

Seven Convincing Miracles by Erwin W. Lutzer, Moody Press, Chicago, 1999 (53 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

Introduction: *When You Need a Miracle*

1. Christ keeps the world together

... the Bible teaches that God is always actively involved in the world; indeed, if He were not involved, the universe would disintegrate. In Colossians Paul wrote, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:17). Moment by moment Christ keeps the world together; the forces of gravity are His ongoing work. Indeed, the Puritans were right when they called the laws of nature “the customs of God.”

A miracle happens when God does something unusual in the world:

...a miracle happens *when God, who is continuously active in the world, breaks His usual pattern and does something extraordinary*. Because this particular event is contrary to what He usually does, we take note of it. A miracle does not happen when God does *something* in the world, but when He does something *unusual* in the world. And the more unusual it is, the more confidently we can say it is a miracle. [Page 17]

2. Examples of miracles

The healing of a dying cancer patient is closer to the meaning of the word *miracle*. Walking on water, raising the dead, and feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, these are miracles for sure. They are so obviously contrary to established patterns that we cannot help but say: *God has done it*. [Page 18]

3. Christ Performed Miracles So That We Might Know He Is the Son of God

We make a mistake if we focus *solely* on the personal benefits people received from the miracles. Even when Jesus was on earth, only a few people were helped, and only then for a short time. We are grateful that they benefited, but if we think that this was the only purpose of Jesus’ works, we are as blind as the Pharisees He continually confronted. In the book of John, miracles point us to the Miracle Worker; they were done that we might know that Jesus is the Son of God. They give us insight into the ways of God in the world. [Page 19]

4. The God of Islam and the God of Christianity Are Not the Same God under Different Names

... the god of Islam, Allah, cannot have contact with man, for this deity is too impersonal, too remote. In Islam, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is viewed as

a blasphemous “tribulation” that must be resisted and debunked, This is further proof that the god of Islam and the God of Christianity are not the same God under different names. [Pages 24-25]

5. The Once Born and the Twice Born

The miracle of Bethlehem leads to the miracle of Calvary. The miracle of the crib makes possible the miracle of the Cross. And the miracle of the Cross is the basis for the miracle of a “new heart.” This miracle divides the human race into two camps, the once born and the twice born. [Page 30]

6. Confidence Makes the Strength of the Church

The strength of the church is not dependent on the number of miracles within our midst. If anything, the church is weak today, not because of a lack of miracles, but a lack of confidence in the message of the gospel. [Page 37]

Chapter One: *Jesus, Lord of the Marriage Supper*

7. Jesus Secretly Revealed His Glory at a Wedding

Jesus performed His first miracle, not at a funeral, but at a joyous wedding; not in a temple, but in a home. He was not a part of the monastic asceticism of the hermitic communities. “He came to comfort our sorrows,” writes J. C. Macaulay, “but also to sanctify our joys.”¹ Here, at an ordinary wedding in an ordinary home, He would secretly “reveal His glory.” [Page 40]

¹J. C. Macaulay, *Expository Commentary on John* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 33

Chapter Two: *Jesus, Lord of Time and Distance*

8. Bar Owner Believes in Prayer

Somewhere I read a story about church members who told the owner of a bar that they were praying that his building would be struck by lightning. A few weeks later, a thunderstorm engulfed the community and the bar was struck with lightning and burned to the ground. The bar owner filed a lawsuit against the church, arguing that the church members were to be blamed for the loss. The Christians in turn hired a lawyer, who argued that they were not responsible for what happened. The judge reported that the case was somewhat confusing, but he was convinced of one thing: The bar owner believed in prayer, whereas the Christians didn't! [Page 63]

9. Our faith Grows in Times of Trial

Like a garden that needs certain ingredients, so our faith grows in the soil of difficulty and need. [Page 65]

10. God Communicates Differently in Different Times

C. S. Lewis says that God speaks to us in our health but “shouts to us in our pain.” [Page 65]

11. Incomplete Faith

A faith that is dependent on signs and wonders is not a complete faith. [Page 67]

12. The Importance of a Soul

We often think that our body is more important than our soul, but our soul is eternal and can exit quite apart from the body. Keep in mind that [] eventually anyway; even faith healers die. The best a miracle can do is to postpone the inevitable. Only the salvation of a soul is an eternal miracle. [Page 72]

13. Miracles Can Build Faith

Miracles can build faith. But Jesus’ words also remind us that great faith can survive without miracles. Years ago, I knew a missionary couple who served in China before the Communist takeover of 1949. They had lived high in the hills, and their only means of transportation was using a boat on a nearby river. At a particular time of year the river was dried up.

