

Joshua 5:9-12

Hampton Baptist

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“From Miracle to Miracle”

I’m not sure why some people choose *not* to believe in miracles, or seek ways to discount them, but it happens regularly. A duck hunter bought a new beautiful retriever, which was guaranteed to be the best retriever anyone had ever seen. He couldn't wait to show off his new dog to his buddies. And then he couldn't *say* enough *about* his dog. All through the trip down to the camp, and all evening long, he talked nonstop about his dog, and how good it was going to be.

Opening day came. The hunters were all sitting in the duck blind early in the morning. The owner of the new dog was filled with excited anticipation. The dog sat next to him, ready. A flock of ducks flew over; the dog began to tremble in excitement and anticipation. A shotgun fired. At a signal from his owner, the dog took off after the duck like a streak of lightning. It jumped *out* of the blind, *over* the cover, and *onto* the water. That's right, it didn't *swim*; it ran right across the water and retrieved the duck. They couldn't believe it; everybody was incredibly amazed.

This went on a couple more times. A duck would be shot, and the dog would run across the water and retrieve the duck without ever getting its feet wet. The owner was beaming. If he had grinned anymore, his face would have split in two. He couldn't stand it. "So what do y'all think? What do you think of my new dog?"

One of the guys who was tired of hearing how wonderful this dog was, said, "Well, he's good looking all right. But I don't know if I'd want a dog like that or not. The sorry critter can't even swim."

Miracle. Random House defines it as, “an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause.” (www.dictionary.com)

Perhaps in our *sophisticated* society, the word “miracle” has lost some of its luster. A movie, which is still popular today although it was filmed in 1947, was entitled *Miracle on 34th Street*. Some people do not like mayonnaise but prefer another sandwich spread called “Miracle Whip.” In a few weeks, many of you will purchase “Miracle Grow,” a fertilizer which does wonders for plants and vegetables. A movie, simply called “Miracle,” chronicles the gold medal victory for the US Hockey Team over the USSR in 1980.

Some consider miracles only to be found in the Bible, yet we use the term with such frequency that we may not even realize it. When cures become available for terminal diseases, we call them “miracle drugs.” When I witnessed the births of both of my children, I declared, “Childbirth is a miracle.” Many scientific minds who cling to Sir Isaac Newton’s theory, “To every action, there is always an equal and opposite reaction” seek to explain everything that happens. For me, I am less interested in understanding *how* the miracle happened than I am in accepting that God caused another miracle. “Effects or extraordinary events in the physical world that surpass all known human or natural powers and are ascribed to a supernatural cause” occur every day; miracles happen...even in 2010. I believe that miracles happened as recorded in Scripture, and I believe that God continues to intervene today. Perhaps what we call *miracles* are simply *occurrences* for God. Miracles abound; to witness and acknowledge them, all we have to do is open our eyes...and our minds.

In our Old Testament Lesson, the people of Israel had miraculously entered the Promised Land. The departure from Egyptian slavery was extraordinary. Numerous events during the next 40 years in the wilderness could be classified as miraculous. Crossing the Reed Sea and also the Jordan River on dry ground was unbelievable and then settling in this foreign land was phenomenal. From miracle to miracle.

Remembering their past, specifically the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The Passover had been observed only twice before; once when they went out of Egypt, and the other time was at Mount Sinai. For more than 40 years, they only observed this grand event on two occasions; to participate in the Passover, one must be circumcised (Exodus 12:48), which was not an option out in the wilderness. But now in their Promised Land, the rite of circumcision was re-established, and they gave thanks to God in celebration of their deliverance from Egypt. From miracle to miracle.

Throughout their forty-year wilderness wandering, God had rained manna from heaven as a daily provision of bread. Every day, they would have to gather enough for *that* day; the manna simply could not be frozen, because there were no freezers, and it could not be stored in barns, because it only possessed a one-day shelf-life. With Moses now gone, Joshua led them across the Jordan River, and they had been in the land long enough to plant gardens; no longer were they gleaning daily manna as they meandered through the wilderness. Now that they had settled, God was going to require more of them.

