

Today it's called "[The Miracle on Ice](#)." There's never been a bigger upset in Olympic history. At Lake Placid in 1980 a group of American college kids beat the mighty Russian national team 4-3 in ice hockey. A year earlier the same Russian team beat the NHL All Stars 6-0. Prior to the 1980 Winter Olympics, NY Times columnist, Dan Anderson wrote, "[Unless the ice melts, or a team performs a miracle, the Russians are expected to easily win the gold.](#)" The US triumph shocked the world.

As the final seconds of the game ticked off the clock, announcer Al Michaels shouted out his famous call, "[Do you believe in miracles?](#)"

This morning is the 10th message in our series, "[Essentials: what Christians believe and why it matters.](#)" And today's topic is [Miracles](#). I hope you can answer Al Michael's question in the affirmative, "[Do you believe in miracles?](#)" As a Christian you should be able to say, "Yes."

Christianity is supernatural. It's based on a series of miracles. But to understand the role miracles play in Christianity we need to put them in proper context. Miracles go hand-in-hand with "[God's Kingdom.](#)"

In our text, Matthew summarizes the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In 4:23 He tells us, "[And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.](#)" Jesus' message was "[the kingdom](#)" – and it came with *miracles*. [Do I believe in miracles? Yes!](#) Miracles are proof God's Kingdom has come.

Each week we have a statement of faith that helps us track where we're headed. Here's today's statement... [We believe the kingdoms of this world are being invaded by the Kingdom of God. This invasion occurs spiritually. God operates in the world through the Holy Spirit and the Church. One of the signs the Kingdom has come, is the presence of God's miracles.](#)

Before we dive in, let's first make sure we define the term "*miracle*." For as impressive as the hockey upset in Lake Placid might've been it's not what we would define as a *miracle* in the biblical sense of the word. In fact, we toss around this word "*miracle*" far too casually and nonchalant...

There's [miracle detergent](#), and [miracle fabric](#), and [miracle drugs](#), and [miracle grow fertilizer](#)... but none of these constitutes a real miracle. [A 9th inning rally - or an innovative technology - or the birth of a baby - or winning the Powerball jackpot - or beating the Russian hockey team](#) - often gets labeled "*a miracle*" - but none of these are biblical miracles.

A true miracle takes place when God intervenes in circumstances to produce an outcome that would never have occurred otherwise. God *super-cedes* or *over-rides* natural laws to generate unusual results. A miracle goes beyond normal human and natural activity. Miracles are more than natural – they're supra-natural. They defy logical explanation.

For example, turning water into wine is *not necessarily a miracle*. Water turns to wine everyday through the process of fermentation - but when Jesus told the wedding attendants to fill their jars with water, and seconds later they out poured out wine... *that was a miracle*. Jesus pulled some strings and super-ceded nature's power. A miracle occurs when God steps in and uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary.

Often science is given as a reason to reject the reality of the miraculous and supernatural. But, as a tool of discovery, science has its limitations. Science is confined to what can be **observed** and **verified**. You learned this in Elementary School. The scientific method is two steps – [hypothesis](#) and [experimentation](#). You watch for patterns – then test those patterns.

This is why a miracle goes beyond the scope of science. A miracle can't be placed under a

microscope, or replicated in a Petri dish. By definition a miracle is a break in the natural pattern. It's abnormal and infrequent. We often call miracles "acts of God." But God is no dancing bear. You don't snap your fingers and watch God perform on cue. Miracles happen when and where God decides. In that sense they are very *unscientific*.

And Christianity is a *religion of miracles*. Christian belief is more than ascribing to a set of dogmas – or keeping commandments and rituals... As we mentioned last week the NT ties true Christianity to a series of historical events that occurred in space and time... *the virgin birth of Jesus, His resurrection, His ascension, and His second coming*... Without the miraculous there is no Christianity.

Even the ministry of Jesus was colored by the supernatural. As in this morning's text, Jesus' healing stood side-by-side with His preaching. The Gospels contain 3,779 verses - 468 verses deal directly with Jesus' healing ministry. That means 12% of the Gospels involve the miraculous. And that doesn't include the other miracles of Jesus – walking on the water, multiplying the loaves and fish, calming the storm at sea, etc.

