

"THE TRUTH ABOUT MIRACLES"

A Sermon By

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### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever found yourself praying for a "minor" miracle? I'm not talking about a really big miracle...like praying for a family member near death. I'm talking about little miracles...like,

"Oh, Lord...please let this traffic light stay green!" Or, "Oh, Jesus...please help me to 'ace' this test!" Or, "Oh God, let our team win..."

I wonder...is there anyone present this morning who has not at some time in his or her life perhaps prayed for this kind of miracle...a "minor" miracle?

Author Jay Kesler describes how after he got his Driver's License he wrecked his dad's car. The crash tore away the front fender, two doors and the rear fender. After Jay found out that all in the car were okay, he stood in the ditch and prayed, "Dear God...Oh Jesus...I pray this didn't happen". Opening his eyes he saw that the car was still wrecked and so he closed his eyes again, squinted real hard and prayed, "Dear God...this didn't really happen". Then he opened his eyes....but, he says, it had happened anyway.

### BEEN THERE?

Have you ever been there? I think we all have. We all have asked God at some time or other in our lives to move heaven and earth on our behalf over something trivial, something impossible...absurd....

"Oh, Lord....PLEASE don't let it rain on my daughter's wedding day"...(ignoring the fact that there are others who are depending on rain for their well-being). "Lord, PLEASE let the answer to that question be 400 years". (Do we really expect God to change history so that we can pass the exam?). "Oh, Jesus...PLEASE let mine be the lowest bid". (Yes, Lord...take your heavenly eraserrand blot out everyone's bid. Make them higher than mine!)

Have you ever asked God to repeal the laws of gravity, undo the past, re-write the BIG TEN commandments, change some weather pattern - all for your personal convenience? We've all done it. We all have "been there". So, we can appreciate our Bible lesson for today that's taken from John's Gospel.

### JESUS GOES TO A WEDDING

Today we find Jesus at a wedding. It's His first public appearance after His baptism by John and the forty days in the wilderness. It's an interesting and important appearance. Weddings are a sacred act, involving a holy covenant. They're always times of joy and celebration...hopefully. But at this wedding a bit of a problem is brewing. Believe it or not, they're running out of wine. And for the Jew, wine represented life and abundance. It was a "key" part of any celebration.... especially at a wedding. No more wine meant no more party!

What's of interest here is that Mary, the mother of Jesus, asked Him to intervene. Then she turns to the servants and says..."Do whatever He tells you to do". I have no idea what she was expecting Him to do. It wasn't like He could whip out His cellular phone, call the wine merchant back in Nazareth and ask him to send down more wine to Cana...right away. Was she asking Jesus to do the impossible?

I have the feeling that Jesus initially resisted Mary's request. It could be that He didn't want to dole out miracles like party favors for the convenience and enjoyment of those around Him. Jesus used His miracles to prove His identity and to profoundly affect the lives of people for good, or to further His ministry on earth...but certainly not to be someone's errand boy.

THE TRIVIAL, THE IMPOSSIBLE, THE UNNECESSARY

My guess is that this is the problem with many of our requests to God. Are we guilty of asking God to do the trivial, or perhaps the impossible, or the unnecessary. And when we edge in that direction we are treating God like our servant and not as our sovereign.

When Charlie Ward comes off the court following a Knick's victory and says to Al Trautwig,

"God gave us the victory tonight!" I hope he is saying in so many words....."I thank God who gave me a good body so I can play at my best. I thank God for my good mind that allowed me to play alert and with awareness. I thank God for giving me the hunger and the desire to always be my best."

AND, if that's what the young athlete is saying, then I want to say, "Amen."

"You're absolutely right. Thank God for all of His good gifts".

BUT, if that athlete is saying God literally guided the ball through the hoop or the football through the uprights for the winning field goal so that one team would win and the other lose, then that young athlete has a bit to learn about life and about God.

God is not our personal weather expert. He (or She) is not our football or baseball or basketball strategist. God is not our romance matchmaker, or the rectifier of our past mistakes. God is God. God is our Sovereign and not our servant. It is we who are to bring our actions into conformance with God's will.

It is very human when something big is at stake to assume it is also important to God...like making sure our team wins. I remember a few years ago how I was asked to offer a prayer on radio - WFAM- to insure a victory for the Rangers in the final game of the Stanley Cup finals. I felt uncomfortable, but somehow put something together...some of you called and said it was too long. Remember it. Midnight in June! But when we compare that concern with that of millions of suffering and dying people in our world, when we compare it with the victims of floods and hurricanes and volcanoes, when we compare it to the trials and troubles of people in Bosnia, or Northern Ireland, or North Korea, or the mid-East, then even the most theologically unsophisticated of us must realize the absurdity of our request. Miracles are not designed for the trivial, the impossible, the unnecessary. Put that down first.

MIRACLES DO OCCUR

Having said that, however...let me acknowledge that miracles do occur.

Jesus resisted Mary's request at first. But He was a good Son and He finally did give in to her wishes. Let's review the incident, the situation.

There were six stone jars standing there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding ten or twenty gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water, and then He told them to draw some out and take it over to the Wine Steward. The Wine Steward tasted it and was impressed. He didn't know where this new wine came from, but it was better than the wine they had been serving. Jesus had performed His first miracle - water to wine. Miracles do occur.

