

The Miraculous King of a Supernatural Kingdom: Who's In?

Matthew 12:28

November 20, 2016
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As we continue to live in the post-election grind of constant analysis and ongoing protests, it reminds me of a conversation I had with my neighbor some time ago. He was complaining about politics and politicians and the state of the country. This is a guy I don't talk to that often but he knows what I do and a little about our church. When he got done with his rant and took a breath, I said to him, "It's almost like the world needs a Savior." He said, "Hmm...that's good."

How true. The world needs something or somebody different from the leaders it has known. All of the hand wringing flows from a real worry that our present or future leaders might not be up for the job.

In two months, it's inauguration day. To remove present politics from this, let's just say it's a generic president-elect who is being inaugurated. The cameras are rolling. The nation tunes in to watch the spectacle. The new president-elect comes to Washington, D.C. by walking across the Potomac. General Washington needed a boat. Not this president. Before heading to Capitol Hill he strolls through the military hospital restoring soldiers' lost limbs. He pauses at JFK's tomb and raises him from the dead. As the rain starts to fall during his inauguration speech, he stops and says, "No rain. I want sun." And out comes the sun. What happens to the national mood about the new president? Well this president's a little different from any we've had before. We may have ourselves a right fine president. Why? If he does miracles, who must he be?

Let's talk about miracles and the kingdom of God. The gospels are chock-full of Jesus doing the supernatural. Around one-third of the Gospel of Mark is the record of Jesus' miracles. Matthew, Luke, and John all give front page to Jesus' miracles.¹ These include healings of a wide variety of diseases and deformities, altering of what we call the laws of nature to multiply food or walk on water, immediate control over weather and storms, the casting out of demons, and even resurrections from the dead.

"Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, 'Can this be the Son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.' Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.'" (Matthew 12:22-28)

Jesus' opponents could not deny the reality that a supernatural event had taken place. The man was blind and mute but now he sees and talks. The public is whispering, *maybe Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah!* Since they can't discredit the miracle, they try and discredit the source of Jesus' power. *It is only by Beelzebul (or Satan) that Jesus does this.* Jesus' response is, *why would Satan cast out Satan? That's illogical.*

¹ Clinton Arnold, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 153.

The key is in verse 28, *"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

The only real explanation for Satan's power over this man being broken is that a new kingdom has come upon you. A new power. A new person. A new king who is greater than Satan is here. The miracle proves it.

What is a Miracle?

This is a more difficult question than it seems. I saw a headline this week in which a remote Amazon tribe that had never seen an outsider saw an airplane for the first time this week. To them, a flying object would seem miraculous. To us, we hardly notice them in the sky. It's no big deal. Is flight a miracle? Have birds been miraculous all these centuries? No, they operate according to the "laws of nature."

Where did the laws of nature come from? We typically mean nature as we have observed it to normally function.² These are so regular and observable that we call it a "law." It just happens that way and because it's normal to us; it's the natural order or way things happen. For something to be supernatural, it would have to deviate from what is normal to us. So birds flying is natural; humans flying (outside of a plane) is a miracle.

Further, the universe spins and expands according to patterns of regularity. It is so precise and predictable and measurable we think it cannot happen any other way. Let's call it a law of nature. But the Bible says that God sustains the universe by his power (Colossians 1:15-20). Its constant predictability speaks to the order of his character which the mathematical precision of the universe merely reflects. This sustaining of the universe is known as God's providence. Atheists look at the universe and see laws of nature. Christians look at the universe through the Bible and see the power and providence of God. *"We are wowed by the miraculous only because we have been spoiled by God's awesome regular providence."*³ In other words, we should see everything as sourced in God's creative and sustaining power. Like the song title from the LEGO movie, *"Everything is awesome!"* Biblically, *yes it is.*

So what is a miracle?

*"God is always working directly in the world in the most fundamental metaphysical sense, actively sustaining it, in the sense of constant creation, from moment to moment. Therefore, a miracle claim does not disturb belief about the underlying cause of nature's uniformity. God is no more or less at work in the world when turning water into wine than when grapes ferment during the normal process of making wine. What makes the former sorts of events special and deserving the term miracle is, of course, the absence of certain secondary causes. But the supernatural cause behind it all remains constant."*⁴

When someone takes medicine and is healed, we thank medicine. When Jesus spoke and people were healed, we call it a miracle even though it's the same result but without what to us is a normal secondary cause. A miracle is when God chooses to act differently from the way he normally does in providence to produce a result with no other secondary cause.

