

Big Questions

6. *Do miracles happen?*

October 23, 2022

Jennifer Groesbeck was a twenty-five-year-old single mother studying to become a medical assistant. In 2015 she was driving home on a darkened highway in Utah when her car suddenly struck a concrete barrier and careened off the road. Her red Dodge sedan landed upside down in the Spanish Fork River. Fourteen hours later, a fisherman spotted the wreck and called police.

When four officers arrived, they spotted an arm through the car's window, but the wreckage looked bad and they assumed no one could survive. That's when they heard a woman's voice calling out softly, "Help me, we're in here!" The words were as clear as day. An officer shouted back, "Hang in there! We're trying what we can!"

The officers sprang into action. They strained and pushed together to pull the vehicle onto its side. What they discovered shocked them. Groesbeck had been killed on impact. But in the backseat, they found an unconscious eighteen-month-old girl, who had hung by her car seat upside down all through the frigid night. The top of her blond hair was just inches from the water. They took the little girl to the hospital, where she was treated and released in good health.

But that voice—where did it come from? Not from Groesbeck, who had been dead since the crash. Not from the child who was unconscious—besides, said a rescuer, it was definitely the voice of a woman. Officer Tyler Beddoes said he wouldn't have believed what happened if the other rescuers hadn't heard the voice too. He told reporters, "That's the part that really sends me for a whirl, I'm not a typically religious guy. It's hard to explain—it was definitely something. Where and why it came from, I'm not sure."

So what happened there? Was that a miracle? *Do miracles even happen?*

Four out of five Americans say they believe in miracles. That's a very high level! It's hard to get 4 out of 5 Americans to agree on anything these days. However, we might not all mean the same thing by the word "miracle."

When we talk about a "miracle" today we mean: **Miracle: a divine action that overrides the ordinary course of nature and generates awe.** So, we're not talking about an unusually awesome sunset – that is inspiring, but it is the ordinary course of nature. We're not talking about the birth of a baby, as wonderful and life-changing as that may be – it is still natural.

Last week I heard people say that it was a miracle that the Steelers defeated Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Bucs. Unusual, yes, but not the kind of miracle we're

talking about here today. By “miracle” we mean something you would never expect to happen apart from clear intervention from God. For example, those officers hearing that voice makes us whisper, “Whoa...” That’s awe.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you believe that miracles happen. I can say that, because the Christian faith is based entirely on a miracle: the resurrection of Jesus. He was executed on a cross and then rose from the dead and walked out of his tomb. That is a flat-out miracle. That was an act of God. Dead people just don’t rise again in the natural course of things.

The Gospels are New Testament biographies of Jesus’ life, and they are filled with accounts of miracles... walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, raising the dead, casting out demons. And miracles didn’t stop with Jesus. The book of Acts is the story of the early church, and we see miracles there, too: angels opening prison doors, healings, the dead raised, prophetic words.

The miraculous nature of Christianity is a stumbling for some folks. 18th century philosopher David Hume was a famous skeptic when it came to miracles and religion. He said: *“No human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.”* – *Philosopher David Hume*. He argued against miracles saying nature’s laws can’t be broken... he posed a circular argument saying, “Miracles violate the principle that miracles don’t happen.”

Dr. Jerry Coyne, atheist scientist at U. of Chicago said, *“To have real confidence in a miracle, one needs evidence – massive, well-documented, and wither replicated or independently corroborated evidence from multiple and reliable sources. No religious miracle even comes close to meeting those standards.”* - *Dr. Jerry Coyne*.

And yet, hundreds of millions of people around the world claim to have witnessed miraculous experiences. We can’t assume that all of those were genuine miracles, but neither is it reasonable to simply ignore all of them while claiming there are no credible witnesses for miracles. Indeed, it is surely intellectually dishonest to dismiss them all from the start on the basis of “uniform” human experience, or to simply go cherry-picking among the least plausible examples to justify neglecting more plausible ones.¹

Dr. Craig Keener reports that nearly three-quarters of doctors in the United States believe in miracles. Even more, over half of physicians say that they have *witnessed* what they considered to be miracles.² That is impressive when you consider that doctors’ scientific training rightly leads them to look for ordinary causes first, and some surveyed were philosophically opposed to believing in miracles, so they would not have called an event a miracle no matter how extraordinary it was.³

¹ Keener, Craig S.. *Miracles Today* (pp. 25-26). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² Keener, Craig S.. *Miracles Today* (p. 26). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³ Keener, Craig S.. *Miracles Today* (p. 26). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The case of Barbara Cummiskey Snyder was truly one of those extraordinary cases. From the age of fifteen to the age of thirty-one, Barbara spent three-quarters of her life in the hospital; the rest of the time she was being cared for at home. She had chronic pulmonary disease, with frequent infections and pneumonia. Dr. Harold Adolph, described her condition toward the end of her suffering: “Barbara was one of the most hopelessly ill patients I ever saw. She was diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic as having multiple sclerosis. She had been admitted to the local hospital seven times in the year that I was first asked to see her. Each time she was expected to die. One diaphragm was completely paralyzed so that the lung was nonfunctional, and the other worked less than 50 percent. She had a tracheotomy tube in her neck for breathing, and she could speak only in short sentences. Her abdomen was swollen to be huge because the muscles of her intestine did not work, nor would her bladder function. She had not been able to walk for seven years... And she was blind except for two small areas in each eye.... Because she could not swallow, she had a feeding tube in her stomach... Her feet pointed down, unable to rest flat against the floor—even had someone tried to stand her up. Her arms remained tight against her chest... Her hands curled up against the inside of her wrists.”