Tony Campolo tells about an experience that occurred when he was fourteen years old. Tony's family was very poor and his father was out of work because he had been struck with Hodgkin's Disease. His hospitalization was running out and the family was heading for trouble. They did not know where they would get enough money to meet their basic needs.

Fourteen year old Tony knew that it was his duty to earn some money for his family, but at the same time he wanted to stay in school, get good grades and eventually go on to college. He figured out that he could buy unsold bread that truck drivers returned to the Bond Bread Company located at 56th Street and Market Streets in Philadelphia. He could buy a loaf of bread for a nickel and sell it for a quarter to restaurants in West Philadelphia. The simple transaction promised a hefty profit, but there were a couple of problems involved. For one thing, he could not pick up the bread until after nine at night and the only means he had for delivering the bread was by piling it on a wagon and then fastening the wagon to his bike.

One dark, cold and wet night at about eleven o'clock Tony was making a delivery. Unfortunately he rode his bike over a pot-hole. Bang. His front tire blew out. He pulled the bike off the street and sat down on the curb. After a while he started to cry. He remembers crying hard and long. He was cold, soaked, shivering and discouraged. It was a quiet and lonely street in Philadelphia and there was no one around to hear him when he cried out loud,

"God...You're mean! Everybody else thinks you're kind.  
But I know You're mean. If You were kind, You'd help."

He says that he cried for a few more minutes and then, for reasons that he will never figure out, he got up and pushed his bike and pulled his wagon filled with bread loaves to the service station down the street. The station was closed for the night. Nevertheless, he pushed his bike over to the air pump and tried to put air into the blown-out tire. It never occurred to him how unusual it was that the air pump of this closed service station was still working. He was in such a state of sadness and brokenness that he did what he did in something of a daze. Needless to say the air came out of the tear in the blown-out tire as quickly as he pumped it in. He says he doesn't know what he was expecting, but crying and trembling, he just stayed there in the dark carrying out a hopeless task.

And then - THE MIRACLE HAPPENED. Suddenly he realized that the tire was hard...firm. Somehow and in some way that's impossible for him to explain, the tire was holding air. He stood up...confused but happy and he remembers to this day yelling out, "Oh, thank YOU. Thank YOU. Thank YOU, Lord". And he made two more deliveries and then rode the bike three miles back to his house and the tire held.

The tire held!

When he got home he lifted his bike onto his front porch and locked it. It was about 12:30. He went to the door and was putting his key into the lock when he heard a hissing sound. He turned back to the bike and watched with amazement as the air quickly left the blown-out tire. The miracle was over. The tire was flat.

#### MIRACLES HELP TO BUILD OUR FAITH

I tell that simple story for this reason. My guess is that everyone with a deep faith can look back over his or her life and see some miracle there such as Tony Campolo experienced in his life. Can you? I can. Many of us can. But it doesn't always happen and it may happen only once in a lifetime. There are other times when we will ask for a miracle and heaven will be as quiet as a tomb. But when it does happen and heaven responds....remember it and treasure that memory.

Miracles do happen and maybe....maybe they happen for a specific reason. They help to build our faith. I'm sure that Tony Campolo across the years of his life can look back at that defining moment, at that incident involving the bicycle tire and say to himself, "Hey....God is REAL". And nobody can take that away from him.

To me, the secret of the miracle at the wedding in Cana is found in these words of verse eleven,

"This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee,  
and manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him!"

Jesus performed this miracle not to save the bridegroom embarrassment, or even to please His mother. I think He wanted to build the faith of His disciples. He wanted to make sure that they knew WHO HE was and what they were dealing with.

And this is the role miracles play in the life of the believer. God is not our servant. God is our Sovereign. God isn't going to do anything that ultimately is not for our best good. When we pray and Heavens seems to be silent, perhaps it is because God's plan is bigger and better than we can see at the moment. But somewhere along the way that we walk, God gives us experiences that help to build and nurture our faith....that serve as defining moments and as "watersheds" along our life's journey. God gives each of us these events....those moments....whether they be minor miracles or major mountain-top experiences...so that when we come to those difficult times when we pray but nothing seems to come from our prayers, we can say with confidence,

"I know God is with me. God has been  
with me before...and I know that God  
is with me now!"

#### CLOSING

Friend, whoever you are...you're not a realist if you don't believe in miracles. Make room in your life for them. They do happen for a specific reason...to build our faith. So, if you pray for the home team to win and they don't, or if it rains on your daughter's wedding day, or if you pray to win the lottery and you don't....inspite of all the time you may have spent on your knees, try to remember this isn't what miracles are about anyway. Miracles are all about helping us trust God. That's the truth, I feel, about miracles.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your presence and to Your nearness in these moments, O God. Let the memory of this miracle of Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana long ago, let it speak to us...let it nourish us and make us strong in our belief that with You...all things, indeed, are possible. That there are no limits to what our trust and our faith in You can accomplish in this world. Let Jesus touch our lives in this time of worship....changing the water of our life into the wine of life. In His name we pray. Amen.