

## THE TRUTH ABOUT MIRACLES

Have you ever prayed for a 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 the traffic light stay green! Or Jesus, please help me ace this test! Or, God, please let our team win! Is there anyone in this room today who has ever prayed for that kind of miracle? Author Jay Kesler says that shortly 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 everyone was okay, he stood in the ditch and prayed, "Dear God, I pray this didn't happen." He opened his eyes and saw the car was still wrecked, so he closed his eyes, squinted real hard, and prayed again, "Dear God, it didn't happen." Then he opened his eyes, but, he said, it happened anyway.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever asked God to move Heaven and Earth over something trivial, something impossible, something absurd? "O Lord, please don't let it rain on my daughter's wedding," (Ignoring the fact that there are others who are depending on rain for their wellbeing.) "Lord, please let the answer to question 8 be four hundred years." (Do we really expect God to change history so that we can pass an exam?). "Oh, God, please let mine be the lowest bid." (Yes, Lord, take your heavenly eraser and blot out everyone's bid and make them higher than mine.)

Have you ever asked God to repeal the laws of gravity, undo the past, change weather patterns or something equally as absurd just for your convenience? I suspect we all have at sometime of another. So we can appreciate our lesson from today's Gospel. Jesus is making his first public appearance after his baptism. It is at a wedding. That's interesting. Weddings represent God's unity with His Church. They are a sacred act, involving a holy covenant. Also they are times of great joy and celebration. But there is a problem at this particular wedding. They are running out of wine. For the Jews, wine represented life and abundance. It was an integral part of any celebration especially a wedding. No more wine meant no more party.

What's interesting is that Jesus' mother Mary asks him to intervene. Then she turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you to do." We can't even imagine what she expected. It wasn't like he could whip out his cell phone, get the wine merchant on the line, and ask him to send down more wine. Was she asking Jesus to do the impossible? Jesus initially resists Mary's request. It could be that he didn't want to dole out miracles like party favors, for the convenience of those around him. Jesus used his miracles to prove his identity, to profoundly affect people's lives, or to further his ministry not to be someone's errand boy.

My guess is that this is the problem with many of our requests to God: WE ASK GOD TO DO THE TRIVIAL OR THE IMPOSSIBLE OR THE UNNECESSARY. When we do that we treat God like our servant and not our sovereign. When a young athlete comes off the field and says, "God gave us the victory tonight," I hope he is saying, "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 to always be at my best." If that is what these young athletes are saying, then I want to say, "You are absolutely right. Thank God for all God's gifts."

God is not our personal weather expert, football strategist, romance matchmaker, or rectifier of our past mistakes. God is God. God is our Sovereign, not our servant. It is we who are to bring our actions into conformance with God's will, not God who is to bring his actions into conformance with our will. It is very human when something is very important to us to assume it is also very important to God like making sure our teams win. But when we compare it to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the troubles in North Korea and Iran, then even the most theologically challenged of us must realize the absurdity of our request. Miracles are not designed for the trivial, the impossible, or the unnecessary.

HAVING SAID THAT, HOWEVER, WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT MIRACLES DO OCCUR. Jesus resisted Mary's request at first, but he was a good son and he finally did obey her wishes. 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 to the wine steward. The wine steward was impressed. He didn't know where this new wine came from, but it was better than the wine served first. Jesus had performed his first miracle. He turned water into wine. Miracles do occur.

MIRACLES HAPPEN, BUT THEY HAPPEN FOR A SPECIFIC REASON; TO BUILD OUR FAITH. God is real! And nobody can take that away from us. The secret of the miracle at the wedding in Cana is found in the words of the eleventh verse: "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. Jesus wanted to build the faith of his disciples. He wanted to make sure that they knew who he was. 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 Heaven seems to be silent, it is because God's plan is bigger and better than we can see at the moment. But somewhere along the way God gives us experiences that build our faith that serve as watersheds along our life's journey. God gives us these events whether they are miracles or mountaintop 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 God is with me now."

Miracles happen, but they 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, in spite of all the time you have spent on your knees, remember this isn't what miracles are all about anyway. Miracles are about helping us trust God. Miracles are about knowing that God has been with me before and he is with me now and for evermore. Amen.