² Tim Challies, "Miracles and the Peculiarities of Human Psychology," Challies.com, November 1, 2005.

³ James Spiegel as quoted by Tim Challies, "Miracles and the Peculiarities of Human Psychology," Challies.com, November 1, 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

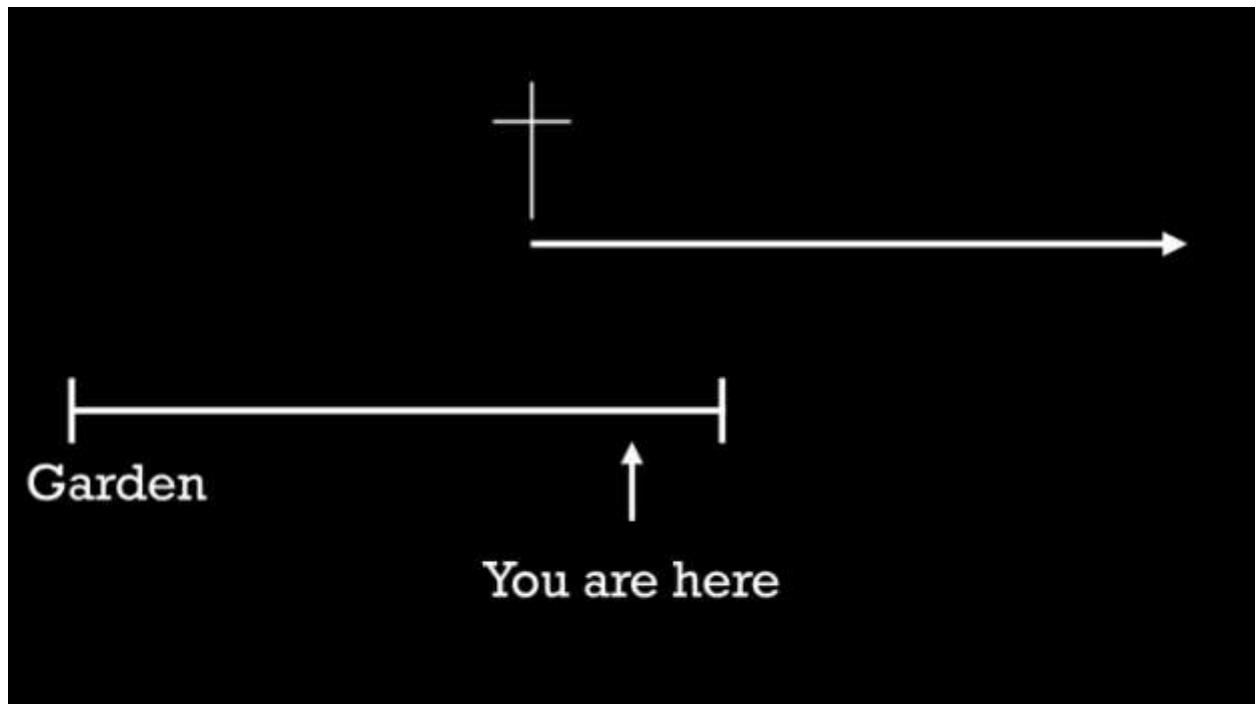
This brings us back to Jesus in Matthew 12:28, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Miracles are signs that God's Kingdom is here

The kingdom of God isn't a sign that the miraculous has come. The miracle is a sign that the kingdom of God has come. He is here. His kingdom has come *now*. Remember, the kingdom of God is the reign of God through Christ.

Let's go back to the seed parable from last week. Jesus talked about the kingdom of God like a mustard seed. It's so small yet it grows so large. In a seed of a plant is the total DNA of the plant. Everything the plant will become is in some fashion present in the seed. What the kingdom of God will be like in fullness was seen in Jesus. He was a microcosm of what the kingdom will be as a macrocosm.