- Faith and disappointment

One day their child was ill with a high fever. They knew that if they were to get medical help, they would have to travel by boat, but the river was only a muddy stream. They prayed that it would rain so that the river would swell and their boat would travel. But their prayers were not answered. Days later, their child died.

- Disappointing answer to prayer

Shortly after his death they walked outside and rain was splashing against their faces. By the next day, the river had swelled and boats were able to travel.

- Questioning God

What would you have said to God, if that had been your child? Was God mocking them? Why should they believe when God seemed so heartless and even cruel? Why

would He heal a nobleman's son with a high fever, but not their son inflicted with the same malady?

- Faith without understanding

They went on believing. They learned that faith is not merely receiving from God what we ask, but it is the ability to accept whatever God gives us.

Though He giveth or He taketh,
God His children ne'er forsaketh;
His the loving purpose solely
To preserve them pure and holy.

Carolina Sandell Berg, 1858; tr. Ernst W Olson, 1925. Text reprinted by permission of the Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America.

- Their survived intact

This couple has long since died and gone to heaven, where they have been reunited with their child. I'm sure that the purposes of God are much clearer to them now than they were back in those days in a jungle in China. Their faith survived intact.

- Faith grows

Faith grows when our prayers are answered; it also grows when our prayers are not answered. In either case, we know that Jesus, who is not limited by space, walks with us every step of the way. [Pages 73-75]

14. Hyper-spirituality over the Teachings of the Bible

Many of these signs and wonders are more in keeping with the hyper-spirituality of popular culture than he teachings of the Bible. For example, Peter Wagner gives five steps to be followed in obtaining the miracle of healing. In the fourth stage, he says, "sometimes there is a fluttering of the eyelids or a kind of aura that surrounds the person. Sometimes there are other manifestations."³

15. Two Most Impressive Miracles for Unbelievers

The late John Wimber, who founded the Vineyard Movement, said that the two most important miracles for impressing unbelievers are "falling in the power of the Spirit and filling teeth."⁵ [Page 76]

16. Protestants and Healers

...Wimber actually defended the practice of employing medieval relics in healing. "In the Catholic Church for over a 1,200-year period, people were healed as a result of

touching the relics of the saints. We Protestants have difficulty with that ... but we healers shouldn't, because there is nothing theologically out of line with that.'⁷ [Page 76]

17. The Value of Healings

Alan Cole, who has served Christ in many different cultures, says of the Vineyard Movement:

None of these signs are new to me (healings, visions, tongues, exorcisms). But the trouble is that I have seen every one of them (yes, tongues too) in non-Christian religions, and outwardly there was no difference in the signs, except that one was done in the name of Jesus and the other was not. Of course, if the person was also responding to the Gospel, there was real and lasting change in life. That is why I cannot get excited about healings in themselves, and why I can reverently understand how Jesus used them sparingly, and retreated when the crowds became too great.⁸ [Page 77]

18. Contemporary 'Revelation'

In an excellent book, *Blessing the Church?* the authors, who are all charismatics (and thus more sympathetic to the Vineyard/Toronto phenomena), are concerned about the drift they see in their own movement. They concede that the emphasis of the Toronto Blessing has "led to the pernicious practice of using contemporary 'revelation' as the basis for doctrines and the justification for the formulation of new teaching and practice within the church which has no biblical foundation."¹⁰ They lament the fact that so many people ignore Bible doctrine because the claim to receive their messages directly from God. [Page 77]