God had led them through the most dire of straights, but those days were now behind them. Wondering from where their next meal would come no longer occupied their thoughts. They planted gardens, and God continued to provide manna until their first harvest, but the manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land. There are goods and bads about that statement. The good news was that they were now more self-sufficient; the bad news was that they were now more self-sufficient. God provided the sunshine, and the rain for their crops to grow. Grain requires these basic elements whose origin rests with God, so they were still dependent upon God to make the plants grow. No tractors. No fancy machinery. Their food came because of *their* toil and *God's* grace.

In his book "From Beginning to End," noted author Robert Fulghum writes, "The ritual moments of life mark changes from moment to moment, day to day, year to year, and from one stage of being to another. The conscious acknowledgments of these changes are called rites of passage." (pp. 21-22) A rite of passage is a conscious acknowledgment made public, when the *internal* becomes *external*. Attention is paid to a *change*. The transitions in our text mark great significances and are rites of passage. The celebration of the Passover marked the end of one era in Israelite history and the beginning of another. Eating from their own gardens and the termination of manna certainly was a significant change. Moving from manna to matzo, God substituted one miracle for another, and both were equally marvelous. Rites of passage, noting the miracles in our lives, deserve responses of gratitude to the one who continues to provide miracle after miracle.

The Children of Israel were God's chosen people, but they were not chosen for *privilege*; instead, they were chosen for *service*. God wanted to use Israel so that the world would know God. They were *blessed* in order to be a *blessing*. Miracles abounded so that the Israelites could *act* as God's chosen people.

Many of us have experienced the miraculous. Some have received healing from a disease which the doctors indicated was incurable. Some have escaped harm at an accident when injury looked inevitable. Others have witnessed miracles in this fashion. An addiction which has shackled a

person for years finally is broken. The end of the dark night of the soul subsides after wondering if the shadows would ever dissipate. The fact that we are here is a miracle. I'm not saying that it is miraculous that you are at Hampton Baptist today, although maybe for someone that could be an unexplainable phenomenon. To consider the composition of our bodies, how we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and the intricateness of our own personal design is miraculous to me. God continues to choose *us*, which could be considered a miracle in itself. At our baptisms, our personal rites of passage, we noted the change in us, the miraculous, that we had accepted the wonderful grace of God. This regeneration, this new birth, also notes a miraculous change when we consider how that God will continue to mold us like a potter molds clay. Moving from *becoming* a Christian to *being* a Christian allows God to continue to do the miraculous.

We too have been *blessed to be* a blessing. Receiving the miraculous grace of God was never intended to be the only encounter with God. Our decision to follow Christ allows God to work through us as the Body of Christ.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the mission of the Incarnation became the *responsibility* of the Body of Christ. God came to earth in the form of a human to show more fully God's character. Now, the Body of Christ has the privilege of continuing that mission, to be the hands and feet of God in the world. From miracle to miracle.

The season of Lent leads to perhaps the greatest miracle of all-time, the resurrection of Jesus. Because of this, we know that we will never have a problem too big that God can't solve or a situation too complex that God can't unravel. The miracle of Incarnation led to the miracle of the resurrection. And because of that miracle, we have opportunity for God to do the *miraculous* through us.

We continue to have choices. We can choose to wander in our own wilderness and continue to eat routine manna, or we can choose to enter the Promised Land of hope which God has created for us and enjoy a variety of delectable delights. We can choose to try to take God out of the equation and deny the miraculous, or we can affirm how big God is that even circumstances bow to God's control. We can choose to live our lives with no compass and never reach our destination, or we can allow God to lead us to where we *need* to go. We can choose to believe that we are alright just like we are, or we can acknowledge that all of us are sinners in need of grace, that the miracle of Easter comes to us each time we allow God to do the miraculous. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; wiping our slate clean is also miraculous.

Especially during this Lenten Season, thanks be to God for allowing us to live from miracle to miracle. May we be encouraged to continue to be the body of Christ, allowing God to do the miraculous through us