Perhaps you've heard of the "The Jefferson Bible." Its official title is "*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*." America's third president, Thomas Jefferson, admired Jesus as a teacher and a moralist, but he didn't believe in miracles. He harbored an anti-supernatural bias.

In addition, Jefferson was quite arrogant. *I suppose being president can go to your head*. But Jefferson sat down in the White House and cut out the portions of the Gospels that referred to angels, prophecy, healing, miracles, even Jesus' deity... *After he was done, not much was left*. You can't separate miracles and the message of Jesus. Christianity is the invasion of the supernatural into the natural realm. Miracles result.

In his book, "*What's So Great about Christianity*," Stanford Researcher and Christian author, Dinesh D'Souza, makes this observation, "*The issue of miracles is of special importance to Christians, because Christianity is the only major religion in the world that depends on miracles...*"

Islam's holy book, the Quran, says Muhammed never worked a miracle. Though Jewish history is full of God's direct intervention, you can take the miracles out of Judaism and its rules and rituals would be unaltered. Strip Hinduism and Buddhism of the supernatural and the purported path to enlightenment would essentially be the same. Only Christianity hangs on the miraculous – it's woven into the fabric of our faith.

In fact, Christianity begins with a colossal miracle. Genesis 1:1 reads, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" And it's been well noted, if you can believe the first verse of the Bible you shouldn't have any problem believing and trusting in the other 31,172 verses. If God created the laws of nature, then it's nothing for Him to super-cede or over-ride them. God can do whatever He pleases. Author Dan DeHaan, puts it best, "*The Christian has learned to believe in one big, bold miracle – God! And everything else falls into place...*"

For many people it's the miracles that attract them to Christianity. The God of the Bible is a big God. He's large enough to merit our belief. The Christian God fits what you'd expect from a holy, heavenly, spiritual, invisible, omnipotent, omniscience, omnipresent, sovereign, majestic God. The one, true God is not subject to *physical limitations* or *human logic*.

In Isaiah 55 God Himself says, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*" says the LORD. "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*" The knowledge of God can never be exhausted.

When the second century Latin apologist, Tertullian, was asked to comment on the virgin birth, he said, "*I believe because it is absurd...*" Why would humans with their tiny, pea brains

expect to understand how God became man? If we could decipher all there is to know about God, He wouldn't be much of a god. He surely wouldn't be worthy of our worship. Tertullian's faith was founded in the fact He couldn't figure God out.

Never be *ashamed of or shy away from* the miraculous in Christianity.

It reminds me of the 10th grader who came home from church. The kid's friend wanted to know what he'd learned... *The boy retold the story...* "The Israelites fled Egypt and came to the Red Sea. It was a trap, so the Corp of Engineers built a pontoon bridge... All the Israelites crossed safely, but when the Egyptians used the bridge, the army blew it up."

His friend asked, "*Are you sure that's the story you heard?*" The young man replied, "No, but if I told you the real story you'd never believe me."

Don't assume that's true. Take the miraculous out of Christianity and it's a faith not worth belief. Never apologize for the mystical in the message. It's the supernatural – the other-worldly element of the Gospel – that pumps it with power. Our sinful condition is so desperate we require a miracle. A Gospel without the supernatural is unable to save sinners.

And God uses the miraculous to test our humility. Miracles are designed to baffle our brain – and put us in our place – and drive us to our knees - and force us to face our physical and intellectual limitations. Miracles bring us to *the brink of understanding* and *the beginnings of faith*. The inquisitive, technical, mechanical, analytical mind has to give up in the face of a miracle. One can never *figure out* what only *faith* can grasp.

Famous philosopher, Mortimer Adler, became a Christian at the age of 82. He explained why, "I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements to it that can only be described as mystery... My chief reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible. What's the point of revelation if we can figure it out ourselves? If it were wholly comprehensible then it would be just another philosophy." Ironically, miracles make faith reasonable.