19. What is God Saying Now

We should not be surprised that the members of the Vineyard Fellowship deny that the Scriptures are sufficient for doctrine and the rule of life. Like the mystics of a bygone era, they are interested in what God is saying to them *now*. Often these revelations are compatible with Scripture; at other times these moments of illumination are bizarre and outside of the limits of scriptural sanction. Certainly this would be true of the Toronto Blessing, with its animal noises, laughter, and "carpet time." [Page 78]

20. The True Test of a Prophet

... the Scripture warns that even if a prophet is accurate in predicting the future, this does not prove that he has been sent by God (if he is inaccurate, then we can be sure that he is not of God). Moses said that even if the sign or wonder, which he foretells

comes to pass, the prophet is to be rejected if he says, “Let us follow other gods” (Deuteronomy 13:2; see also 18:20- 22). In other words, the primary test of a true prophet is not the signs and wonders he is able to perform but what he believes. His doctrine takes precedence over his miracles, even if those miracles happen as predicted. The fact that today’s miracle workers often belittle doctrine and assert that more doctrinal openness is needed in the church ought to be a clue that not all is well in the Signs and Wonders Movement [Page 80]

21. Insufficient to Persuade the Unconverted

... even the signs and wonders recorded in Scripture were insufficient to persuade the unconverted to believe in Christ. The more miracles He performed, the more opposition toward Him grew. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Christ was “accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22); yet most in the crowd were not brought to faith until they heard the gospel through Peter’s lips. [Page 81]

22. Signs and Wonders

Interestingly, no church in the New Testament is chided for not doing more signs and wonders. But Paul rebuked churches for an unclear gospel (Galatians), an overemphasis on gifts along with a worldly spirit (Corinthians), and the dangers of accepting a gnostic view of Christ (Colossians). Christ’s rebukes to the seven churches addressed in the book of Revelation were either doctrinal, moral, or both. Never once did He hint that they needed more signs and wonders.

Miracles are of lesser importance than a clear gospel witness and the quest for holiness. All this is not to say that authentic signs and wonders cannot occur today, or even that they do not occur today. There is no hard scriptural evidence that the gift of miracles has been rescinded. What we do know is that such miracles are of lesser importance than a clear gospel witness and the quest for holiness. Yes, we can believe God today for miracles, but we cannot demand them; and we should not be led to expect them on a regular basis. And we most assuredly cannot ascribe to the modern notion that they are needed to do effective evangelism in a culture already saturated with bogus miracles of every sort. [Page 82]

NOTES

³John H. Armstrong, “In Search of Spiritual Power,” in Michael Scott Horton, ed., *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody, 1992),74.

⁵Ibid., 76.

⁷Ibid., 77.

⁸Quoted by D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," in *Power Religion*, 95.

¹⁰Clifford Hill, Peter Fenwick, David Forbes, and David Noakes, *Blessing the Church?* (Surrey, England:: Inter Publishing Service, Eagle, 1995), 4.

Chapter Three: *Jesus, Lord of Our Impossibilities*

23. God Does Not Treat All Men Alike

Picture the crowd of disabled folks lounging near the pool. All of them wanted healing; all of them hoped for a miracle. Jesus, with infinite power at His disposal, could have healed them all but focused on one man, a "certain man" (v. 5 KJV), who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. This is proof that God does not treat all men alike. He does not heal all that He could heal; just as He does not save all He could save. [Page 86]

24. "Do you want to get well?"

"Do you want to get well?" That might seem like a foolish question. Of course the man would want to get well!

Perhaps yes; perhaps no.

