising themselves as a delegation from a faraway land.

Joshua was of course upset about this, but he showed his integrity by keeping his word and honoring the alliance he had been deceived into making. Well, when the Gibeonites' neighbors heard about this treaty they looked on them as traitors and decided to attack, to punish them for siding with the Hebrews. When the Gibeonites learned of this imminent attack they sent word to Joshua, pleading for his help.

At this point, Joshua's integrity continued to shine. I mean, if he could have sat back and just waited for the five unified armies to obliterate Gibeon and all of its residents! After all, they had deceived him. So, he could have reasoned that they were just getting what they deserved. But Joshua was too righteous of a guy to think that way. He knew a treaty is a treaty and there is no right way to do a wrong thing. So, he immediately marshaled his forces and ordered an all-night march to rescue the Gibeonites.

And Joshua really pushed his troops. They hurriedly covered in one night a distance that had taken them three days to cover earlier. And, I'm sure it was a tiring march because not only was it double time all the way, their route was also pretty much uphill all the way. When they arrived at Gibeon, they attacked the unsuspecting Canaanite confederacy suddenly, presumably at dawn.

As the Hebrews fought, God threw the enemy forces into confusion such that the armies of the five kings fled. Look back at verse 10. ***"Israel pursued them along the road going UP to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah."***

To give you a mental image of the battlefield, the fighting at Gibeon and from there at first it went up ten miles to Beth Horon. But from that point the road drops away abruptly, falling seven hundred feet in two miles. In fact, the rocky slope is cut into steps, and it was down this rugged descent that the Canaanites fled before the pursuing Israelites. I'm sure the King of Jerusalem and his allies were hoping to reach their fortified cities, seal the gates, and gain at least a night's rest before they had to face their pursuing foes again.

But that didn't happen, because as the Canaanites fled down the rocky path, God intervened in the first of two miracles. First, God sent help in the form of hailstones that miraculously struck only the panicked enemy soldiers. In fact, verse 11 says, ***"More of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites."***

Now picture the scene that must have greeted Joshua as he crested the ridge at Beth Horon. Before him, as far as his eyes could see, were masses of the panicked armies being pursued by his own soldiers. Over the slopes and above the plains beyond, there was a great cloud from which hail was falling, wounding and killing the fleeing enemy troops. But, as he looked to his right, he saw the sun was about to begin its long afternoon descent toward the Mediterranean. And, at this point Joshua must have realized two things. First, it hit him that this was an unprecedented opportunity to destroy the southern confederacy once and for all. Instead of having to fight five different battles, he could deal with each of the armies of each of these cities at the same time. If he could destroy them now, the battle for the southern part of the Promised Land would be a done deal.

But at the same instant a second thought entered his mind. The sun was going down; and when it set, fighting would cease. He quickly calculated that there was just not enough time before sunset to achieve total victory. So, Joshua uttered an unprecedented prayer. He asked God to prolong the day. And that's exactly what God did. Look at verse 12-14:

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So, the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

Now, it is at this point that many people, even Christians say, *"Wait a minute. The miracle of those 'smart-bomb hail stones' is one thing. But the sun stopping for an entire day? Come on!? This is too much! Besides, as any educated individual knows the sun always stands still. It is the earth that moves."*

Well, I would respond to that last bit of criticism by saying that Joshua was just using the same language we do---even today in our modern, educated culture. I mean, the weather man tells us when the sun will “set” and when it will “rise” even though the sun never moves. I mean, can you imagine Joshua praying, “*God, stop the earth from rotating which will make the sun appear to stand still, so my soldiers can have enough light to win the victory!*” No, of course not.

But, aside from this “sun stand still” wording, what did happen on that day of days? Did the earth really slow and then stop its rotation for an entire day? Did the moon cease to orbit our planet as verse 13 says? How would that have been possible? Wouldn't it have messed up the tides and caused earthquakes and things like that? What really happened that day as Joshua stood on the slopes of Beth Horon?

Well, even Christians, have debated this for centuries.

