

Have you ever prayed for a miracle? I'm not talking about a 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 to ace this test! Or, God, please let our team win! **Is there anyone here who has prayed that way?**

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 everyone was okay, he stood in the ditch and prayed, *"Dear God, I pray this didn't happen."* He opened his eyes and saw that the car was still wrecked, so he closed his eyes, squinted hard, and prayed again, *"Dear God, it didn't happen."* Then he opened his eyes, but, nothing changed.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever asked God to move Heaven and Earth over something trivial, something impossible, something absurd? *"Oh, Lord, please don't let it rain for 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." (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 had a time when we prayed these prayers. **Therefore, we can appreciate our lesson from the 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 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 is 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. **HOW DID JESUS USE HIS MIRACLES? Jesus used his miracles to prove his identity, to profoundly affect people's lives and to further his ministry but 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,"* we 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 the young athlete is saying, then I want to say, *"You are absolutely right. Thank God for all God's good gifts."* But if that athlete is saying God literally guided the football through the uprights for the winning field goal so that one team would win and the other lose, **that young man has a lot to learn about life and about God.**

God is not our personal weather expert, football strategist, romance matchmaker, or "fixer" 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 God's 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 team wins. But when we compare that concern with the millions who are suffering and dying in this world, when we compare it with the victims of hurricanes, or volcanoes or floods, when we compare it to the trials in Bosnia, or North Korea or Northern Ireland,

then even the most theologically unsophisticated of us must realize the absurdity of our request. **MIRACLES ARE NOT DESIGNED FOR THE TRIVIAL...THE IMPOSSIBLE...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 acquiesce to 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, 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 wine to water. Miracles do occur.

Tony Campolo tells about an experience that occurred when he was fourteen years old. Tony's family was very poor, and his father was out of work because he had been struck down with Hodgkin's disease. His hospitalization insurance was running out, and the family did not know where they would get enough money to meet their basic needs.

Tony knew that it was his duty to earn some money for his family, but at the same time he wanted to stay in school, get good grades, and go to college. He figured out that he could buy unsold loaves of bread that truck drivers returned to the Bond Bread Company located at Fifty sixth and Market Streets. He could buy the bread for a nickel and sell it for a quarter to restaurants throughout West Philadelphia. The transaction promised a hefty profit, but there were a couple of problems. He could not pick up the bread until after 9:00 p.m., and the only means he had for delivering the bread was by piling it in on a wagon that he pulled behind his bike.

One dark, cold, rainy night at about a quarter till eleven Tony was making a delivery. Unfortunately, he rode his bike over a pothole. Suddenly there was a BANG! His front tire blew out. He pulled the bike off the street and sat down on the curb. After a while he started to cry. He remembers crying hard and long. He was soaked, shivering, and completely discouraged. It was a lonely side street. There was no one to hear him when he cried out loud, "**God, you're mean. Everybody else thinks you are kind, but I know you're mean. If you were kind you'd help me.**"

He cried for a few minutes more, then, for reasons that he will never figure out, he got up and pushed his bike and his load of bread to the service station down the street. The station was closed for the night. Nevertheless, he pushed his bike over to the air pump and tried to put air into the blown-out tire. It never occurred to him how unusual it was that the air pump of this closed service station was still working. He was in such a state of brokenness and sadness that he did what he did in a daze. Needless to say, the air came out of the tear in the blown-out tire as quickly as he pumped it in. He says he doesn't know what he was expecting. But trembling and crying, he just stayed there in the dark carrying out a hopeless task.

Then the miracle happened! Suddenly he realized that the tire was hard. Somehow and in some way, that is impossible to explain, the tire was holding air. He stood up, confused and happy. He remembers yelling out loud, "Oh, thank you! Oh, thank you!" He made two more deliveries and then rode the bike three miles back to his house. And the tire held!

When he got home, he lifted the bike onto his front porch and locked it. The time was just after 12:30 a.m. He went to the front door and put his key into the lock when he heard a hissing sound. He turned back to the bike and watched with amazement as the air quickly left the blown-out tire. **The miracle was over, and the tire went flat.**

I shared this simple story for this reason: *My guess is that everyone with a DEEP FAITH can look back over his or her life and see a familiar miracle such as Tony experienced in his life.*

Can you? Many of you can, I know. But it doesn't always happen, and it may happen only once in a lifetime. There are other times we will ask for a miracle and Heaven will be as quiet as a tomb.

MIRACLES HAPPEN, BUT THEY HAPPEN FOR A SPECIFIC REASON--TO BUILD OUR FAITH.

Tony Campolo, for the rest of his life, can look back at the incident of that bicycle tire and say to himself, **God is real! And nobody can take that away from him.**

The secret of the miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee is found in these 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—THEIR FINAL PURPOSE IS TO HELP BUILD OUR FAITH.

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 in 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 be 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. THEIR REASON-TO BUILD OUR FAITH!

So, if you pray for the home team to win and they do not, 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 about anyway.**

Miracles are about helping us trust IN GOD. That's the TRUTH ABOUT MIRACLES.

AMEN!!