

Jesus Unfiltered

Session 4: Can We Believe in Miracles?

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to John chapter two verse one. This morning, we're going to do a shout out to some men who are actually here this morning, Men of Faith from Faith Assembly Church. Our own administrator John Angelakos leads a group of men on Thursday mornings from 6:30 to 7:30. They meet for leadership development, discipleship, and increasingly for accountability. Faith Assembly Church, Orlando, Florida. If you are one of the men that are visiting, Lanzo, if you're one of the men who are visiting this morning from Faith Assembly, would you please stand wherever you are and just let us welcome you? We're so glad to have you with us. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome. We're glad to have you men with us. Awesome. Our very first live shout out. That's pretty cool. That's pretty cool.

The title of the series, Jesus Unfiltered, John chapter two this morning. Can we believe in miracles? Yesterday, I had what seems like to me a small miracle happened. Actually, it was a small disaster that became a small miracle. Yesterday, for the very first time, some of you know who have been here for a while know that I have a house that cuts through from one street to the other. I told so many cutout stories that I was beginning to get a reputation as that mean guy that lived in the house between two streets. I haven't told a cut through story in a while, but this one is so preposterous that it deserves a mention. Yesterday, I get a knock on the door and I open the door and there is a man who is part of a field trip and there's a school bus straddling the road next to my house, half in my neighbor's yard, half in my yard. This school bus had taken a wrong turn. One of the students had said, "I think we turn here."

Well, we live on this little road that's about this wide. There's no turn around either. It's not a cul-de-sac at the end. It just ends. This school bus driver had figured out that she needed to turn around. She starts to maneuver this. She's going back and forth. Next thing she knows, it's like she's beached. This school bus is beached in my planter. Front left wheel's over in my planter. The only next move that she has is to knock over my neighbor's mailbox. They decided they better knock on the door. I went out and the monitor on this school bus seemed pretty calm, but the driver was pretty hysterical. Her eyes were about this big. You could tell she was really flustered. If you ever been in a situation like that and been flustered, you know that you can't do anything right. Everything works wrong. She didn't know what to do.

They asked if they could pull into a driveway a little bit so that they could turn around. I said, "I have a better idea for you. I'm about to present you with," I didn't say it. I should have. "A small miracle. You can cut through our driveway and pull out the other side." She said, "You mean it pulls? You can pull through?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm going to guide you through." This is a residential driveway and now I got this giant school bus. I'm out there directing traffic. "Go this way a little bit." Of course, she's flustered. She doesn't know what to do. I'm guiding her through. I said, "Pull over here. Come closer to the house so you can make the turn." I said, "Just please be sure on the way out the driveway you don't knock over my mailbox," which she almost did anyway. I gave her a small miracle. I mean, it was just the

most bizarre scene I have seen in a long time. This story is so odd that you almost had to be there to believe it. That's what we're going to take a look at this morning too, a story that's too odd to be a forgery, this story that we have in John chapter two.

A STORY TOO ODD TO BE A FORGERY

We're going to look at verse 11 to begin with. It says, "This," having recounted the story, "the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee, he thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him." I'm calling this just a story too odd to be a forgery. The first question up is this is the story turning water into wine. Why did the Holy Spirit preserve this story? Why did the Holy Spirit, of all the stories that could be preserved, why did the Holy Spirit decide to preserve this story of Jesus turning water into wine? Well, we have had the testimony of John that this is the lamb of God. We've had Jesus giving some affirmation to that himself, but beyond the testimony of John and the affirmation of Jesus, what is a sign that this really is deity, that this man really is a deity?

This word miraculous sign that's used here is the word sign. It's used for miracle. It says, throughout the rest of the New Testament, they ask him to show them a sign. The religious leaders asked Jesus, "Show us a sign." The crowds asked Jesus, "Show us a sign." Even his disciples said, "Lord, will you give us a sign?" There's beyond the words, there needed to be some kind of proof or some kind of evidence or some kind of sign that was beyond the person himself. Why is that? Well, that's because we know from Isaiah 52 and 53 he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. Jesus was an ordinary looking guy like you. Oh my gosh. He looked like you. Given that, if you started talking like Jesus started talking and if you started saying, "Hey, that's the lamb of God," we might want to have a little bit more evidence to support that.