Don't assume that people want to get well; some would prefer to live with their disability because the thought of having to work for a living is frightening. This man made a living begging; if he were healed he would have to lay aside his beggar's cup, rise early in the morning, and return late in the evening, weary with the demands of a new vocation. He was not trained for any particular line of work, and he would not even know where to begin to earn a few denarii. [Page 88]

25. We Do Not Always Know What We Need

Walter Brueggemann spoke for all of us when he said, "I have found myself discovering that mostly I do not need more advice, but strength. I do not need new information, but the courage, freedom and authorization to act on what I already have been given in the gospel."¹ [Page 91]

26. When Christ Commands the Impossible, He Supplies What He Commands

When Christ commands the impossible, He supplies what He commands. Paul prayed that we would be faithful until the appearing of Christ, then added, "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). [Page 91]

27. We Can Do What We Should Do

If you think you do not have the power to be reconciled to the person who has wronged you, you are denying Jesus' power. Looked at through your eyes, the command is impossible; looked at through the eyes of Jesus, you can do it. You can say, "God did it through me." We are asked to scale mountains, but when we begin the journey, Jesus walks with us to navigate the difficult terrain. *We can do what we should do.* [Page 92]

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¹Quoted in Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, Victor Books, 1994), 64.

Chapter Four: *Jesus, Lord of Our Daily Bread*

28. God Knows Where to Find You

Luther said regarding those who are called by God, "When He hath need of thee, He will know where to find thee." [Page 111]

29. God Does Not Bypass His People in Doing His Work

On one level we can say that the miracle was not dependent on the boy's lunch. The Creator did not find it "easier" to create the food now that He had a bit of food in His hands. But Jesus seldom works without us; He does not bypass His people in doing His work. He can save the lost without our witness; He can build His church without our cooperation. And He can feed the hungry without our lunch. [Page 111]

30. What Is in Our Hands Is Nothing; What Is in Jesus' Hands Is Everything

What we have in our hands is ours and can only do what it can do; but when it is transferred into Christ's hands, there is no guessing as to what it might do. That which is in our hands we lose; what is in Christ's hands, we keep. And it will be ours for all of eternity. To put it differently, what is in our hands is nothing; what is in Jesus' hands is everything. Let us take what we have and put it in contact with Omnipotence.

31. You Don't Have to be Talented to Have Jesus Work through You

(Perhaps D. L. Moody is one of the best examples of a person who had little to give Jesus, but nevertheless put what he had into the Lord's hands. He was so poorly educated that when reading the Bible aloud, if he came to a word he could not pronounce (and I'm told it happened often), he would stop, make a comment, and then continue reading on the other side of the word! His grammar was atrocious and his

personal style irksome. But through his ministry thousands were converted, schools were begun, and both Great Britain and the United States were spiritually revived. He was just another boy who gave his lunch to Jesus. [Pages 112-113]

Chapter 5: *Jesus, Lord of Nature*

32. Levels of Fear

God created us with the ability to be afraid. Just surely as He gave us the capacity to love, He gave us the capacity to fear. Properly controlled, fear can protect from harm. It can keep us from carelessly crossing street or touching an electrical wire. But if we live with a fear of people, circumstances, or failure, we can be paralyzed, unable to function in this world. John wrote, “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). The disciples had reasons to fear the forces of nature, but if they had listened to Jesus’ words more carefully, they could have enjoyed the storm. [Page 128]

33. With the Coming of Jesus, They Were Back to the Safety of Land

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid,” Jesus told them (Matthew 14:27). John tells us that they were willing to take Him into the boat, “and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading” (John 6:21). This phrase seems to imply that there was another miracle, the boat being “immediately” at the shore. With the coming of Jesus, they were back to the safety of land.

Jesus comes to us in times of fear

They discovered Jesus in the midst of their fears. Even today there are fears within some hearts as terrifying as those that night on the Sea of Galilee. Fear of cancer, fear of poverty, fear of rejection, fear of failure. These fears can torture us, cripple our emotions, and paralyze our ability to function. And yet, in our fright, Jesus comes to us. When we have no strength to row our battered boat, we find Jesus beside us. [Page 129]

34. Jesus Can Always See Us

Let’s remember that Jesus can see us, even when we cannot see Him! There on the hilltop, He knew the longitude and latitude of their boat; His eye was constantly upon those whom He loved. Perhaps you have learned, as all of us have, that although storms may hide the face of God, yet He is watching us, monitoring our movements. [Page 130]

35. God's Eyes Are on Us as We Battle Our Storms

... it is more important that God see us than that we see Him. Rest assured His eye is on you as you battle your own personal storm. Though the clouds obscure the face of God, He sees you with impeccable clarity. [Page 130]

