

## 257 How To See a Miracle

*(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "How To See a Miracle", originally shared on March 15, 2023. It was the 257<sup>th</sup> video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKaL2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)*

Have you ever wondered how great it would be if you could just go back in time and see Jesus walking the earth, maybe doing a miracle? Have you ever thought that seeing just one miracle would lock-in your faith and remove all doubt? You'd be wrong. Today we're going to find out why, and how you can see a miracle right now every day.

Rain and snow are still falling in Southern California. It's kind of amazing after years of drought, but is it a miracle? Ask the people living in the mountains if they are grateful for more snow, or the people living in burn scars if they are grateful for more rain.

Even people down here are getting pretty fed-up with the rain.

As a pastor, I'm sometimes given the invisible wink and elbow and get asked something like, "Hey, 'padre', can't you do something about this weather?" I say, "I'm sorry. I'm in sales, not management." 😊

The main Bible reading we're looking at today, **John 9:1-41**, raises a similar question.

Jesus did miracles. He healed a man born blind. Why don't we see those kinds of miracles today?

Good question!

The passage begins with a sight that is all but unheard of today but which was not so uncommon back then, and is not so uncommon in many parts of the world today, in **verse 1**,

*<sup>1</sup>As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.*

"Blind from birth."

That meant something then that we wouldn't necessarily consider today. We might say that it meant some congenital cause was present, rather than the result of an injury.

When people in Jesus' day thought about a cause, they thought about sin. They believed that things like blindness happened to people as punishment for sin. It was just a question of whose sin. The persons or their ancestors.

Which is weird because that answer is one that is seen to change over time in what we call "the Old Testament" and what people in that day called "scriptures." The Bible says that God punishes people for the sins of their ancestors near the beginning of the Old Testament, and says that God does **not** punish them for the sins of their ancestors near the end of that Old Testament era.

Jesus takes the later view and so shows a better grasp of the scriptures than his disciples.

Why was the man born blind then? Jesus answers, in **verse 3-5**,

*<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

Jesus is about to take the disciples to school. God's works are about to be revealed. Jesus is God, and the works that are about to be revealed are the gifts of Creation.

That's what a miracle is. It's not a suspension of the laws of physics. It's not something unexpected that just happens. A miracle is the restoration of what God intended the world to be in the beginning.

The world was created to be perfect. Human rebellion brought evil into the world, and we can't connect the sin with the result, like when a factory owner has toxic waste to dump and dumps it in the river behind the factory. He saves money, his business is more profitable, his stockholders are happy and he sleeps well at night. Meanwhile, people drink the water and eventually they get cancer. They don't know why.

A miracle is a sign that points to God's Creation as it was intended to be. Clean. Perfect. In this case, no blindness.

Jesus, "the light of the world", comes into the darkness of the man born blind and the man sees Jesus. His sight is restored.

But first, it gets weird, in **verses 6-7**.

*<sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.*

Did anyone, when you were a kid, usually a female relative, see dirt on your face and take out their hankie, dip it in their mouth, and use their saliva to clean off the spot? Gross right? You probably make that "Ick!" face. But you were clean.

Have you ever heard someone make a toast by saying "Here's mud in your eye"? That expression started in England around 1930 and is either a reference to life in the trenches during WW1 or a reference to this text, which kind of makes sense because it is associated with a toast to one's good health.

People back in Jesus' day believed that saliva had actual healing properties. Jesus used it as a signal that a healing was about to take place.

The man's neighbors, who have only known him as a blind beggar, have questions. And Jesus is not around. So, they bring him to the Pharisees, who also have questions, in **verses 13-15**,

*<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."*

Do you see where we're going here? If you know one verse of the Bible by heart, it's probably **John 3:16**. If you know one hymn by heart, it's probably Amazing Grace, and the first verse in particular:

"Amazing grace!- how sweet the sound-  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see."

You probably know the story of how that hymn was composed by John Newton, an English slave ship captain who came to Christ and repented of what he had done, left that work, and lived to campaign against slavery. He lived a transformed life in the grace of God.

That's what the Bible calls a miracle! A miracle is a sign that God's intention for creation is being restored. And what was God's intention for all of humanity but a personal transformational relationship with the one true living God?!

Do you want to see a miracle? Share your faith. Invite someone you know who does not know Jesus to receive him. Connect with someone in need, invite them to be transformed, to become a new Creation!

But there's a bigger issue.

At least the Pharisees think there is.

Jesus has broken one of the commandments, they say, by healing, that is, doing work, on the sabbath, the day of rest. And the guy who was told to go and bathe in the pool of Siloam has washed himself, also working. This, they say, cannot be a work of God.

They quiz the man's parents, and his folks see that they don't want to get caught up in all the drama.