- Some say all this talk about the sun standing still was just poetic.
- Others say Joshua didn't really ask for the sun to stop but for a release from the day's heat and that God's answer was the hailstorm, a storm that not only brought refreshment to his travel-weary soldiers so they could do the work of a full day in half the time, but also brought destruction on Joshua's enemy.
- Others believe a miracle of refraction of the sun's rays made it just seem as if the sun and moon were out of their regular places.

Well I don't hold to any of these beliefs. In fact, I will go on record in saying that I believe the account in Joshua is exactly what happened. I believe God literally “stopped the sun” for an entire day. I believe this because I ALSO believe God created this entire universe, including our sun and moon. I believe that as Psalm 74:16 says, “***Oh God, the day is Yours, and Yours also the night; You established the sun and moon. It was You Who set all the boundaries of the earth.***” I believe that as Colossians 1:17 says, “***...in Him all things hold together***”---even things as big as planets and solar systems. I believe this literal account because I also believe God will let nothing interfere with His sovereign purpose. God can effortlessly and will literally move Heaven and Earth if need be!

I can't help but think of a portion of God's reply to Job. In chapter 38 He said, “***Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?***” The BEING Who made dawn and dusk can easily prolong a day.

Now, before we go any further in our study, let's agree on a definition. What is a miracle?

We need a definition because we use the word “*miracle*” so flippantly these days.

- If a scared student passes an exam he didn't study for he says, “*It was a miracle!*”
- If the Redskins win three games in a row we say, “*It was a miracle!*”
- If we are able to turn left out of the church parking lot onto Muncaster Mill Road without the help of a crossing guard we say, “*It was a miracle!*”

Well, since we use this word so casually, we obviously don't have an accurate grasp on its meaning. So let's spend the rest of our time this morning trying to correct that. First a definition. According to Charles Swindoll, “*A miracle is a humanly impossible event that occurs in the natural realm apart from natural causes for the glory of God.*”

Now please note his last phrase. Biblical miracles are done for a specific purpose. God countermands His natural law in order to bring Himself glory. Paul Little writes, “*Biblical miracles, in contrast to miracle stories in pagan literature and those of other religions, were never capricious or fantastic. They were not scattered*

helter-skelter through the record without rhyme or reason. There was always clear order and purpose to them."

This is something we need to understand. As Jesus said in John 10:25, ***"The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me."*** In other words, Biblical miracles, miracles that are of God, always have the purpose of pointing to Him. God is glorified, not the miracle worker. They help convict people of their need for God's saving power. Miracles are never performed for entertainment or for personal prestige or to gain money or power. They always point to Jesus.

I'm reminded of the story of the four missionaries who were speared to death by the Auca Indians of Ecuador back in the 50's. The Aucas reported that as the missionaries lay dying, they looked up and saw angels welcoming the slain missionaries into Heaven. This miracle served its purpose because it helped push these Aucas and later their entire tribe toward faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, you may wonder, *"Then why doesn't God do more miracles? Surely that would make more people want to become Christians."* Well, I don't have a complete answer to this question, but I do know that even miracles aren't enough for some people to believe. Look at the Israelites. They saw miracles every single day. They saw the Red Sea parted but an entire generation still refused to believe God could help them conquer the Promised Land. And do you remember Abraham's reply to the rich man who was in Hell and asked that someone go and warn his brothers who were still living so they could avoid his fate? In Luke 16:31 Abraham said, ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."***

Sadly, some people are so hard-hearted that they discount even miracles. No amount of evidence would persuade them to believe. So, when it comes to answering why God doesn't do more miracles, we need to trust His foreknowledge. We must trust that He will intervene miraculously only if He knows it will suit His eternal purposes.

Okay, to help deepen our understanding of Biblical miracles here are three basic facts.

(1) First, miracles are CENTRAL to our faith as CHRISTIANS.

Think of how impotent our faith would be without miracles. I mean without them we wouldn't have the inspiration of the Bible, miracles performed by Moses and the prophets, the Virgin Birth, Jesus' miracles, His bodily resurrection and as Paul puts it in 1st Corinthians 15:14ff, ***"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."***

C. S. Lewis said, *"The mind which asks for a non-miraculous Christianity is a mind in process of relapsing from Christianity into mere 'religion.' All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Mohammadanism---but you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great miracle. A naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian."*

So, when it comes to the Christian faith, a belief in miracles is not something you can take or leave. Without miracles our faith is empty. This leads to a second basic fact.