Here is how the Bible describes it. We live in the time of overlapping kingdoms or ages. The *present age* and the *age to come*.⁵



The present age is passing away. This age is marked by evil, the reign of Satan, all the brokenness we see around us, and death. The age to come is the age of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is life eternal. All things will be renewed and restored. Judgment ends the present age; Jesus' resurrection began the age to come. For now there is overlap and Jesus' miracles were signs, seeds, of the age to come. The present age is blindness, lameness, demonic control, and death. The future age has none of these things. Sin is what makes healing and health seem miraculous. Death is what makes eternal life seem odd and supernatural. These are what God intended to be normal. Sin and Satan stole this and created a new normal. The kingdom of God is the old normal but it feels to us like a new normal.

⁵ See George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 35ff.

Jesus' miracles were signs that the kingdom of God has come upon us. It's here now. It's not everything it will be. It's the kingdom as a seed, but like that seed, all that the kingdom is, is here now. Let's scan the miracles in Matthew 14-15.

The feeding of the 5,000 (really more like 10-15,000) – Matthew 14:13ff.

What was supernatural here? Bakeries make more bread. Fisheries make more fish. The miracle is that Jesus didn't use wheat and yeast or go fishing. He created these instantaneously. In the kingdom of man this is a miracle. In the kingdom of Almighty God, it's no big thing to see God's direct creative power meet our needs. He is the Bread of Life.

Jesus walks on water – Matthew 14:22ff.

The creator of the universe reorders the molecules under his feet allowing him to walk on the water. Life in the age to come is going to be very different.

Mass healing at Genneseret and the Sea of Galilee – Matthew 14:34ff.; 15:29ff.

"Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel." (Matthew 15:29-31)

He healed everyone. This age is the age of hospitals and doctors. There are no hospitals in the future age to come. No Medicare. No waiting rooms. No needles. Wholeness and vitality is what life in God's kingdom is like.

He goes on to feed 4,000 (chapter 15) and his supernatural person is seen in his transfiguration (chapter 17). Why? *If I do these by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* (Matthew 12:28)

These miracles are signs that the invasion of God's kingdom and glory has come into the darkness of the present age. God is beginning to reassert his divine rule over a rebellious creation.⁶ What seems to us to be miracles will be common and ordinary in the kingdom of God. We won't call these miracles anymore. The supernatural will be the norm.

You look at a popcorn seed and you don't think, *I want to eat that*. It's hard and not apparently tasty at all. But Orville Redenbacher or somebody else thought, *I wonder what's actually inside a popcorn seed. Let's heat it up and find out what happens*. Guess what they found? Something wonderful, especially when combined with butter and salt.

What were Jesus' miracles? They were little explosions of kingdom power to show what God's kingdom is like. *It's like this, and like this, and like this, and this and this. What is a wonderful miracle in the present age is the normal stuff of the age to come. This is what my kingdom is like. And by the way, it's here because I am here. The kingdom of God is upon you. You think this is great? You haven't seen anything. You don't want to miss it.*

⁶ Arnold, p. 159.

Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and read aloud from Isaiah,
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18)

How do the spiritually blind get the idea that Jesus can help them see? He healed the blind man. How do the spiritually hungry get the idea that Jesus can help them? He fed the 5,000. Where do the deaf, the hurting, the hopeless, the sinful, the marginalized, and the dying look for any hope in this present age? How about looking to the man who touched the leper and healed him? Who forgave the sins of the prostitute weeping at his feet? Who raised the widow's son from the dead? Who fed thousands in the barren wilderness? Who was born of a virgin? Who was raised from the dead? His whole life was supernatural and all these miracles intended to communicate to a lost and dying humanity that there is a new kingdom and a very different King who offers a whole new life and future to all who believe in him.

Marva Dawn makes the point that if you go camping and there's a sign that says, campground 2 miles, you don't park your RV at the sign. The sign is to get you to the campground.⁷

The miracles are simply signs pointing us toward the kingdom of God and toward the King. Not to simply be believers in miracles but to believe in the miracle worker. To personally put our trust and faith in Christ and to pledge allegiance to him as our King. Jesus doesn't say, believe in my miracles; he says believe in me. He invites you into his kingdom by faith in his death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection for our victory and eternal life. Who's in?

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⁷ Marva Dawn, *Sexual Character*, p. 123