The Pharisees ask the guy who was healed about this "sinner", Jesus, the one who had healed him, and we see, in **verse 25**.

*<sup>25</sup>He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."*

That's a good answer, and the Pharisees argue with the man born blind, now healed, but the man holds his ground, and they drive him out.

Jesus hears about what happened and finds the man, in **verses 35-38**,

*<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.*

**There's** the miracle! Not the miracle of childbirth or the miracle of the order of the cosmos, or the miracle of the beauty of nature, but the miracle that is happening every day all over the world.

Do you want to see one? Share your faith. Ask someone, "Have you heard about Jesus? Really heard about him?" Share the good news for them and invite them to open their heart to receive the transformational gift of Jesus Christ, the savior of the world.

Invite them to turn away from their old lives, to start over, to receive a new life, the restoration of their original humanity in the transformational relationship with God in Jesus Christ, seen in **2 Corinthians 5:17**,

*<sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

King Duncan, one of my favorite preachers, points out that the Pharisees had turned the Law into a burden, not a benefit. And many in our own communities see us as a burden, not as a benefit. Why are we here? Here's the answer: we are not looking for people to share our burden, we are here to share their burden. We are first of all, a Christian community. There is something in our churches when we gather that is

greater than any of us. Jesus! That is what we have to offer. Good news! New life in Jesus Christ!

We are not the light of the world in our communities. Jesus is. But we can be reflectors of the light.

Robert Fulghum, in his book, It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It, told the story of a modern Greek philosopher who answered Fulghum's question on the meaning of life with his story about living on a Greek island during the Nazi occupation.

One day, he said, he came upon a wrecked German motorcycle. He picked up the broken pieces of the rearview mirror and, unable to put them together, kept the largest piece, which he filed down to a circle with a stone. He played a game with that mirror, seeing what deep pocket of darkness he could illuminate by reflecting light into it.

He still had that mirror in his wallet and believed that it was the key to the meaning of life: that he was not the light or the source of the light, but that he could be a reflector, bringing light into the dark places of life, and that though he didn't have the whole mirror, he had a part of it, and could do what he could with what he had.

How do we help people see this, to see the Light, with what we have? The story of the healing of the man born blind concludes with its lesson, in **verses 39-41**,

*<sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." <sup>40</sup>Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" <sup>41</sup>Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.*

Tricky. Sin produces our separation from God, our lack of the relationship with the one true living God for which we were created. Jesus says to the Pharisees that if they were blind, it would not be because of their sin. But by saying "We see" while not "seeing" the presence of God at work right in front of them, they reveal that they are still in their sin. They don't see God, which is worse than any physical blindness.

How is your faith today?

Do you sometimes wonder how great it would be if you could go back and see Jesus walking the earth, maybe doing a miracle? Have you ever thought that seeing just one miracle would lock-in your faith and remove all doubt? You'd be wrong.

Think about all the people who saw Jesus physically do a miracle. Thousands! How many stuck with Jesus to the end? Zero. I think it was because they didn't "see" Jesus.

Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Church reformer, said, "I have covenanted with my Lord that He should not send me visions or dreams or even angels. I am content with this gift of the Scriptures, which teaches and supplies all that is necessary, both for this life and that which is to come."

The Bible is our source of supply for everything that is good in this world and the next. It is the primary means by which God speaks to us. The Bible reveals to us the power of the cross to restore that for which we were created: a living relationship with the one true living God.

The Bible both describes miracles and enables us to see them.

People come to new life in Jesus Christ every day. The people we know and love, or just know, or don't know yet, need to hear that, need to know that God loves them and that we imperfect children of a loving and gracious God welcome them.

There are many things that we can see.

Did you see the news about President Biden in Monterey Park this past week talking about gun violence? Did you see the news about the giant asteroid coming toward earth. Did you see the news about the possibility of war with Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran? Did you see the news about a massive volcano brewing? Did you see the news about the danger to our economy?

Did you see the good news of Jesus Christ, and did you share that good news?

The man born blind could only see Jesus when Jesus took action, when the light of the world came into his darkness and revealed himself. But Jesus did take action, and he still does today.

That is the stuff of miracles, and we can see them every day. We can be participants in them. We can tell our stories. We can point people to God's intention for human beings when he created them, and to the power and agency of God to make them into a new creation. We can point to Jesus as the agent by which a living relationship with the one true living God for which we were created was made possible through faith.

We can work to make all of creation more like what God made it to be.

But, most importantly, we can invite others to open their hearts and receive Jesus, the light of the world, to let him heal their blindness and know the miracle of God for all who will receive it, new life in Jesus Christ, in whom we have been given ultimate healing on the cross for our true selves and the knowledge that, in Christ, ultimately, everything will be healed!