

INTRODUCTION

When my daughter Jenni was young, I used to ask her on the way home from church what I had preached on that morning. That's really not a fair question for a child, because they might not really be paying attention. But Jenni has always been pretty smart and she soon figured out that all she had to say was, "Jesus" and it would be the right answer. She was correct, because if I didn't have Jesus in my message I was wasting everybody's time. From the time God called me to preach in 1970, I have loved preaching about Jesus from the four gospel accounts. Since I've been pastor here I have taught verse-by-verse through the gospel according to Mark (1993), John (1996), and Luke (2000). Today, we begin a study of the gospel according to Matthew, but I'm taking a little different approach. Rather than teach verse-by-verse through the narrative sections, I'm simply going to teach on every miracle and every parable recorded in Matthew. I'm calling the series, "Parables and Miracles: Experience the Timeless Principles and Transforming Power of Jesus."

As I studied Matthew this past summer, I discovered there are 88 parables and miracles in this wonderful book. This is going to be a real Jesus Journey, because it's going to take us a couple of years to study every one. Over the next couple of years, when you wake up on Sunday morning, you don't have to wonder what I'm speaking about; you'll hear a message focused on Jesus. It will be either the words of Jesus or the works of Jesus. These first messages will be about the miracles recorded in the first few chapters of Matthew.

The word "miracle" is thrown around a lot these days. There was a movie named "Miracle" about the 1980 gold medal U.S. Hockey team, and there was a movie released last year entitled, "The Miracle at St. Anna." You've probably seen the classic Christmas movie entitled, "Miracle on 34th Street." "It's a Miracle" was a hit song by Barry Manilow, as well as the name of a popular television show. There's a Children's Miracle Network, you can put Miracle Whip on your sandwich, Miracle-Gro on your plants, and if you're hard of hearing, there's a Miracle Ear for you.

Miracles seem to be commonplace today. But as we study the miracles of Jesus, we need to have an understanding of what a miracle really is. The classic definition of a miracle is: "A miracle is an interruption of the laws of nature which can only be explained by divine intervention."

There are some events that we call "miraculous" that may not be actual miracles. For instance, I was amazed that all 155 passengers survived when the US Airways flight landed on the Hudson River. It's being called the "Miracle on the Hudson." Passengers related when the captain said, "Prepare for impact" most people started praying. Some say the reason all the people survived was due to the skill of the pilot, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger. But maybe God did have His hands under those wings keeping the plane from sinking. We'll never really know whether it was a true miracle or not until we get to ask God.

But the miracles of Jesus are unquestionable displays of God's power. Each miracle was a verified interruption of the laws of nature. Let's start our Jesus Journey with Matthew 1:1. "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob..."

Now I won't read all these names, some of them are obscure, hard-to-pronounce names—but each one is important. Skip down to verse 16 and we'll see where the genealogy ends and learn what is amazing about this list.

Matthew 1:16-24. "And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ. This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means 'God with us.' When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Prepare to hear me say many times in this series that there is a parable in every miracle and a miracle in every parable. Every parable contains a miraculous divine insight, and there's a life-changing truth connected to every miracle. There are actually three miracles in this text and in each one we learn something that can change our lives.

1. The miracle of Jesus' genealogy assures us that God is in control

The most important thing about this genealogy is found in verse 17, "Thus were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ." What is the significance of this list? Let's look at it from three perspectives. First, what is the meaning of fourteen generations? We need to remember Matthew was a math geek. He was a former tax collector who was accustomed to writing down names and adding and multiplying numbers. He recognized fourteen is the product of two important numbers in Jewish thought, seven and two. Jewish gematria is the use of numbers to communicate deeper truth than simply counting. Seven is the number of perfection and two is the number for a witness. Testimony had to be established in the mouth of two or more witnesses. Matthew was pointing out that this genealogy was a perfect testimony that Jesus really was the Messiah. Three is the divine number, so these three sets of generations represent a thumbnail of the divine history of Israel. The first fourteen generations represents the age of the Patriarchs, the second set represents the age of the Kings, and the third represents the period of time after the Babylonian exile.

But we can look at this genealogy from another perspective. Why is it the genealogy of Joseph, who wasn't really the father of Jesus? In Luke 2 we have another genealogy that traces the

lineage of Jesus through Mary. *But why this list?* Even though Joseph wasn't the biological father of Jesus, he became the legal father of Jesus by adoption and all legal rights ran through the father, not the mother. This is a legal registry, which was very important to the Jewish people. During this time in which we're promoting Hope for 100, I came to realize for the first time that Jesus was an earthly adopted child. This legal genealogy connected Jesus to two of the greatest characters in the Old Testament, David and Abraham.