It's been said, "*Only if miracles are possible is Christianity believable.*" This is why Jesus preached the Kingdom of God AND worked miracles. *His miracles* authenticated *His message*... Jesus is King, and with Him, God's Kingdom and all its power came to earth. God's reign includes His authority, His wisdom, and His blessing – and all is embodied in Jesus.

In Week Six of our Essentials series we looked at the Bible as a series of covenants that God made with Israel on behalf of mankind. But another way to view the Bible is to understand it as the history of God's Kingdom.

This is how the Jews interpreted history, and this is why it stirred such emotion when they heard Jesus preach "*the gospel of the kingdom.*" For 400 years a succession of 39 kings ruled over Israel. Initially, God wanted to be their king, but they lusted after the pomp and circumstance of neighboring nations – the *pageantry* and *security* of a visible, tangible king.

But it was their kings that led them astray from God. The kings followed after idols. And God was forced to bring judgment on His own people. The Babylonian army sacked the kingdom and took captive their king. The Jews were transported to Babel - taken into exile - where they spent 70 years in God's time out... *reflecting on their mistakes* and *repenting of their sin*. Yet God was not through with His kingdom.

It was during their captivity that God made a new covenant with Israel. The prophet Ezekiel wrote of this covenant in chapters 36-37... "*I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes... I will take the children of Israel from among the nations... gather them*

from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation... on the mountains of Israel... one king shall be over them."

This New Covenant consisted of three promises... First, Israel will **return** to their homeland. Second, the hearts of God's people will be **reborn**. And third, His Kingdom will be **re-established**... This was the covenant Jesus ratified on the cross. At the Passover He took the cup, and said, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood."

Imagine the buzz on the streets when Jesus appeared on the scene, and with urgency in His voice, preached "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Think of how a Jew might process these words. Israel is back from exile. *Aren't the king and kingdom next?* Now they hear, "The time is fulfilled." The Jews are primed to take up arms and overthrow Roman occupation. Revolution is in the air. The nation is ready for a Jesus-led *coup-de-tat*... But Jesus never gave the order to attack. *His order was to believe...*

The people had been re-gathered and the king had come, but what they had missed was a transformation of the heart - *the miracle* of new birth.

This is the issue in John 3... If you want to go to heaven it's **essential**.

A Jewish rabbi named Nicodemus approached Jesus one evening for some theological tutoring – it was the first *Nick-at-night*. Nick knew the nation had returned. *But should he be looking for the kingdom?* That's when Jesus made His famous statement, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

In other words, the second part of the New Covenant – a transformation of the heart – is a prerequisite for the kingdom. The wages of sin is death – not just physical, but spiritual. This is why our spirit has to be reborn. For a person to serve the King and be part of His kingdom you have to bow your *haughty heart*, and let God replace that stubborn stone in your chest with a sensitivity to Him and toward others. We call it "love."

The miracle of spiritual renewal is an essential element of Christianity. God's Spirit ignites a spark inside us. The divine paramedic resuscitates us. His two paddles are repentance and faith. When they're both heartfelt the current of heaven flows through them to shock us from death to life. This is *the primary miracle* God is working in the world today.

All other miracles are designed to identify Jesus as King and signal that the kingdom has come. Jesus' miracles proved *His power* and displayed *His passion* – but far more importantly, they solidified *His position*. *What kind of a man has authority over demons?* Jesus calms a storm at sea... *what sort of person whispers a command and nature obeys?*

The crowd marveled that Jesus healed the lame man, but the religious leaders didn't miss the real miracle - He forgave the man's sin. They all thought, "Who does He think He is... only God can forgive sin?"

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after rigor mortis set in. He'd been dead four days - but Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus performed miracles to clarify and affirm His identity – not to provide a permanent solution to our problems.

You need to see this truth... the wind and waves Jesus calmed kicked up again the next time cool air collided with the warmth of the lake.

Every belly that ate the loaves and fish growled the next day.

Everybody Jesus healed eventually got sick again and died.

