

“Jesus Performed Miracles”

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Did you know that four years ago there was a virgin birth? It’s true. A British woman in her mid-30s, Kimberley Godsall, became pregnant despite being a virgin. Yet, this wasn’t a miracle. No, Godsall decided to get artificially inseminated, spending thousands of dollars at a fertility clinic to become a mother despite never knowing a man in the biblical sense.¹

So, there’s a bit of trivia for you. But I don’t bring this up to give you trivia. I share that story because some people think it’s impossible for a virgin to conceive. Yet it is possible, but only if an outside agent does something unusual. In this case, medical staff at a fertility clinic were the outside agents, enabling a woman to become pregnant apart from the usual manner.

The story of Jesus as told in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke begins in a similar way, with something we call a miracle. His mother, while a virgin conceives. But she didn’t go to a fertility clinic, since they didn’t exist over two thousand years ago. In this case, the outside agent was the Holy Spirit, who in some non-physical manner miraculously made Mary pregnant. Some people think miracles are impossible. But they aren’t; if a person outside what is normally a closed system does something unusual, then things that are impossible within the closed system are possible. It’s impossible for a tumor to disappear all by itself. But it’s possible for a tumor to disappear if a surgeon removes it, or if God does something unusual and makes it disappear.

The story of Jesus begins with a miracle: an outside agent, the Son of God, enters into his own creation. But that’s not the only miracle associated with Jesus, of course. If you read the Gospels, you quickly see that Jesus performs many miracles. And that’s what I want to talk about today. I want us to see the kinds of miracles Jesus performed and the meaning of those miracles.

Before I get to Jesus’ miracles, it’s important to understand what a miracle is. I think everyone understands that a miracle is an extraordinary act of God. That’s a good starting place. But there are some misunderstandings regarding miracles. Some people call anything that is improbable or rare or amazing a miracle. But unlikely events do occur. The American hockey

¹ Andrew Court, “I’m a Proud Virgin but My Miracle Pregnancy Was No Immaculate Conception,” *New York Post*, February 17, 2022, <https://nypost.com/2022/02/17/virgin-mom-reveals-how-she-became-pregnant-with-miracle-baby>.

team beat the Soviet hockey team in the 1980 Winter Olympics. It was called a miracle, but hockey teams win games regularly, and sometimes a David beats a Goliath.

Some people think a miracle is something that's amazing or even mysterious. I've heard people say that every baby is a miracle. That's not true. Every time a baby is conceived, grows in the mother's womb, and is born, it's amazing. It's a fascinating process. But it's not a miracle. It's simply how all humans are made. A lot of things in the natural world are amazing—sunrises and sunsets, far-off galaxies, black holes—but they're not miracles. The reason the conception and birth of a baby isn't a miracle is because God created human bodies with certain causal powers—that's a fancy term meaning that things have the power to cause other things to happen. God created the world such that when a sperm cell fertilizes an egg cell, that's a new life. It happens every day. Amazing, yes. Miracle, no.

Here's another misunderstanding about miracles. Some people think that miracles are the things that God does, whereas most of the time, God isn't doing anything. It's that kind of image of God that envisions an old man in a rocking chair, taking a long series of naps punctuated every so often by activity. But this is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible upholds the universe—always. He's always at work. If God ceased to exist, the universe and all that is in it would cease to exist. Consider what Hebrews 1:3 says about Jesus and his role in sustaining the universe. Hebrews 1:3 says this about the Son of God: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."² Jesus, the second Person of God, sustains all things by his word. Colossians 1:17 says, "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." If Jesus didn't hold everything together, it wouldn't hold together. It would be chaos. So, we can't say a miracle is simply a "God thing" because everything is, in some sense, a "God thing."

Or consider something more timely, given the very cold weather we've just had. We read this in Psalm 147:15–18:

- 15 He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
- 16 He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
- 17 He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs;
who can stand before his cold?
- 18 He sends out his word, and melts them;

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

God gives a command and it snows and hails. He gives another command and the snow and the hail melt. God's word even governs the icy blasts of wind. God governs all things in nature.

Here's the key thing to know: God works in extraordinary ways and ordinary ways. Another way to say this is that God is the primary cause of all things, but he usually works through secondary causes.³ Think about a baby that is conceived. I think most of us know how babies are made. The mother and father in this case are the secondary causes. Humans have the God-given ability to reproduce. New lives are produced every day. But in the Bible, we read these words of David in Psalm 139:13: "For you formed my inmost parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." David says that God "knitted him together" in his mother's womb. David didn't believe that God took some sewing needles and started crocheting. This is poetry, after all, and David knew, roughly, how babies were made. But he also realized that behind the secondary causes of his parents was God, the primary cause.

