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CHAPTER II

Adversity: The Breeding Ground For Miracles

We talk a lot about miracles in the church today. Some are of the opinion that the age of miracles has ended; that these demonstrations of God's power aren't for today's church, while others strongly disagree. Well, there's no sense in getting into a discussion about the possibility or credibility of miracles until we've agreed upon what we mean by the word "miracle." How it's defined.

A miracle is, in essence, a special manifestation of God's super-natural power; a work done for a divine purpose and accomplished by means which are totally incomprehensible to the common man. Something wondrous in scope - something extremely unusual. As the kids would say, something awesome.

Many times we use the word "miracle" to describe the ordinary course of an event. For example, when someone escapes a really bad car accident, we might say, "It was a miracle that no one was killed." Or if we've taken a really difficult exam that we're not that well prepared for, and we pass the exam, we'd probably say, "It was a miracle that I passed." What we do is, we credit the natural course of things as a miracle, when, in fact, it's nothing of the kind.

Augustus said, "The daily miracle of God has grown cheap by repetition."

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In other words, we use the word "miracle" so totally out of context, so frequently in our daily conversation, that the rightful meaning of the word gets lost. A true miracle, a true manifestation of God's power, has some fundamental characteristics that just don't show up in the everyday common use of the word.

Webster defines the word "miracle" as, "An event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of these laws; an extra-ordinary, anomalous or abnormal event brought about by super-human agency." That's a mouthful isn't it?

Anomalous means strange or unusual. I had to look that one up myself. That's ironic, isn't it? The definition of a word you look up in the dictionary has words in it that you have to look up in the dictionary. I think that was done intentionally as some sort of marketing trick.

Now, what does that mean to us, from a Christian perspective? Well, if we were to examine the miracles of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, we'd discover that they are all extraordinary events which accompany a divine manifestation at a crucial moment in time; usually in a time of great adversity.

Biblical miracles are generally a complete reversal of the natural course of things. They totally deviate from the laws of nature. They turn the laws of nature upside down. God, the Father; the creator of all things; the creator of these laws of nature; has the power to change them; to alter

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their effect as he sees fit for His divine purpose, which is always for the good.

Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.*" Even when we don't see it, God's purpose is always good; always just.

God has the sovereign power to control and redirect the laws of nature to accomplish His divine will. David Hume, a Scottish philosopher really nailed it when he said, "A miracle is not a violation of the laws of nature but the introduction of a new effect."

So Biblical miracles are not a violation of the original laws. They're simply the intervention of a supernatural power outside of nature creating a new effect. In other words, a miracle is just God saying, "It's my creation; If I want to change it; redesign it to come up with a new end result; I can. I have that right. It's my product; I've got the patent on it."

Please understand this. If we deny God's ability to intervene in a situation; His ability to create a new effect from a law which He, himself, conceived; then we're denying that He's God, aren't we?

Let me use this example to clarify my point; this right of God to intercede in a situation. I've written a book. So, I'm the author; the creator of that book, right? If I wanted to, would it be okay for me to go back and make changes in that book; to rewrite some of the chapters in that book; to give the story a little different twist; a different feel; to cre-

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ate a new effect? Would that be okay? Sure it would. As a matter of fact, I did that. It's a natural part of the writing process.

Well, that's no different than what we're talking about here in the spiritual realm. God is the author, the creator of the laws of nature, right? So, as the author, He has the right; the authority (you see the word author is the root word for authority) so the author has the authority to do something, see? So God, the author of everything, has the authority to go back and rewrite His book just as I had the authority as the author, to rewrite my book. Got it? The difference is; I asked God for direction in writing my book. He never asked me for help with His. Lucky thing, huh?

Did you know that Jesus spent thirty years on earth before He finally performed His first miracle? He and the disciples had been invited to a wedding at Cana. The bride and groom came from fairly poor families and apparently a large number of guests showed up for the wedding feast, causing a shortage of wine, which in those days was a great embarrassment. It would be kind of like going to a wedding today and they forgot to bring the cake. The family would probably feel a little embarrassed.

So Mary, Jesus' mother, was the first one to notice that the wine was gone. So what did Mary do? How did she react to this awkward situation? Did she panic? Did she start moaning and groaning and complaining? Did she rant and rave about all the work that she had done and how the wedding was ruined? No, she didn't do any of those

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things. Mary knew what to do with her problem. She simply turned to Jesus and said, "...They have no wine." In the middle of a touchy situation, she simply gave the problem to Jesus.