(2) ...our belief in miracles reflects our understanding of the NATURE of GOD.

I mean, if we believe that God is truly omnipotent, truly all-powerful, then we have no trouble believing in miracles like we read about here in Joshua 10.

Leland Wong, was an evangelist to Chinese people in America and he put three Biblical texts at the top of his letterhead: Joshua 10:13, ***“The sun stood still.”*** 2nd Kings 6:6, ***“The iron did float.”*** and Psalm 48:14, ***“This God is our God.”*** ***“The sun stood still...the iron did float...this God is our God.”*** Sounds like a great FACEBOOK post!

Nothing is too great for God. As God Himself puts it in Jeremiah 32:27, ***“I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for Me?!”*** Of course the answer is no. Our almighty God can do anything! To say that there is something God cannot do, to say God can't do a miracle which---by definition, is something that occurs outside natural law is to in essence deify that natural law and make it God. I mean, of course God can “stop the sun.” He created the sun. He “invented” the miraculous natural law that makes the sun work. So, of course God can reverse the miracle and stop our planet and keep us from floating off into space if He wants to. He made our planet! He made space! He set into motion the laws of planetary motion and He can stop them whenever he wants. Can't a clockmaker stop his clock if he so desires?

By the way, we tend to forget that the natural law itself is a miracle of God. As J. N. Hawthorne puts it, *“Miracles are unusual events caused by God---the laws of nature are generalizations about ordinary events caused by Him.”* Miracles are going on around us every minute. The fact that you can hear what I am saying is a miracle of God. The fact that you can breathe air and your heart can pump blood is another and so on. Another thing---as Christians, if we are to do anything great for God, anything lasting, well, it requires us to believe in His limitless power.

The more we believe He can do the more we'll attempt for Him. Do you believe our God is truly omnipotent, all-powerful?

- Is He powerful enough to heal your marriage?
- Is He strong enough to provide your physical needs and wise enough to know what they are?
- Is your God able to make you an effective parent?
- Can He help you do your job?
- Can this virus that we all fear thwart---or even slow down---God's purposes? NO!

One more.

- Is His hearing sensitive enough to hear your prayers?

Well, use your miracle-empowered hears to hear me because God can do anything!!!

(3) The greatest miracle is CONVERSION.

I say this because when we hear the word “miracle” we tend to think of things like parting the Red Sea or healing a blind man, or this guy on the video being healed of a terminal illness. But those miracles, as amazing as they are, are nothing compared to the miracle that occurs every time an individual puts his faith in Jesus Christ and has his sins forgiven so that He stands pure and blameless in the eyes of our Holy God. Let me put it this way. All other miracles are temporary. Those healed get sick again. Risen Lazarus still died again eventually. The sun only stopped for one day but conversion is for keeps because accepting God's gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus gives us eternal life.

As Calvin Miller puts it, *“Heaven is the finest and most final of all Christian miracles. In that eternal place there is no pain or sorrow or death because the old order of things has passed away.”*

Think of it this way: a 30-year-old woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. Docs say it is terminal. This prompts her to turn to God. She hears the Gospel and puts her faith in Jesus. She also asks for God's healing power and He gives it. The cancer disappears. Her docs can't explain it and she lives 60 more years. At the ripe age of 90 her body ceases to function. But because of her conversion six decades later she doesn't die. She lives in Heaven forever. Now, tell me which miracle is more powerful? Her healing from cancer gave her 60 years but her faith in Jesus gave her eternity!!! Do the math. Which miracle is greater?

Another thing, sometimes God heals, but he always saves. He always performs the greatest miracle. As Romans 10:13 says, ***"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

One of these days the sun will set on your life. Are you ready for that day? If not, you can be, because right now if you call on the name of the Lord---if you pray and ask Jesus to forgive you of your sin and to come into your life as Lord---He will. If you want to make that decision today, come forward and I'll answer your questions and we'll pray together. If you are here and you'd like to pray for God's miraculous power concerning some issue or circumstance, come, we'll humbly ask for God's help together. And if God is leading you to join this church family come but come now as God leads.