36. Death Cannot Separate Us from Jesus' Love

Death does not sever us from the love of Jesus, nor does it sever us from His protection. [Page 131]

37. Obeying God Isn't Always Easy

Obedience...often puts us in the path of a storm. [Page 131]

38. Just Because You're in Trouble, Doesn't Mean That You Are Out of the Will of God

Sometimes we have the mistaken notion that a storm is proof that we are "out of the will of God." Yet, it is in the center of God's will, in obedience to Him, that we might encounter the fiercest opposition. Let's not fall into the error of thinking that we have made a wrong decision just because we are sailing into high winds. Sometimes our greatest trial comes when we are walking in obedience to the Lord's command. [Pages 131-132]

39. Jesus Has Everything Full Under Control

Think about your storm. Whether it is your health, your finances, your vocation, or your relationships—that situation, no matter how painful, is one that Jesus has fully under His control. Let us see Jesus crushing the devil and inviting us to join Him in the victory! Let us see Jesus walking over the sea of God's wrath and inviting us to join Him. Let us see Jesus triumphing over the sting of death and inviting us to join Him! [Page 134]

Chapter Six: *Jesus, Lord of Future Judgment*

40. Faith Healers

That afternoon I also witnessed firsthand what is now common among the faith healers seen on television. Those who came to the platform were touched by the evangelist and "slain in the spirit." They fell backward, caught by ushers and laid on the floor. After a few moments they "came to" and left the platform area walking on their own strength. This phenomenon, though widely practiced today, is neither found in the New

Testament nor practiced by the apostles. To appeal to the story of the soldiers who “fell backward” when they came to capture Christ to justify this modern novelty is to misuse the Scriptures. Of course, Christ the Son of God can smite soldiers if He so desires, but these Romans who fell backward were certainly not “filled” or “slain with the Spirit.” Much less can this account be used to justify some kind of supernatural power that strikes when the faith healer touches his followers.

41. Even Faith Healers Die

We must humbly admit that there are no promises that say we can be healed whenever we wish if only we had the faith. If there were, we would not have to die until the Lord returns. We could just keep claiming our healing again and again. You should not be surprised that there are people today who think that an endless life is indeed possible, based on divine promises. I knew a man, who has since died, who believed that he would live until the Lord returned. But even the faith healer he most admired is now dead. [Pages 158-159]

42. The Best-known Promises for Divine Healing

The best-known promises for divine healing are found in Isaiah 53, which is quoted in Matthew 8:17. There we read that Christ went about healing people “to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” Peter wrote, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

- Healing-body, soul and spirit

Some theologians who are skeptical of divine healing have labored to prove that the healing spoken of in these passages is spiritual, not physical. But the context in Matthew and the implication of Peter is that Christ did indeed die for our physical bodies. In fact, it is consistent with Scripture to affirm that Christ came to redeem the whole man—body, soul, and spirit.

- Christ came to redeem us from sin, but we still have a sin nature

But does this mean that we can have physical healing whenever we prayerfully meet the conditions? Clearly the answer is no. Although Christ died for our bodies as well as our souls, we will not see the fulfillment of that aspect of our redemption until we are resurrected into glory. Christ came to redeem us from sin, but we still have a sin nature; He came to destroy death, yet we die; He came to redeem our bodies, yet we are subject to accidents, poisons, and the frailty of the flesh. Our resurrected body is in the atonement, but today the body we carefully nurture is subject to disease. Yes, of course, some day the enemy of death will be taken away, but we aren’t there yet. [Pages 159-160]

43. Not Healers but Evangelists

...we see no evidence in the New Testament that some people began a healing ministry, dispensing healing to those who would come to them. On occasion Peter and Paul healed the sick, but it was incidental to their evangelistic/discipleship ministry. First and foremost, they were not known as healers but evangelists, engaging men and women in dialogue about the Messiah. [Page 166]

44. Expect Greater Things from God

We can be grateful that the charismatic movement challenged all of us to expect greater things from God. But we dare not elevate the so-called “supernatural gifts” above the quest for personal holiness, evangelism, and single-minded discipleship. [Page 166]