But Jesus' conception was a miracle. Why? Because God bypassed the secondary cause of a father and made Jesus in Mary's womb. That's how we know it was a miracle: God did it directly.⁴ God made men and women in such a way that conception normally requires sex. But here, God bypassed his usual method of doing things.

So, in a broad sense, a miracle is an extraordinary act of God when he does things contrary to his normal way of doing things. When we talk about Jesus' miracles, we'll see that these miracles have a more specific purpose: they function as signs. They're not just God showing off; they are God communicating truth.

Perhaps the best way to understand the nature of Jesus' miracles is to look at the Gospel of John. There are many other miracles that Jesus performs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but the ones in John represent most of the broad types of miracles that Jesus performs.⁵ Because there

³ Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 179: "God as the *primary cause* is active in bringing about all the events in the world, both ordinary events and extraordinary ones. But in the case of ordinary events he works in conjunction with *secondary causes*."

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 86: "God is always the first cause, but there are truly second causes; and they are the means which God uses, in the ordinary course of the world, for the accomplishment of His ends. It is the exclusion of such second causes which makes an event a miracle."

⁵ The only type of miracle we don't see in John is exorcism, the driving out of demons/unclean spirits. For a chart of the miracles Jesus performs, see https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/miracles_of_jesus_chart.htm.

are several miracles to consider, I'll do some paraphrasing and summarizing as well as reading some Scripture.

The first miracle described in the Gospel of John is found in chapter 2. Mary, Jesus, and some of his disciples are at a wedding at a place called Cana, several miles north of his hometown of Nazareth. This is what we read in John 2:3–5:

³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Weddings were community affairs in those days, and they might last for multiple days. Running out of wine was an embarrassment. Apparently, Mary knew that Jesus could fix this situation. But strangely, Jesus tells Mary that his hour has not yet come. If you're familiar with John's Gospel, you know that Jesus' "hour" is a reference to his death. For some reason, he links making wine with his death. That may seem like an odd detail, but we have to read what happens next. Here are verses 6–11:

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

In Judaism, there was a great stress on purification and cleanliness. The idea is that uncleanness, or impurification, is related to sin. We are unclean and need to be made clean. Jesus contrasts the old way of purification with what he is going to do in his death. The six jars of water for purification represent that old way. Seven is a number of perfection or completion in biblical thought, so six is something that is incomplete, imperfect. Jesus contrasts that with what he miraculously makes: wine out of water. It's impossible for water to become wine. No amount of time can make this happen. You need grape juice, some fermenting agent and time. But Jesus makes water into wine, and it is superior to the wine that was served earlier.

This isn't a nifty party trick. John calls it a sign. What is it a sign of? Well, it's a sign that whatever Jesus is going to do at his "hour" is better than the old ways of Judaism. He will purify

people through his death. And eventually he will bring about an age of feasting. That's what the Bible says will happen in the end. When Jesus returns, a new creation will be made, and it is sometimes described as a great feast, one with the best of meats and wines, where there will be no death (Isa. 25:6–9). In Amos 9, we're told that "the mountains will drip sweet wine" and that people will plant vineyards (Amos 9:13–14). Jesus will bring about this new creation eventually.

So, the miracle is a sign pointing to a greater reality. Jesus didn't need to perform the miracle. There are worse things than having an embarrassing wedding reception. It wasn't an emergency. But what he did was a clue about what he would do in the end.

The next sign comes at the end of John 4. This is John 4:46–54:

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

There are at least three interesting things to point out there. One, Jesus performs a healing miracle. A boy is near death, and Jesus heals him. Second, Jesus does this without even seeing the boy, let alone touching him. He simply says, "your son will live," and the boy is better. Third, this "sign and wonder" leads the father to faith. He and his household come to believe in Jesus because they understand that he has the power of healing.

This miracle is a sign that Jesus has great power and he came to heal. He is the Great Physician. This doesn't mean that all who have faith in Jesus will become healthy in this life. Even if Jesus miraculously healed us when we get sick, we would all get sick and die at some point. At least, that's what's happened to humans for thousands of years, and to Christians for nearly two thousand years. But Jesus does heal us in the end. In the new creation, there will be no sickness and death.

