



Seven signs from the Gospel of John

Jesus heals a disabled man JOHN 5:1-15



That you might believe
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We're making our way through the seven miraculous signs that Jesus performed, and John recorded in his Gospel: Signs that reveal the character and the compassion and the power of Jesus Christ. And we've arrived at the third, where Jesus healed a disabled man. A man who had been unable to walk for 38 years was instantaneously healed!

But I am conscious as we make our way through these miracles, that I am preaching to a Western audience who have been deeply influenced by anti-supernatural philosophies, that our culture is deeply sceptical of miracles.

And Christians living in the West can feel intimidated by those views, and we may be tempted to *tone down* – or even to *deny* - the supernatural aspects of our faith, as the liberal churches did many decades ago. But this would be a catastrophic mistake, because Christianity is founded upon a miracle—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And because conversion to Christ is miraculous! God gives us a new “heart” by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit

So to deny the miraculous would be to betray the Gospel itself.

Bearing that in mind let's spend a few minutes on that issue!

#1 How can we believe in miracles today?

According to the BBC, more than half of the UK population, some 62%, believe that miracles can happen, and that percentage rises to 75% for young people between the age of 18-24. Remarkable!

Since most people in the UK believe in miracles, why do we need to defend them? Well, because there are loud voices - especially in our schools, colleges, universities and the media—who deny the miraculous and are dedicated to their materialistic outlook.

Let's remember four truths about miracles, I can only sketch them out:

(i) Scepticism is a minority view in the world

Proud westerners may believe that the whole world thinks like they do—or should think like they do - but they don't!! Only about 16% of the world say they are not affiliated to any religion, 84% of the world says they are religious—and almost all religions believe in the supernatural.

(ii) The western view that miracles can't happen is without any proof

A bloke by the name of David Hume said that miracles violate the natural laws of nature we experience every day, so miracles can't happen—and his view has spread across the West, but Hume is way out of date. The laws of nature are **the normal way** God runs his universe (you can't *normally* walk on water, you'll fall through the surface) but there is no reason to believe that in the instant of a miracle God can't run his universe in one location by a completely different set of laws (in that part of the lake of Galilee for one moment, you **can** walk on water.) Miracles aren't breaking any law of nature, miracles are the Creator who made them in the first place using a different set for a moment, just as he chooses to.

There is not a single line or equation or theory in all of science which denies the possibility of miracles. People are unaware of this, but it is true.

(iii) Many miracles in the New Testament were signs, that is true...

You see some Christians don't expect miracles today because they say that the miracles in the New Testament were special signs which we should not expect today. It is true that many of the miracles were signs. Many of the miracles *Jesus performed* were signs - meant to reveal his power, his compassion, and so on. And the *miracles the apostles performed* were sometimes proofs that Jesus had appointed them and given them his authority; Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 12:12.

But there is no evidence to suggest that *all the miracles* of the New Testament were signs and that miracles came to an end with the close of the New Testament!

It is true, that today, God is often pleased to heal through doctors and medicine, but we are surely wrong to limit the supernatural power of God by saying that the age of miracles is over!

"Is any one of you sick? (writes James) He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well." (James 5:13-15)

God can heal today! Sometimes we are put off by those Television money-grabbing fraudsters, but error should not put us off truth, for God is able to perform miracles today. And as if to confirm this...

(iv) ...Hundreds of millions of Christians around the world believe in miracles

For this series of sermons I have been making my way through two hefty books about the miracles of the NT where I read this sentence: *"Hundreds of millions of people worldwide claim to have experienced or witnessed what they believe are miracles."* (page 262)

The author, Craig Keener is talking about Christians all around the world who have experienced a miracle.

Summary

Well, I hope those few words about miracles are helpful to someone listening today.

#2 Jesus heals a disabled man

Let's now turn to this true account of Jesus healing a disabled man in John chapter 5. By the way, just over 100 years ago, archaeologists excavating in Jerusalem found the pool mentioned in John 5. Picture the scene, a great number of sick people gathered around this pool, some blind, some lame, some paralysed, all waiting to be healed.

There was a widespread belief that ever-so-often an angel stirred the waters of the pool. And when this happened, the first person to get into the water would be healed. (This must have been true or surely "a great

number” of sick people would not gather there every day. Some people must have been healed in those waters.) And among all the sick people gathered around the pool there was one man who had been unable to walk for 38 years.

Our hearts must go out to him for the long duration of his illness! 38 long winters and 38 weary summers of his life had come and gone, with no change in his plight. And think of the dependency his illness would have placed upon his family. Without social security, and mechanical aids, he would have been unable to work and would have to depend entirely on his family. And after 38 years, is it not possible that he would have felt himself a burden on them? And on top of his condition he is completely alone! He has no-one to help him into the pool! Had 38 long years exhausted the sympathy of friends and family? After all, it is one thing to wait by the side of family member or friend every day for a year or two, it’s quite another to wait by the side of someone all day long, for almost 14000 days!

Into this tragic scene walks Jesus.

And out of all the sick people around the pool, Jesus approaches this one man. (Perhaps, when he learnt how many years the man had been unable to walk, Jesus had special compassion on him.)

Jesus comes up to him and asks *“Do you want to get well?”* Jesus knows that the answer is “yes” - that’s the reason the man has come to the pool of Bethesda today - Jesus asked the question to test whether this man knows who is speaking to him. Does he know that the One speaking to him can make him whole? Has he heard about Jesus Christ, the Son of God who can heal the sick and open the eyes of the blind and save us from our sins?