Even Lazarus had to die twice. Imagine years later, old Lazarus in the hospice, "Here I go again!" I'm sure he prayed, "Lord, not a three-peat."

Did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead because He loved him? Of course, Jesus cared deeply for his friend. That was one reason. Did suffering and death sadden Jesus? Certainly!

“Jesus wept.” But Jesus loved every dead person in that graveyard! He cared for them all. He was *gripped by* and *grieved over* every person’s pain – all human hurt... *yet He only alleviated the suffering of one person that day.* When Jesus healed the lame man how many others went unhealed.

Jesus did miracles, but they were always a means to an ends – to prove that He was King and His kingdom had come. God does a miracle - not to reveal His love - *that’s what Jesus did on the cross.* Miracles aren’t intended to address all pain and suffering – *that was Jesus’ purpose on the cross.* The primary motive behind the miraculous in Christianity - both then and now - is to bring God glory and to prove that His Kingdom has come.

Isaiah 53:5 promises us, *“By His stripes we are healed.”* Every believer who trusts in the wounds of Jesus receives total and irreversible healing. There’s no sick section in heaven. No one is lame or blind. All broken necks are healed. In heaven miracles are God’s reward for faith. But on earth miracles serve a different purpose. A miracle is a sign.

So often we pray for our miracle now. We’re between a rock and a hard place. Only supernatural intervention will save us, so we pray... *for healing, or money, or more time to pay, or reconciliation, or a job, or just a break...* And our miracle **never** comes. Heaven remains silent. Some of you have struck out more than once in the miracle-asking department... and our tendency is to assume God doesn’t love us.

Here’s our reaction: *God doesn’t have time for me... He’s not interested in me... I must not know how to pray... I didn’t pray enough... I’m being punished for something I’ve done or didn’t do... or the worst possible conclusion to draw, **God must not have miracle power after all...***

Understand when Jesus *does* work a miracle in your life it isn’t just about YOU – it’s primarily about HIM. A miracle says to believers and unbelievers alike that Jesus is King and God’s Kingdom has come.

In John 9 Jesus and His disciples passed by a beggar who was born blind. Later in the day, Jesus spit in the dirt and smeared mud over his eyes. The man could see... A miracle had restored his sight.

But prior to Jesus’ miracle the disciples had only focused on the reason for the man’s blindness. They’d asked Jesus, *“who sinned, this man or his parents?”* And Jesus had a remarkable answer, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”*

This created a couple of thorny theological issues... How can it be God’s will for an innocent person to suffer blindness from birth? Neither he nor his parents had sinned, yet he was still touched by a malady and had to live his poor, miserable, impoverished life in the dark.

Does this mean God’s plan *for us* is inclusive of healing *and* sickness – good stuff *and* bad stuff - joy *and* sorrow? Evidently, God’s will is big enough for a lot of life... This man’s blindness was not about him. *And neither was the miracle that effected his healing.* He did nothing to deserve or receive Jesus’ miracle power. All He did was wash in the pool.

Do I believe in miracles? Yes, but here’s the lesson... miracles occur *when*, and *where*, and *why*, and for *whom* God desires. At times you pray and get your miracle. At other times you pray and life goes on as usual. God still loves me *either way*. Jesus is still God and King *either way*. I’m still expected to love Him and worship Him with all my life *either way*...

Yes, *Al Michaels*, *I believe in miracles*, but you’ll lose your mind trying to explain the ways and whys of an infinite God. There is one certainty, when God does a miracle it brings Him glory and declares Jesus as King.

Here’s a great quote, *“Miracles sometimes happen, but many a life has been wasted waiting on one. Miracles are God’s prerogative, not ours. If God chooses not to provide the tangible miracle you have requested, accept the far greater miracle of His presence in your life.”*

Jesus loves you, but miracles – and all of life – aren't *just* about you. Miracles meet a need – they reveal God's love - but ultimately a miracle brings honor to God. Miracles are a sign that God's Kingdom is here.