Okay, let's take a closer look at this. Now why would Mary tell Jesus that there was no wine? He wasn't the host of the party. He was a guest. Why would she bother Him with something like this? And what did she expect Him to do? After all, remember, He had never performed a miracle up to this point? What gave her the idea that He could solve the problem?

You know, even though Mary had never seen Jesus perform a miracle, the knowledge of His divine mission had to have been locked in her heart; don't you think? She had to have been thinking about all these things all along. She had to be wondering when her Son, born of the Holy Spirit, would finally demonstrate His divine power. I mean she knew all along that He was a really special kid, but after all, He was thirty years old and she had to be wondering what He was planning to do with His life, ya know. She was His mother. You know how mothers are.

I can hear Mary now, "Son, you had a good job as a carpenter; a good job; and now look at what you're doing with your life. I don't know what I've done do deserve this. All you want to do is hang out with that bunch of hooligans that follow you around everywhere. And you're always in trouble; the authorities are always looking for you.

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What am I going to do with you? And put that staff down before you put someone's eye out."

She might have said that, ya know? You know how mothers are.

I think Mary had to have known in her heart that there was something more out there for her son. Something special. God had to have put that in her heart from the very beginning. She must have been waiting for this day for a long time. She had to have been anticipating this day when her son, the Son of the living God, would establish His divine authority on earth. Maybe God, in His infinite wisdom, gave Mary a vision of this day, this day at the wedding at Cana. Maybe she knew by some form of divine intervention that this was the day.

Whatever she was thinking, I can tell you one thing for sure about Mary. She didn't react like you would expect the average woman to react in this instance. No offense to you ladies, but have you ever been to a wedding when something happens that wasn't part of the plan. Some sort of minor catastrophe. You'd think the world was coming to an end. Everyone's running around hysterically, "Oh, all our planning, all those months of work, all that money...and look what's happened! What are we going to do now! What will our friends think?" It's not a pretty sight.

Now here's Mary, in the middle of this huge wedding, and the wine runs out. I mean this was serious stuff. In those days, if you didn't provide wine for your wedding

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guests, it was a tremendous insult to them. It's just one of the idiosyncrasies of the Middle Eastern culture, they'd really be offended if you didn't offer them some wine. This was no minor inconvenience. This was a really embarrassing situation. It was a potentially catastrophic social blunder.

The Bible isn't specific about this, but the people throwing the wedding were probably relatives of Mary. She'd probably helped out with the planning and the preparations. She may have even been the one that was in charge of the refreshments. Maybe that's why she noticed that the wine had run out. Maybe that was her responsibility.

So, Mary, evidently anticipating some sort of action on Jesus part simply said those four words, "They have no wine," and Jesus took it from there.

Now remember, Jesus had just returned from forty days alone in the wilderness where he had been tested by Satan. He had fasted for forty days. He had to have been starving by now and he was very weak. In fact, the Bible says that He was so weak that He had to be ministered to by an Angel; ministered to for His physical needs.

Yet, even though He had refused to work a miracle in the wilderness to meet His own needs; remember? He had refused to turn the stone into bread, and you know that after forty days of fasting that bread would have looked really good. But even though He wouldn't perform a miracle for His own benefit, He performed this first miracle in

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order to meet the needs of others; to meet the needs of those wedding guests.

I'm sure most of you know the story. Jesus commanded the servants to fill the clay pots with water. So the pots were filled and instantaneously the water was turned into wine. Just like that. And this wasn't just any ordinary wine. I mean, Ernest & Julio Gallo didn't make this wine. It was made by the Master. The master of the feast called it "the best wine." You know, most people would have served the best wine first and then brought out the cheap wine when everyone was too drunk to know the difference. But in this case, Jesus saved the best wine for last. You see Jesus always gives His best last. Always.

Now I know there are some of you scoffers who think this is just some cute story that got put into the Bible to fill up space because the publisher needed some more pages or something. Well, for all of you scoffers, and I know you're out there, do you remember the story of Jairus?

Jairus had gone to Jesus and told Him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." The Bible says that Jesus went with him and on the way to Jairus' house some men came running over to Jairus and said, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?"

I'm going to get off on a tangent here, I can tell, but I feel lead to share this with you. Let's go back to the beginning here. Mark 5:35 says, "While Jesus was still speaking,

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some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler."