We get another picture of Jesus' healing powers in the next passage. Look at John 5:2–15:

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’ ” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’ ” ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

There was a place in Jerusalem called Bethesda, a pool where the blind, lame, and paralyzed hung about. Apparently, there was some kind of superstitious belief that when the waters were stirred, perhaps when waters rushed into the pool from nearby springs, people could be healed. And by the pool is a man who couldn't walk, who had been in that condition for thirty-eight years. If the pool really healed, you would think that this man would have been healed in those thirty-eight years. After asking the man if he wants to be healed, Jesus simply commands him to get up and walk, and he did.

We're also told that this was the Sabbath, a day of rest and a day when no work was supposed to be done. The fact that Jesus would dare heal on the Sabbath ruffled the feathers of the religious leaders. But Jesus knew what he was doing. He could have come back to heal the man the next day, but he intentionally heals him on the Sabbath. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says that he is “lord of the Sabbath” (Mat. 12:8). That's a bold claim, perhaps a subtle indication that he is God. After this passage, Jesus will liken himself to God the Father, saying that God always works, even on Sabbath days, and that he does the work that his Father does (John 5:17). The religious leaders knew what Jesus was doing, making himself equal to God, so they plotted to kill him (John 5:18).

So, this miracle is a sign of Jesus' divinity. But notice something else. Jesus tells the man to go and sin no more. He's implying that there's a connection between this man's sin and his former physical condition. The reason why there's sickness, disease, injuries, and death in the

world is because of sin. We are all guilty of failing to love, trust, and obey God as we should. This man was likely no more of a sinner than anyone else. But Jesus was indicating that his true mission was not to heal all disease, but rather to heal us of what truly ails us, our sin-sickness. He came to take away our sin and guilt, to make us clean. That's why there are times in the other Gospels when Jesus heals a person and tells that person that he is clean (Matt. 8:1–4). Sin makes us unclean and sick; Jesus cleans and heals.

The next sign that occurs is in John 6:5–13. I'll summarize this one quickly. Jesus has been drawing large crowds because of his authoritative teaching and his miracles. When a large crowd has appeared and they are hungry, Jesus miraculously takes five loaves of bread and two fish and feeds thousands of people—five thousand men at the least. Everyone ate “as much as they wanted,” and then Jesus told his disciples to gather the leftovers “that nothing may be lost.” They collect twelve baskets full of leftovers. Twelve represents the tribes of Israel, as well as the number of the apostles. Jesus came so that none of his people would be lost. But he comes to feed, to sustain life, to give us more than just our daily bread. He gives us bread that will satisfy. This is highly metaphorical. He means that he will give us a spiritual food, something that will keep us living beyond another day. In John 6:27 he says, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” A few verses later he says that the bread of God comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (verse 33). The people ask for that bread, and Jesus says that he is the bread of life (verse 35). All who come to “feed” on Jesus, who hunger for him and trust that he will meet all their needs, will have eternal life.

But even before Jesus says those things, Jesus performs another miracle, in John 6:16–21:

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Jesus' disciples had set sail on the Sea of Galilee, and they're miles away from shore. They had gone without Jesus, and yet in the midst of the dark, he approaches them by walking on water. This may be a fulfillment of some Old Testament passages that speak of God treading on water or making a way through water (Job 9:8; Isa. 43:16). Bringing them safely to harbor might be

another fulfillment of a verse in Psalm 107 (Ps. 107:30). In other places in the Gospels, Jesus commands a storm to be still, certainly fulfilling what we find in Psalm 107:23–32. This shows that Jesus has power of nature, which indicates that he is divine. Even his “I am he” response might be a way of identifying himself as the God of Israel, for that it is a term that God used of himself (cf. Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:18–19; 46:4; 48:12). Again, this miracle isn’t a nifty trick, Jesus simply showing off his superpowers. No, he is showing his disciples that is God, and that he has control over nature.

There’s yet another miracle in John 9. This is John 9:1–7:

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Jesus is with his disciples and they pass a man who had been born blind. The disciples, knowing that things like blindness are due to sin in the world, assume that this man was being punished for his sins or perhaps the sins of his parents. Jesus says that this isn’t the case. This man is blind because it gives God to display his works through Jesus, who calls himself the light of the world. He then heals the man in an odd way, making mud with dirt and spit. Why does Jesus do this? He doesn’t need to do it, for we have already seen that he can heal with just a word. Perhaps there’s a call back to Genesis 2:7, where we’re told that God made man out of the dust. Perhaps it indicates that Jesus can raise us from the muck, that he can use the most common elements to bring about something great. But at any rate, he heals the man, causing him to see.