Chapter Seven: *Jesus, Lord of Death*

45. God’s Love for Us Does Not Mean That We Will Be Spared from Death

Though Jesus loved Lazarus that did not prevent his death. God’s love toward us does not mean we will be spared that experience of passing through the iron gate of death. We might feel forsaken by God, but He is there; His love abides with us into eternity. Our suffering is not inconsistent with the love of God. [Page 169]

46. Our Death Has Nothing to Do With Jesus’ Care for Us

Like Lazarus, we also die within the context of Jesus’ love. Our death, even if it should be sooner than expected, does not reflect unfavorably on Jesus’ care for us. Indeed, death is the chariot He sends to take us home to be with Him. [Page 171]

47. To Walk with Confidence

... Jesus tells the disciples that they must return to Judea, the territory where Bethany was located. The disciples warn him that the Jews tried to stone him on their last visit in Judea. Jesus, confident that He will be protected by the will of God, reminds them that to walk in obedience is to walk in the daylight, whereas to walk at night is indeed dangerous. To walk without confidence in the will of God would lead to stumbling. [Page 171]

48. Why

Why did Jesus not spare Martha her bitter tears? Why was He not moved to action by the sorrow that threatened to break Mary’s tender heart? Why did He not speak the word at a distance, and the flush of health return to Lazarus’s cheeks?

Temporary trials help build faith

Spurgeon has given the best answer to these questions, “Christ is not glad because of sorrow, but on account of the result of it. He knew that this temporary trial would help His disciples to a greater faith, and He so prizes their growth in faith that He is even glad of the sorrow which occasions it ... He sets so high a value upon His people’s faith that He will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened.”¹

Jesus does not shield us from those trials that will develop the qualities He so values. The love of God does not necessarily result in health, wealth, and happy relationships. Jesus is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, but He does not shield us from those trials that will develop the qualities He so values. The delays of Deity are not because of insensitivity to our present needs, but because of greater sensitivity to our ultimate needs. There are benefits in those tears. [Page 172]

49. If Only

At almost every funeral I’ve attended, I have heard, “If only...”

“If only I had convinced him to go to the doctor sooner ...”

“If only he had not been driving that evening ...”

“If only they had not operated on him ...”

“If only...”

What shall we do with our “if onlys”?

God’s sovereign purpose and plan

Jesus would tell us that we must believe that these happenstances are a part of God’s sovereign purposes and plan. If we could represent all of our “if onlys” as dots on a sheet of paper, we must then draw a circle large enough to encompass all of them. And that circle represents the providence of God. [Page 173]

50. God Can Take Life or Prolong It

Whatever, these infirmities were the immediate cause of his death; but the ultimate cause was God. He is the one who can take life or prolong it; He is the one who determines the length of our days. That which is out of our control is firmly within His grasp. No sickness, accident, or bolt of lightning can cause our death if God still has work for us to do. [Page 174]

51. We Have a Qualified Savior

The resurrection of Lazarus proves that we have a qualified Savior. We do not need a Savior who can just “help” us. We need a Savior who can resurrect us. We do not just need a Savior who helps us when life gets tough; we need a Savior who can help us when life ends. The Resurrection proves that for us, death is transitional, not terminal. When He gives us “dying grace, we are witnesses to His forgiveness and power. Death is a time of transition, not annihilation. [Pages 178-179]

52. It’s Not the Gospel You Believe, but Yourself

Augustine lived before scholars chewed up the Scriptures according to their personal whims. Nevertheless, even in his day, some people believed what they wanted and discarded the rest. He wrote, “If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don’t like, it’s not the gospel you believe, but yourself.” [Pages 184-185]

NOTES

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 2:456.

Epilogue: *For Doubters Only*

53. Two Men

A Buddhist in Africa who was converted to Christianity was asked why he changed religions. He replied, “It’s like this. If you were walking along and came to a fork in the road and two men were there and one was dead and the other alive, which man’s directions would you follow?” [Pages 188-189]