You see, Jairus was a very powerful man. He was a synagogue ruler. He was risking his whole career - his whole life - by coming to Jesus. Some of you have done that, haven't you? Put your careers on the line because of your beliefs. Jairus knew very well that if he was caught asking Jesus for help, he'd be thrown out of the synagogue. But Jairus understood who Jesus was. He understood Jesus authority; and his daughter was dying. Okay, let's get back to the text; Mark 5:35; "Your daughter is dead," they said, "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

Verse 36 says, "Ignoring what they said...,"

See? What did Jesus do here when these men showed up, these non-believers? He ignored them. And I'll tell you something. There are people out there, actually there are people right there in your church; they may be sitting next to you next Sunday; people who are a threat to your faith. Do you know that? That's right. You heard it right. People who will tell you all kinds of nonsense; all kinds of negative junk; people who will tell you that the Bible doesn't really mean what it says.

Well, what did Jesus do when these nay-sayers showed up? Continuing in verse 36, Jesus told Jairus, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.' Just believe! The King James says, "Only believe." Let's take a closer look at this, because this is really crucial. Let's break down what Jesus really said here.

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Too many times we read scripture and we just breeze by it without taking the time to absorb the full meaning. You have to drink it in. God's word has to become a part of your being so that you know that you know that you know. So that when you need to call on it, it's there, inside of you; in your spirit.

Everything that's in the Bible is important. In the newspaper business when we need to plug up a hole, a blank space at the end of an article; we use something called "filler." It might be a quote from some famous person or an anecdote or whatever. It's just used to take up space. Well, God didn't use any filler in the Bible. Everything in there is important.

"Don't be afraid, only believe." This is a direct command from the Lord here, isn't it? This is authoritative. He didn't say, Try not to be scared. Please give me a chance to prove myself." This is a direct order; a mandate.

"Only believe." What does that really mean? It's helpful, sometimes, to take a closer look at words. To tear them apart. To get to the core of their meaning. Let's take a look at the word "only." What does "only" mean.

Well, there are several other words that we can use to more fully clarify or define the word, "only." Let's look at a few of them. First word; wholly. Wholly believe. Next word; entirely. Entirely believe. Next word; solely. Solely believe. Next word; exclusively, exclusively believe. Exclusive of everything else you do in your life, believe. Are you getting this? Okay, last one, and this is the one that I think

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really clarifies what "only" really means in the sense the Lord is using it here when He says, "Only believe."

Excepting all else. Omitting all else. Barring all else. Rejecting all else. Forgetting all else, BELIEVE! Unconditionally! Don't listen to the negative people. Don't listen to the negative philosophies. Don't listen to the people at work who laugh at you behind your back, who mock you because of your faith. Don't listen to them. You can't afford it! ONLY BELIEVE!

Excepting all else. Disregarding all else. Excluding all else. No matter what your friends say. No matter what your brother says. No matter what your sister says. No matter what your mother says. No matter what your father says. No matter what your boss says. No matter what the doctor says. No matter what your checkbook says. No matter what the circumstances say. ONLY BELIEVE!

Okay, continuing now in verse 37. "He did not let anyone follow Him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James." Do you see what Jesus was doing here? He surrounded himself with men who believed in Him. Men who were positive and supportive. Men who understood who He was and His authority.

Now to verse 38. "When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but asleep?'

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Now look at this. Verse 40 says, "But they laughed at him." They laughed at him! They laughed at Jesus. How many of you know it's not a real good idea to laugh at the Son of God? These people were obviously not too bright. But these people are still around today aren't they? People who laugh when you try to tell them about Jesus. They must be descendants of these dolts. But, we'll keep praying for them anyway.

And do you know what? When these people; these people who give you a hard time because of your faith; when they come up against an impossible situation that they can't handle; when they're facing some tragedy or some terrible misfortune in their life; guess what? They're going to want to talk to you. Because in their hearts they know that you have something that they need. And they'll come to you. They're going to want what you have.

Now look at this. Look at what Jesus did. What He did when these scoffers started laughing at Him and making fun of Him. Verse 40 continues, "After he put them all out..." He put them out! He threw them out of the room. And in the Hebrew the same word used here for "putting them out," was also used in John 2:15. This is the same word, in Hebrew, that was used in John 2:15 when Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple. The same word. He literally threw them out! Jesus was no wimp?

