

**“It’s a Miracle!”**  
**Exodus 14: 19-31**  
**September 14, 2008**

I’d like to begin the message this morning by taking an informal poll. With a show of hands, tell me, how many of you believe in miracles? Well if you raised your hand, you’re in good company because just this past week, I read that in *a new report released in June of this year by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 79% of American citizens believe in miracles.* Pretty impressive when you think about it, in a day when we can’t seem to get people to agree on much of anything, it says a lot that nearly 8 in 10 Americans believe in miracles.

But with that said, there is another question that needs to be asked. What is a miracle? Of the most overused, misused, and misunderstood words in the English language, “*miracle*” has to be near the top of the list. Let’s take just a moment and think of all the ways that we use that word. When someone is unexpectedly healed of a disease, we call it a miracle. When a boss who is usually overly critical actually offers up a word appreciation, we call it a miracle. When our teenage children clean their room without being asked, we call it a miracle. When the US Hockey team beat Russia in the 1980 Olympics, we called it a miracle. When someone finds a potato chip containing the image of Christ, we call it a miracle. With all this wild variety of things that we consider to be miraculous, it’s no wonder that we have trouble agreeing on just exactly what qualifies to be considered a *bona fide* miracle.

But despite our apparent disagreement over what is or what is not a real miracle, one event that I’d be willing to bet at least 79% of us would place in the category of real live miracle would be this morning’s scripture story of Moses’s parting of the Red Sea. And much like the story of Moses and the burning bush that we talked about a couple of weeks ago, I’ll also bet that for most of us, the Charlton Heston, Cecil B. DeMille depiction of the parting of the Red Sea has taught us as much, if not more than the Bible has, about this story of God’s miraculous saving of his children from the armies of Pharaoh. Let’s watch it now ...

It’s true, isn’t it? Pretty much any time that you read or talk about the story of the parting of the Red Sea from the book of Exodus, this big, shiny, jaw dropping, Cecil B. DeMille style depiction is pretty much the way that most

people have it pictured. Well, what would you say if I were to suggest to you that the parting of the Red Sea looked nothing like that scene from “The Ten Commandments,” but instead involved the children of Israel crossing a dry sea bed during that dry season, while the Egyptians showed up just in time for the seasonal flood waters to arrive and swallow them up?

Well, agree with them or not, that is the interpretation of the story as it is shared by many if not most of the world’s most respected scholars and theologians today. Most scholars agree that far from the dramatic walls of water depicted by Cecil B. DeMille, the common understanding is that the Israelites actually crossed a shallow, marshy lake called the Sea of Reeds that was located just north of the Red Sea. As this version of the story goes, after the Israelites easily made their passage on foot, when the Egyptians showed up on horseback and in their heavy chariots, they got bogged down and stuck in the muddy bottom. They were then finished off when the annual flood waters arrived, perhaps aided in their speed and effectiveness by an earthquake-induced tsunami.

You see, there is some disagreement concerning the exact nature of the events that took place in this ancient story. However, despite the disagreement concerning precisely HOW God saved his children and destroyed the armies of Pharaoh, there is agreement on one thing—everyone agrees that it was a miracle. You see, both those that subscribe to the Cecil B. DeMille interpretation and those that subscribe to the Sea of Reeds interpretation of the story agree on one thing—no matter how it happened, God did it. Whether it took place through huge winds and tremendous walls of water or through the somewhat more subtle deluge of a seasonal flood, everyone agrees that the escape of the Israelites, and the destruction of the Egyptian army, was choreographed and executed by the hand of God. It was a miracle.

And this all goes to show us that by and large, miracles are in the eye and the perspective of the beholder. Back in the story of Moses and the children of Israel, we are told that they were at first led by, then protected in a sort of rear guard action by what is described in the scriptures as “*a pillar of cloud*” that “*moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel.*” [Exodus 14: 20–21] To the Egyptians, the cloud was nothing but a cloud. But to the Israelites, the cloud was the miraculous protective presence of God. You see, in their divergent

interpretations of the cloud as the presence of a miracle, or lack of it, is all in your way of looking at it.

In *Preaching Today*, author and speaker Tony Campolo tells this modern story that expresses much the same truth:

*I was in a church in Oregon not too long ago, and I prayed for a man who had cancer. In the middle of the week, I got a telephone call from his wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer." I said, "Had?" Whoa, I thought, it's happened.*

*She said, "He died." I felt terrible. She continued, "Don't feel bad. When he came into that church that Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence. After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing."*

*And then she said something incredibly profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed."*

You see, in big ways and small, all around us, every single day, God is bringing miraculous events into our everyday lives. This past Tuesday, my mother had a tube shoved into her abdomen and threaded into her vein where it wound its way to her heart, allowing a team of doctors to examine the arteries around her heart. And that's a miracle.

A couple of years ago in Pennsylvania, a madman broke into a classroom full of young children whom he terrorized, and he murdered five of them in cold blood before turning the gun on himself. In response to this tragedy, the children's parents attended the man's funeral and took up a collection for the children that he left behind. And that is a miracle.

Twenty-two years ago, I met a beautiful young woman named Nancy Travis. And for 22 years, the love that she has for me has allowed her to see past my numerous imperfections, and for all these years she has remained my wife and my best friend. And that is a miracle.

And then there's you. Did you know that you're a miracle? *In A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Bill Bryson marvels at what makes up human life: He writes:

*No one really knows, but there may be as many as a million types of protein in the human body, and each one is a little miracle. By all the laws of probability proteins shouldn't exist. To make a protein you need to assemble amino acids ... in a particular order, in much the same way that you assemble letters in a particular order to spell a word. [For example, to make collagen,] you need to arrange 1,055 amino acids in precisely the right sequence ....*

*The chances of a 1,055-sequence molecule like collagen spontaneously self-assembling are, frankly, nil. It just isn't going to happen. To grasp what a long shot its existence is, visualize a standard Las Vegas slot machine but broadened greatly—to about ninety feet, to be precise—to accommodate 1,055 spinning wheels instead of the usual three or four, and with twenty symbols on each wheel (one for each common amino acid). How long would you have to pull the handle before all 1,055 symbols came up in the right order? Effectively forever. Even if you reduced the number of spinning wheels to two hundred, which is actually a more typical number of amino acids for a protein, the odds against all two hundred coming up in a prescribed sequence are 1 in  $10^{260}$  (that is 1 followed by 260 zeros). That in itself is a larger number than all the atoms in the universe ....*

*Yet we are talking about several hundred thousand types of protein, perhaps a million, each unique and each, as far as we know, vital to the maintenance of a sound and happy you.*

People, you are a miracle.

Love, babies, forgiveness, and the parting of the Red Sea. They are all miracles, formed by the hand of God. So open your eyes, your ears, and your

heart, and you'll see the wonders of God all around you everyday. It is a miracle. Amen.