Will the disabled man say “Yes, I want to get better and I know **YOU** can heal me, please heal me?” That’s why Jesus asked the question!

But the rest of the story reveals that this man had never heard of Jesus and his hope was not in the power of Jesus but in the power of the pool: *“Sir, I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”* (Pause)

There are many people in our world even today who have never heard the name of Jesus! Who have never heard of his grace and love and compassion. May the Lord kindle – or perhaps rekindle - our desire to tell others the Good News about Jesus! During the first 300 years of the Christian church there were no missionary societies or missionary movements; instead every local church was a mission station and every Christian was a witness. Oh that the Lord would revive our love for those who, like this man, have never heard the name of Jesus!

What does Jesus do? He tells the disabled man to do the impossible! *“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”* And what happens? *“At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.”*

What an amazing miracle! Not only was his body repaired in an instant, his muscles were rebuilt so that he had the strength to walk! And think of the life-transforming consequences of this miracle: he could now go home, he could work, he could visit friends and relatives, he could go to the temple for worship and fellowship once more! This was a day for rejoicing, a day to remember, a new-life day!

But not everyone saw it that way! Because this man was carrying away his mat on the Jewish **Sabbath**, the religious leaders, whose hearts were as cold as ice and hard as flint, said to him, *“It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”* (The religious leaders had made up these petty little laws about what you could and could not do on the Sabbath which were not in the Bible, and this man was breaking one of them)

The man told them about his amazing healing: *“The man who made me well (I’ve just been healed in other words!!!) he said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walked.’”* The religious leaders should have rejoiced when they heard about this man’s life-changing healing! But instead all they cared about was their petty religious laws! *“Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”*

Religion without any compassion is such a curse!

The man had no idea who had healed him so he couldn't give the religious leaders an answer!

A little later, Jesus met him in the temple and said to him: *“See you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”*

Sometimes illness is the direct result of personal sin, we know that from 1 Corinthians 11:30 and other passages of Scripture, but I don’t believe that’s what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying to this man “I have healed your body, but you have a soul which needs healing too. And if your soul is not healed, if your sins are not forgiven, then you will suffer a far greater tragedy than lameness, you will suffer the fires of God’s eternal and righteous wrath in hell.”

“Stop sinning” – repent of your sins – “or something worse (hell) may happen to you.”

You see, Jesus came into the world to deliver our souls from hell more than to heal our bodies of illness. And to receive the salvation of our souls from hell we must repent of our sins and turn away from our wrongdoing.

That is a word for every sick person and every well person who has tuned in today! There are only two destinations beyond the grave, heaven or hell. And if are to gain heaven and avoid hell, we must (i) believe in Jesus Christ who came into the world to take away our sins, to pay for our sins, to die for our sins, and we must (ii) repent of our sins, turn away from them, be done with them.

“Stop sinning” Jesus says to him, “Repent”, or something worse, (something far worse than any disability) may happen to you.”

#3 The healing power of Jesus today

And this is where we must conclude this morning. This miracle points beyond the power of Jesus to heal our bodies to his power to heal our souls.

Can Jesus heal today?

Of course he can! Some of you listening will have witnessed miracles yourselves. The two books I mentioned earlier are filled with many examples of modern day miracles from around the world:

- From the Philippines, 33 year old Len Mina had a congenital heart disease that left her breathless with even a short walk, she and her husband prayed together and she was healed. (page 271)
- From China, 21 year old Zhao Su’e was given six months to live after a cancer diagnosis. She was prayed for and she was completely healed. (page 299)
- From Nigeria, a woman who could only be saved through a heart transplant was prayed for, she was prayed for and instantly she was healed, page 325
- And from Chile, Margarita Campos fell into a coma. The doctors warned that either she would never come out of it, or if she did she would be bedridden for the rest of her life. Her church prayed for her and she was healed, and her doctors who were not believers said to her, *“You must have good connections up there because you were supposed to be dead.”* (page 355)

We've grown so sceptical in the West that we scarcely believe Jesus has healing power. But I believe those stories! And I believe Jesus can heal today! If we want healing, we should pray, and as the Scriptures instruct in James chapter 5, we should call our elders and ask them to pray for us.....

It is not always his will, examples

... remembering that it is not always God's will to heal us. Paul prayed three times for some serious ailment to go away but the Lord told them that the illness had been allowed by God to keep him humble.

Pray, but be prepared should the Lord in his loving wisdom say "no" and submit to his will.

The greatest healing

And remember, let us always remember, that the greatest healing Jesus performs today, the greatest miracle he accomplishes in our lives is not healing of the body, but healing for the soul.

Jesus came into the world to bear away our sins, to take them away, to pay for them, so that our souls might live forever in heaven, rather than die for eternity in hell. If our souls have been healed, we have the greater and eternal healing!

The Lord Jesus does not promise to heal our bodies, but he does promise to heal our souls if we come to him and believe in his Son and turn away from our sins:

*"whoever believes in Jesus Christ **will not perish but have everlasting life.**" (John 3:16)*

Let's close with a hymn written by John Newton, a man who believed in Jesus Christ, turned away from his sin and experienced the amazing grace of God, *Amazing grace , How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.*