Well, let's try to get back to where we were before I got off on this tangent here. You know, the greatest jazz musician in the world is the Holy Spirit. It's true. I mean He'll

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take you out on a riff over here, then He'll take you over there, then over here and He always gets you back to the main melody line. If you like jazz you know what I'm talking about.

Alright, where were we? Oh yeah, Cana. At the wedding. Jesus had just turned the water into wine. So anyway, I know some of you are thinking, "That's a nice story, but, come on now, nobody can turn water into wine." Well, we shouldn't have to prove anything to you here, after all this is God we're talking about. But, for those of you who are still living by sight, who still need to base your belief on some sort of logic, I'll indulge you for just a minute. I really shouldn't. Jesus probably would have thrown you out, but I'll indulge you.

First, we need to agree that God is God. That's pretty simple, right? God is the creator of all things. The Bible tells us that all things were created by God and for God's purpose. Everything you see as you look around you was conceived in the heavenlies, in the Spirit realm, before it could become a reality here on earth, in the physical realm.

Are you with me so far? Okay, now let's go back to our Scottish friend David Hume. What did he say? "A miracle is not a violation of the laws of nature but the introduction of a new effect." That's important now, so stick with me here.

Now, Webster's definition of a miracle was what? "An event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of

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these laws; an extra-ordinary, anomalous or abnormal event brought about by super-human agency."

Does turning plain water into wine qualify as a miracle by definition? Sure it does. It deviates from the known laws of nature, right? Does it transcend our knowledge of the laws of nature? Yup. Is it an extra-ordinary, abnormal event? Sure is. Was it brought about by super-human agency? Got that one covered too. There's no one more super human than Jesus. Looks like we've got a miracle on our hands, doesn't it?

Stay with me for one more minute on this, okay? Let's take a closer look at what happened. We've already established that God is the creator. He created everything. He created the laws of nature as we understand them. If God created the laws of nature, if He set them up a certain way to produce a certain effect, then He has the ability and more importantly the authority, as the originator, the Creator of those laws, to bring a new effect into being, without being in violation of the original laws. Remember what we said, "A miracle is not a violation of the laws of nature but the introduction of a new effect."

In the case of the miracle at Cana, the miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus created a new effect. He created a new effect out of the natural laws that were already in operation. He wasn't in violation of the laws of nature; He just made some changes in them to create the effect that He wanted. Just like our law-makers today in this country sometimes make changes in the laws that govern our soci-

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ety in the physical realm, laws which they originally created; just as they have the authority to do that, God has the authority to make changes in the natural laws that He originally created in the spiritual realm. Do you see that?

Okay, let's take this one more step. We're almost there. Here's why turning water into wine is not a violation of the laws of nature. Does wine initially start out as water? Sure it does. God created the vine to be fruitful; to produce grapes. He gave it the ability to take in the rain and assimilate that rain to form the juice of the grape. Isn't that true? Grape vines take in rainwater and produce grapes which in turn produce grape juice. Nothing unusual about that, Right?

So actually, the miracle at Cana was nothing more than a speeding up process involving the creative power of God. He willed these chemical changes, which would normally take years to occur, He willed them to instantly transform the water into wine. God has altered the laws of nature, in this case by speeding them up, without violating the original law; to create a new effect, a new outcome; and voila! We have a miracle.

Now, aside from the obvious result of getting the bride and groom's parents off the hook and making the wedding guests happy, what did this miracle accomplish in the spiritual sense? First, it demonstrated that creative power essentially belongs to deity. Jesus was the only one who could have pulled this off.

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Also, it caused Jesus' disciples to believe in Him. Sure, they were already believers, but this demonstration of the Lord's power and authority over the fruits of the earth served as the first opportunity, in the midst of adversity, for God to establish the divinity of Jesus' mission on earth; His mission among men.

As believers, our mission is to go through life turning water into wine. Turning problems into opportunities. You know, like those water pots at Cana, we too are but poor earthen vessels, yet God can use even the weakest of us for His divine purpose.

In closing, I'd like you to reflect on the words of Jesus as Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, faced the worst moment of his life; the worst news any parent could ever imagine; "Your daughter is dead,"

If you can truly understand these words; if you can live your life according to these words; in my opinion you'll have the key to living a victorious Christian life; Jesus said these simple, yet powerful words, and these are the words I'd like to leave you with for this installment of, *The View From Here*.

"Be not afraid. Only believe."