The third interesting thing about this list of names is to notice some of the people made the list who we might think weren't spiritually qualified. For instance, in verse 5, Rahab (who was once a prostitute) is mentioned. Ruth (who was not Jewish, but Moabite) is listed as well. There are some pretty lousy kings who made the list too. Manasseh was one of the worst kings in Israel's history. The Bible says he led Israel into sin and did more evil than any other king. The point is that God can use all kinds of people. If He can redeem the life of a former hooker, an unclean Gentile, and a lousy king, do not be surprised that He can make something special of your life, even if your past is less than perfect.

But the main point of this genealogy is to look at those identical three sets of fourteen generations and be assured that God is totally in control of history. The Bible says in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." We see from the beginning God was planning to send His son and had already determined WHEN Jesus would come.

God is not bound by time as we are—God rules over time. The Bible says, "From everlasting to everlasting, you are God...a thousand years in your sight are like a day." (Psalm 90:2, 4) Most of us are so finite in our understanding of time that history is what we did last weekend and prophecy is what we plan on doing Monday! But we must remember history really is His-Story. Just as God orchestrated the birth of Jesus to occur 42 generations from Abraham, God is in charge of our world as well. Are you glad that God isn't restricted by time?

In his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis observed: "God is not hurried along in the Time-Stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel. God has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only person in the world." Jesus genealogy was a miracle from God.

2. The miracle of Jesus' incarnation reminds us that God can do the impossible

This miracle is described in verse 20. "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." The word "incarnation" means to "take on flesh." According to the laws of nature, human conception involves a man and a woman. That's how all of us came into this world. People call human birth a miracle, but it can be explained by scientific observation, and even replicated in the laboratory. But Jesus didn't come into this world the way we did. The laws of nature were interrupted. He wasn't conceived by the action of a man and a woman. His life was the result of the Word becoming flesh. The

same God who spoke over chaos and said "Let there be light," spoke over a young virgin named Mary, and said, "Let there be life, and there was life."

Our Catholic friends have nurtured such a deep love for the Virgin Mary that they venerate, or honor her in a way that borders on worship. They have added two doctrines about not found in the Bible. The first is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Most evangelical Christians assume that this immaculate conception refers to Jesus, but that's not true. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is the belief that Mary was conceived and born without any sin and that she lived a sinless life. The other doctrine is the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. It teaches that Mary was a virgin and always remained a virgin—that is, she never had any other children after Jesus. Of course, there are several passages that mention Jesus' siblings. They explain this away by saying they were cousins, not siblings.

Now, if you think I'm criticizing our Catholic friends, you've missed my point. If, indeed, they have gone too far in honoring Mary, most evangelical Christians are guiltier, because we have ignored her and not awarded her the respect and honor she deserves. We shouldn't worship Mary, but we should love her and honor her as a woman who was full of grace and truth and blessed among all women. Try to imagine a frightened teenage girl being visited by an angel telling her that she would give birth to a Savior. As the song we just heard asked, "Mary, did you really know?"

Mary did recognize one thing about Gabriel's plan: She knew it was impossible. Mary knew how babies were made, and she knew she hadn't had sexual relations with a man. Notice her objection to Gabriel. "'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'Since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God ... For nothing is impossible with God.'" (Luke 1:34-37) Hang onto those words, "nothing is impossible" because we'll visit them again at the conclusion of the message.

Jesus' birth was totally unique. The words of John 3:16 that we all memorized, "only begotten Son" is actually a translation of one word in Greek *monogenes*. It means "one-of-a-kind birth." Jesus was the ONLY man ever born who had an earthly mother, but no earthly father. He had a heavenly Father, but no heavenly mother. He's the only baby who was older than His mother and the same as His Father! His conception was a miracle from God.

3. The miracle of Jesus' virgin birth proves that Jesus is the only acceptable payment for our sin

Not only was the birth of Jesus a biological, it was also a prophetic miracle. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 in verse 23, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Once, a children's Sunday School class was asked to draw pictures of the nativity scene. One little boy drew the manger, the stable, Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, Shepherds, and Wise men. But he also drew a strange-looking fat guy standing to the side. The teacher asked, "Who is that fat guy?" The little boy said, "Oh, that's John." The teacher said, "Who is John?" The little boy

sighed like all adults were stupid and said, "You know the song, "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright, round John virgin.' So that's Round John Virgin." There was a virgin there, but her name was Mary, not John!

For years, the doctrine of the virgin birth has been under attack from skeptics and liberal theologians who claim it is an impossibility and not really necessary. They often point out the Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is a word which can also mean "young woman" instead of "virgin." But think about it: thousands and thousands of young Hebrew wives gave birth every year, so how could that be a "sign?" No, the only thing that would make the birth of Jesus stand out as a sign was the fact that He was born of a virgin.