When the Jewish leaders hear about this, they are upset. They interrogate the blind man and his parents. They can’t believe he was actually born blind and then Jesus healed him. There’s irony here. Though they are physically sighted, they can’t see who Jesus is. Jesus gives sight to the blind. On very rare cases, he did that physically. But he does that spiritually to countless people.

Some people may wonder why Jesus didn’t do more miracles. They may wonder why he didn’t put an end to all diseases and death the first time around. Christopher Hitchens, a famous

British atheist or, as he would put it, anti-theist, once asked, “If Jesus could heal a blind person he happened to meet, then why not heal blindness?”⁶ But that wasn’t Jesus’ mission. He healed a blind person to communicate a deeper truth: we are spiritually blind, and we need Jesus to enable us to see the truth. He won’t heal all blindness until he returns to bring about that new creation. But when he returns, it will be a time of salvation for his people and a time of judgment for those who don’t believe in him. Jesus can’t put an end to all diseases and death until he puts an end to sin. And that means he must put an end to sinners. But he hasn’t come back because God wants more people to repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

The next miracle comes in John 11. Jesus hears that his friend, Lazarus, is dying. But Jesus says, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4). Then Jesus intentionally waits to go to Lazarus. He could have healed Lazarus with a word, or he could have come sooner to Lazarus, but he waits, and when he arrives, Lazarus has already died. We read this in John 11:17–27:

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

It’s clear that John wants us to see that Jesus could have come sooner, that he could have healed Lazarus before he died. But Jesus waits until Lazarus dies so that he can raise him from the dead. This is a sign that Jesus will raise the dead when he comes again, and it’s also an event that foreshadows the last miracle that appears in John’s Gospel. But when Jesus says Lazarus will rise, Martha, Lazarus’s sister, assumes that he is talking about an end-time resurrection. She’s saying, “Oh, I know that in the end the dead will be raised.” But Jesus says something

⁶ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 3.

more: He says that he is the resurrection and the life. He is the one who brings about new life and resurrected life. Those who believe in him will die in this life, but they will be raised again.

When Jesus sees that Mary, Lazarus's other sister, is weeping, he weeps, too. Even though he could have come sooner, that doesn't mean he was uncaring. It was God's plan for Lazarus to die, so that Jesus could raise him, something which would glorify God, indicate Jesus has the power to raise the dead, and bolster the faith of his followers. But he lamented that Lazarus had to die, and he weeps.

Then, we read the end of this account in John 11:38–44:

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

With a cry, Lazarus is commanded to come out of the tomb, and he does. Jesus commands a dead man to live, and it is so. This is a picture of what will happen when Jesus comes again (see John 5:25–29).

There is one more miracle in John's Gospel. And like the raising of Lazarus back to life, this miracle first required a death. This time, it was the death of Jesus. Unbelieving religious leaders wanted Jesus to die because they challenged the status quo, and because they wrongly thought he was blaspheming God when he made himself out to be equal to God. Jesus' own disciple, Judas, betrayed him for money. Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor, knew that Jesus didn't deserve the death penalty yet had him killed in order to keep the peace in Jerusalem and to save face. Satan, the devil, led Judas to betray Jesus and was ultimately behind the religious leaders' hatred of Jesus. But it was God's plan for Jesus to die, not only so that he could be raised from the dead on the third day, in a body that can never die, but so that his death could purify all who come to faith in him.

The Bible makes it clear that sin brings about death, and that sinners deserve the death penalty. A king has every right to crush rebels, and the King of kings has every right to condemn

those who don't love him and live according to his terms. But God sent his Son to die in our place, taking the condemnation that we deserve. But Jesus rose from the grave in a body that can never die, showing that he paid the penalty in full, and that all who are united to him by faith will rise when he returns. They, too, will have bodies that are indestructible and immortal.

One of Jesus' followers, Thomas, couldn't believe that Jesus rose from the grave. But when he saw Jesus alive again, he said, "My Lord and my God!" And then Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:28–29). So, my question for you all is simply this: do you believe? Do you trust that Jesus performed these miracles to show who he is? Do you trust the Bible? If so, you can have faith that whatever you go through in this life, there is a better life coming. Someday, God's people will be in a world with no blindness, no diseases, no hunger, and no death. But we're not there yet. We live in a world that is broken because of the presence of sin in it. That means we have to hang on in faith while we struggle in this life. God doesn't promise he'll step in and perform miracles to help us out of all of our difficulties. If you're familiar with Paul's life, you know that's true. But God promises his people something greater. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26). Do you?