Dr. Thomas Marshall recalls that her body was “contracted in a permanent fetal position.” He sadly explained to the family that the next infection would likely kill her, and everyone agreed not to prolong her suffering with any further.

On Pentecost Sunday, June 7, 1981, two friends from her church visited her. They were carrying armfuls of cards and letters because someone had called in a prayer request about her to the local Christian radio station, WMBI. 450 letters came to her in care of her church.⁴

Author Lee Strobel interviewed Barbara about what happened next. People prayed in Jesus’ name and Barbara was instantly healed! A divine intervention that causes awe!

Dr. Marshall said, *“I have never witnessed anything like this before or since and considered it a rare privilege to observe the Hand of God performing a true miracle. Barb has gone on to live a normal life in every way. She subsequently married a minister and feels her calling in life is to serve others, which is what she did after her life was miraculously preserved by her Creator.”*⁵ All we can say is “Praise God!”

We might think that no one in that hospital could possibly deny the reality of God after what happened with Barbara; surely anyone who saw that would bow down before the reality and power of Jesus.

⁴ Keener, Craig S.. *Miracles Today* (pp. xii-xiii). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Thomas Marshall, MD, *Physician’s Untold Stories*, Chapter 22

I doubt, however, that Barbara's case eliminated unbelief from the hospital. Why? Because miracles have never done that. Jesus did many miracles – and yet, some people rejected him anyway.

Matthew 11:20-21 *Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.*

Miracles don't prove God's existence or make people believe. They have a different purpose. And what is that? In the book of Acts, miracles are called "**Signs and wonders.**"

Acts 2:22-24 *"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,^[a] put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

Miracles are called signs: Signs point to something – so do miracles. The sign is not the point – it is *what the sign points to that matters. We don't stop to admire a road sign. When going on vacation no one says "We're going to spend a day at the sign for the Grand Canyon.* No, the sign is not the point, it is important because it points to what we're looking for.

So what do miraculous signs point to? For one, **Miracles point to a "Taste of the future."** **Matthew 12** records that Jesus healed a man who was blind and couldn't talk because he was oppressed by a demonic spirit. People were astonished, and this is what Jesus told them: **Matthew 12:28** *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* Jesus said that the miraculous healing of that man was a sign that the Kingdom of God was breaking in.

The Kingdom of God = life when God has his way. Heaven is perfect because there everything is the way God intends. Healing is a sign of the Kingdom because there is no sickness in heaven. So, when Jesus heals, he is giving us a taste of our future and showing us that the Kingdom of God is breaking in on the world in spots even now. Miracles show us that we have a lot to look forward to! Heaven is going to be amazing!

Miracles point to the "Character of God."

Matthew 12:9-14 *Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*

The Pharisees looked at the man with the shriveled hand as a way to test and trap Jesus. They didn't care about him at all. But Jesus did.

***11** He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? **12** How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." **13** Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. **14** But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.*

This miracle showed the character of Jesus – that God is love. How do you think Barbara Cummiskey Snyder felt about God after being healed? She was delighted to walk, and have a normal life, but even more, she was aware of God's love for her. That's what miracles point to.

Miracles also point to the "Power of God."

At one point Jesus was in a boat with his disciples when a life-threatening storm hit. Jesus told the storm to be still, and it did.

***Luke 8:25** In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." Miracles are signs that point to God's power. "Nothing is impossible with God."*

You may not need a miracle today, but sometimes we need a taste of the future to keep us filled with hope. Sometimes life is really hard and we need a reminder that God loves us and sees us, that he knows where we are and that he is with us. That changes everything! We need to experience the power of God in our lives. We need to recognize God is at work in our lives instead of living by our own power all the time.

Tonight we begin our Awakening services. For the next three nights we are going to draw near to God. We are going to press in and hear from the God who does the impossible. I hope you will be with us, because whatever else you might plan to do won't compare to a touch from God – the God who does the impossible.

Come expecting. I don't know what will happen this week, but I know that drawing near to God will change us. Let's come expecting a breakthrough.

Some of us here today are facing impossible situations. You've tried everything and it hasn't worked. Today let's bring ourselves before the God who does the impossible. We don't live in miracles, we believe in the God who does the impossible.