The only way Jesus could be divine is if He was born of a virgin with God as His Father. If Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, then He was an ordinary man. The entire doctrine of the Divinity of Christ rises and falls on the validity of the virgin birth. The miracles of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the virgin birth of Jesus stand as two pillars that hold up the entire Christian faith.

We're told in Romans 5 that we are all sinners because we are born into Adam's family. It's more than a TV show or a movie, but we're all a little creepy, because we're all in the Adam's Family! Because Adam is our spiritual father, we're sinners by nature and by choice. But Jesus is the only man who ever walked this planet who wasn't part of the Adam's family. Flowing in His veins was not the blood of Adam, Joseph, or any other human father. Flowing in His veins was the blood of God Himself. That's why Jesus' blood was the only untainted blood that can wash away our sins.

Talk show host Larry King has asked hundreds of people thousands of questions. He was once asked who he would like to interview if he could choose anyone from all of history. He replied, "Jesus Christ. I would ask Him if he was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me." Good call, Larry. Our faith rises and falls on the virgin birth. It is the Divinity of Christ through His virgin birth that qualifies Him to pay the price for our sins. The Bible says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men." (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

So, the miracle of the virgin birth is not some trivial aspect of the birth of Jesus we can just choose to accept or disbelieve. Belief in the virgin birth of Jesus is one of the fundamental doctrines of our faith. I would go so far as to say you really cannot be a born-again Christian if you don't believe Jesus was born of a virgin. Because we're not saved by believing that Jesus was a good man who left us some wonderful teachings. We're saved by believing Jesus was the perfect God-man who died on the cross for our sins!

CONCLUSION

Sometimes people ask me, "Pastor, do you still believe in miracles?" My answer is, "I don't just believe in them, I *depend* on them!" Yes, God is still showing up and interrupting the laws of nature and human nature and changing people and changing situations. These three miracles are more than a historical glance back into the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus. Each of these miracles speaks to us at our point of need. Do you think our world is spinning out of control?

Relax and trust God, He's in total control. Do you find yourself a sinner who can never be good enough to meet God's standard of perfection? The good news is you don't have to. Jesus is the *only* one who was able to pay the price for our sins and He has already paid your sin debt. All you have to do is to trust Him.

The main message I believe God has for us today is to realize that God specializes in doing the impossible. That's what a miracle is. We have things in our world today that were seemingly impossible 100 years ago. A century ago who would have believed that we would have television that would allow us to watch events happen overseas as they're happening by bouncing a signal off a satellite? And who would have believed that we could hold a little device in our hands like a Blackberry or iPhone and watch streaming video?

If you know anything about modern helicopters, you'll recognize the name Igor Sikorsky. Growing up in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, he was told by his parents that man would never fly—it was impossible. But after the Wright Brothers disproved that theory, Sikorsky dreamed of an aircraft that could take off and land vertically. He built his first helicopter in 1909 at the age of 20. He eventually moved to America and established a helicopter factory. Igor Sikorsky died in 1972, but today, Sikorsky helicopters are the fastest, finest helicopters flying in the world. They supply most of the helicopters for the U.S. Armed Forces including Marine One, which shuttles the President of the United States. When Sikorsky opened his first plant in America he posted a sign in the factory that read: "According to recognized aero-technical tests, it's impossible for a bumblebee to fly because of the shape and weight of his body in relation to the total wing area. The bumblebee doesn't know this, so he goes ahead and flies anyway. The word 'impossible' means nothing!" If I had the power to do it, I would have every person walk out of this room and never use the word "impossible" again. In fact a long time ago, I took my old paper dictionary and I cut the word "impossible" out of my dictionary! If you ask me what are the implications of doing that—I don't know what the word "implication" means because it got cut out on the other side of the page from "impossible!"

Do you need a miracle today? There are five words that can change your life. They are: WITH GOD, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE! Do you believe that? What impossible situation are you facing right now? Fill in this blank: "With God, (blank) is possible!" Are you thinking it's impossible to get out of debt? Say, "With God, getting out of debt is possible!" Are you struggling with depression or despair and seeking peace of mind? Say, "With God, peace of mind IS possible!" I know some of you are looking for work right now and it seems impossible. Will you say, "With God, getting a job IS possible!" Go ahead and fill in your impossibility.

But if you want God to do the impossible in your life, you've got to be willing to surrender to His plan. When Gabriel announced to Mary that God wanted to use her to be the mother of the Savior, Mary had a choice. She could have said, "Find another girl." But she made herself available to God. "I am the Lord's servant." Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38) So, do you want a miracle? Do you want God to do the impossible? Remember this: When I merge my inability with my availability, God's supernatural capability is released. Will you say, "Lord, may it be to me as you desire?" When you fully surrender your life to Him you can expect to see Him do the impossible in your life!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes