

The Miracle Next-Door

R. David Pogge
27 November 2011

Part 1

We were just about to go to bed when my wife noticed red and blue lights dancing all over our living room wall. When we looked out the front window we saw a fire engine and an ambulance parked in front of our house, and two police cars parked in front of our next-door neighbor's house. All four emergency vehicles had their lights flashing. We didn't know it, but a miracle had just happened right next door. We will talk with the person involved in that miracle a little bit later in this broadcast.

But before we do, let's talk about miracles. Miracles don't happen every day. If they did, they wouldn't be miracles. Miracles happen when God temporarily suspends natural laws and does something amazing.

Perhaps the most spectacular miracle is when someone is raised from the dead. This happened on rare occasions in Old Testament times. The first account is found in 2 Kings Chapter 4, verses 8 through 37.

One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

"What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old."

Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

"No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!"

But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. "My head! My head!" he said to his father.

His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”

“Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.”

“It’s all right,” she said.

She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite! Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’”

“Everything is all right,” she said.

When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why.”

“Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’”

Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”

But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her.

Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

It was a miracle that the boy was born in the first place, and a miracle that he was resurrected. Elisha clearly had the power to work miracles; but we should be careful to note that it was actually God who had the power, not Elisha. God worked through Elisha, even when Elisha was dead, as we see in 2 Kings 13:20-21.

Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

Elisha did not resurrect everyone who died, and, as far as we know, Elisha's bones did not resurrect anyone else. God only works miracles on special occasions for particular reasons. We can only guess the reasons, and we should be cautious because we might guess wrong.

Perhaps God raised the Shunammite woman's son to show He rewards the faith of those who believe in the resurrection. Miracles are usually associated with faith. The Shunammite woman certainly had great faith. Twice, while she was on her way to see Elisha she was asked if anything was wrong. She said, "It's all right," because she was sure Elisha would raise her son back to life. She asked for a miracle, expecting to receive it because she had great faith.

But sometimes, it appears that God works miracles because people don't have enough faith and need more. Perhaps God used Elisha's bones to raise that dead Israelite to show that God was still with the Israelites even though he was allowing the Moabites to raid the country.

We can't be sure we really know why God worked these miracles. God's motivations often exceed our understanding. We can only be sure that He can, and does, work miracles on occasions.

In New Testament times, people were occasionally raised from the dead. You have probably heard the story (told in Mark chapter 5 and Luke chapter 8) of how Jesus raised Jairus' daughter. And John chapter 11 tells how Jesus raised Lazarus. Although Jesus clearly had the power to raise people from the dead, Jesus did not resurrect everyone who died. He allowed John the Baptist to be executed, and did not resurrect him after he was.

Why didn't Jesus resurrect John the Baptist? Probably because the time wasn't right. Jesus will resurrect John at the same time as He resurrects all the believers. It doesn't matter to John how long he sleeps in the grave. Given the choice, John would probably choose to sleep until the resurrection than to come back to life a few days after he died and have to deal with Herod some more.

On one occasion, God used Paul to raise someone from the dead. The story is told in Acts, chapter 20, verses 7 through 12.

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

The first day of the week, according to Jewish reckoning, begins at sunset, Saturday night. So, after celebrating the Sabbath with the Christians at Troas, Paul ate with them at sunset and then started a very long sermon, lasting until sunrise Sunday morning, at which time he left them. This was hundreds of years before the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday, so there was no Sunday morning service for Paul to attend. Furthermore, Paul would not sin by traveling on Sabbath, so Paul kept the Sabbath on Saturday, preached from sundown Saturday until sunrise Sunday, and began his trip on Sunday morning.

From time to time, people have been known to fall asleep during a long sermon. This was one of those times. It is bad enough if you fall asleep in the pew, and start snoring; but Eutychus wasn't sitting in a pew; he was sitting on a third story window sill. When he fell asleep, he fell out the window. Verse 9 clearly says that the fall killed him. He was not just unconscious. He was dead. But Paul raised him to life.

Why did God use Paul to raise Eutychus? Again, we can only guess. Perhaps God wanted to validate Paul's ministry one last time before he left Troas so that the congregation would remain firm in the faith after Paul left.

Even if that is true, we should point out that God prefers that we believe because of His word, rather than because of His miracles. John, chapter 20, ends with this story about doubting Thomas.

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John doesn't tell us what the many other miraculous signs were. It should be enough for us to know that miracles were performed without having to witness them ourselves, or be told what they were.

Jesus wants us to make a rational, logical choice to follow Him. He doesn't want us to make a hasty, emotional decision based on a miracle. He would have preferred that Thomas had believed because of the testimony of the other disciples. But, since he didn't, Jesus miraculously appeared to him.

In John, chapter 7, verses 2 and 3 we read:

Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."

The subsequent verses tell us that Jesus did go to Jerusalem, but when He got there, He didn't wow the crowd with miracles. Instead, He taught in the temple. He wanted people to believe Him because of what He said, not because He blew their minds with a miracle.

In Mathew 24:24 Jesus warned against basing your belief on miracles, especially in the last days.

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.

Miracles are proof that supernatural agencies are at work; but that supernatural agent might not be Jesus. False Christs will work miracles to make them appear to be God's agents just to lead people astray. That's why you have to check their teaching against revealed truth in the Bible.

Another reason why miracles are not sufficient grounds for faith is the fact that even though Jesus did do genuine miracles, the religious leaders of His day were not impressed by them. John chapter 10, verses 22 through 42 say:

Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." And in that place many believed in Jesus.

Miracles are God's weapon of last resort. God wants us to believe based on the truth of His word. He validates His word with miracles; but he realizes that people who won't believe the Word won't believe the miracles, either. The fact that He did miracles, and some people still didn't believe Him, simply goes to show that there is nothing He can do to convince those people who steadfastly refuse to believe.

People who don't want to believe will find reasons not to believe, no matter how impressive a miracle God performs. People who do believe, see God working many miracles that non-believers don't even recognize. This brings us to the testimony we are going to hear about the miracle next-door, right after Erica Robinson sings, "Because He Lives," accompanied by JoAn Witzel.

[music – Because He Lives]

Part 2

[Morgan Whiteley tells how she was impressed to check on a neighbor's home, only to find a woman who didn't know she was pregnant had just given birth to a premature baby and left it in the toilet. – File TWWU111127b.mp3]

Part 3

Let's be clear about this: Morgan did not resurrect a baby girl from the dead. She was not breathing when Morgan found her; but she wasn't dead—yet. The baby's mother was so shocked, dazed, and confused, that she left her premature baby in the toilet. The baby certainly would have died in the toilet had not Morgan been there. Morgan saved her life just in time—she didn't resurrect her.

Morgan had no good reason to go to my neighbor's house, or to stay there once she got there. She just had a feeling she should go, and she obeyed that feeling. Her cell phone battery was essentially dead, but somehow it lasted just long enough for Morgan to call 911.

Atheists will say that it was just a lucky coincidence. They won't believe the big, impressive miracles in the Bible because they are just too big to believe. They won't believe the little miracles that happen every day because they are small enough to be explained by luck. Miracles, large or small, probably won't convince a skeptic.

We began the broadcast by defining a miracle to be the result of God suspending natural laws in order to accomplish a goal. That definition might be too restrictive because there are many natural processes that could be considered miracles. There is nothing supernatural about a seed sprouting and growing into a mature plant that produces fruit; but when you think about it, it really is amazing. It is a miracle that happens so often we don't consider it to be miraculous.

We Christians see the hand of God in so many things that happen every day. We don't base our faith on miracles; but we appreciate the miracles because they confirm our faith.

A miracle is one of the ways used by God to bless Christians. When you dedicate your life to Christ, you can expect blessings. You can expect miracles. You won't be disappointed.

Let's close our broadcast now as Erica and JoAn remind us of some of the miracles that happen all around us, every day.

[music – It Took a Miracle]