This is why just before Jesus ascended into heaven He told His disciples, "**These signs will follow those who believe...**" Supernatural phenomena like casting out demons, speaking in tongues, protection from snakes and poison, healing the sick by the laying on of hands... the miracles follow the faith. It's not the *source*, but the *sign*. When the Kingdom of God is present miracles of all kinds occur.

In Luke 17 the Jews confront Jesus. We're told in verse 20, "**When (Jesus) was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'**"

The Jewish idea of the kingdom was a visible, earthly, political government involving laws, institutions, structures, and armies. But the Kingdom Jesus established was the opposite. It's not a worldly kingdom. It's not showy, like a fireworks demonstration. It's not "**Wow see that!**" "**Look at that!**" God's kingdom is heavenly and spiritual. It moves under the radar. Jesus says, "**The kingdom of God is within you.**"

Here's what you need to know about God's Kingdom...

The Kingdom once was... God made promises to Israel – a *forever king* would sit on a *forever throne* and rule over a *forever kingdom*.

The Kingdom of God will be... Jesus is that forever king. On the cross He won the right to rule over creation. Right now, He sits on God's throne in heaven. In the future He'll return to earth – toss the devil out on his ear - overthrow His enemies - and take possession of all that belongs to Him.

But the Kingdom is also now... If you're born again, the King and His kingdom live within you. God's supernatural presence, and power, and peace reside in you. A *miracle* has taken place deep in your soul.

NT scholar, George Eldon Ladd, puts it this way, "**The Kingdom is an inner spiritual blessing which can be experienced only by way of the New Birth, and yet it will have to do with the government of the nations of the world. It is a present reality and a future blessing.**" God's Kingdom is like the candy I use to eat as a kid – the kingdom is **Now and Later**.

An invasion is underway... The same God Who will one day split the eastern sky and return in all His glory to be crowned King of kings... is currently in charge of a covert operation targeting the hearts of men.

In Matthew 13 Jesus depicts the stealth mission of His kingdom... it's a seed that burrows and takes root underground – it's like leaven that works from inside out – it's a mustard seed that starts tiny, but eclipses tall trees.

God's Kingdom is infiltrating the ranks of humanity to win our allegiance through His agents the Holy Spirit and the Church. In fact, the Bible's final invitation is in Revelation 22:17, "**The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'**"

Do I believe in miracles? Absolutely! Christianity is all about miracles. Miracles of all sorts signal the arrival of King Jesus and His Kingdom. The new birth, a miracle of a special sort, is His signature on our hearts.

And the implication of today's *teaching* is *far, far reaching*... God's operation in the world today is about the Kingdom and its miracles...

These truths firmly fix our faith in God. He is a God of miracles. Nothing is *too big* or *too hard* for Him. Christianity is founded on the miraculous.

These truths also establish expectations... Christian faith is born in a wash of miracles, but

on a personal level, what miracles can I expect from God - and what reaction will God expect from me?

These truths put politics in its place... We're citizens on earth and in heaven. We live in two kingdoms – one visible and one invisible. Thus, our responsibility is two-fold: work to better this world. But always be mindful the better world is *not here* and *not now* – it's yet to come.

These truths also settle my priorities in life. Romans 14:17 encourages us, "**The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**" Despite what's available to me externally my joy is found as God reigns in my heart and fills me with His blessings.

And finally, my life isn't dependent on the opinions or approval of this world. As Paul said to the Colossians, "**our life is hid with Christ in God.**" One day the Kingdom of God will be a huge expanse – an incredible place filled with wonders and awe and unbridled joy. But today, that kingdom is inside me, and through faith I can find it and live there.

In a sense Christians are believers caught in a time warp. We're in between the OT Kingdom and God's future Kingdom on the earth. We live in the meantime... in the in-between time... and we look to God's miracles to understand His intentions for this fallen world. Author Tim Keller writes, "**Jesus' miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming.**" In the meantime we live, and work, and fight, and love, and rejoice *by faith*.

Let me close with our statement: **We believe the kingdoms of this world are being invaded by the Kingdom of God. This invasion occurs spiritually. God operates in the world through the Holy Spirit and the Church. One of the signs the Kingdom has come, is the presence of God's miracles.**