Jesus decided, among other things, to give signs of his deity. This first evidence is it's a supernatural intervention or interruption of the laws of nature. Let's start at verse one in chapter two. "On the third day, a wedding took place in Cana in Galilee. Jesus's mother was there." Now, remember that John is the author of this gospel. We know at the end of this gospel, Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son." He says to John, "Behold your mother." We know that this gospel is written in the late part of the first century. For perhaps decades, John has been Mary's Social Security program. That's the way Social Security worked then. It works a little differently now. Back then, children were the Social Security for their parents. This gospel writer is talking about a woman who's probably been in his home for decades. He knows her very well. That's an aside.

"Jesus's mother was there." John's not saying "my mother," but it was his mother. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. We don't know anything else really about this. We don't know whose wedding it was. We don't know why they were invited. You could read all kinds of speculative things about this. The lesson here, just quickly, on that kind of thing is be careful not to over-read the Bible. There are necessary meanings. There are possible meanings. There are probable meanings. It's important when you are speculating just let everybody know it's an active imagination so we don't know any more than this. "When the wine was gone, Jesus's mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Woman, why do you involve me?'" Now, today, if somebody said, "Woman, why do you involve me?" At the most tender moment of Jesus's relationship with Mary when he was handing her off to John, he used the same term. It's a term of endearment in this culture. In my NIV, it says "dear woman." I think that's helpful.

Anyway, "Woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." This is so interesting because Jesus knew that what was going to happen, he was going to do this miracle. There is something about Jesus's style or manner that this is consistent with. I've just remembered these. On the road to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going to be walking farther or further. Further or farther? A greater distance. He's walking on the water and it says he's about to pass them by. The Canaanite woman who has the demon-possessed daughter asks for help and he says, "It's not right that the children's bread should be taken and tossed to the dogs." She says, "Well, even the dogs are able to eat the crumbs under the master's table." Then he says, "Your faith has made your daughter well." Then, on the 5,000, he says, "You give them something to eat." There's some clever way of Jesus drawing attention to what he's doing by these devices.

Anyway, I think that's what's happening here. "My time has not yet come." Well, actually, it has because his mother said to his servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now, this doesn't mean that the mother, the Jewish mother, is controlling the son. It means that she is surrendering the situation to the will of her son, whom she understands to be the Son of God in some sense, probably better than anyone else at that time since she was a virgin. Still, there's this mystery about who Jesus is. Nearby stood six stone water jugs. These were ceremonial jugs carved out of stone. These were not earthenware, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. These were very large jugs.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." They filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now, draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." Basically, take it to the party planner. They had a party planner for the wedding. They did so and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink." Sidebar, do you think this was real wine? There's so much debate about this. Is this like really just grape juice or whatever? Do you think this was really alcoholic beverage? Well, it must have been because you could have too much to drink. There are a lot of arguments that have been made to kind of twist this thing around. I just say don't over-read it. Just look at a plain reading of the Bible. The guests have had too much to drink, but you've saved the best til now.

Jesus took water and did what he usually does over the course of time. In other words, he takes seeds, puts them in the ground, grows vines, sun, nourishment from the soil, water from up above, and takes this water and converts it into wine over a period through a natural process. What he has done is he has compressed this action into a moment and basically suspended natural laws, the laws of nature, in order to do something supernatural. Now, this is going to present a big problem for a lot of people and we're going to talk about that. I want to finish the text though. Then it says, "This, the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee, he thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him."

Why did he do this miracle? What's obvious about this text? You know, you've heard me say it before. An obscure message will take the ... A bad message will take the obscure of ... I wasn't planning to say that. It was just kind of a spontaneous thing. Seems like I should have rehearsed that a little more. A bad message takes the obvious and makes it obscure, but a good message does what? Takes the obscure and makes it obvious. What does a great message do? It takes the obvious and makes it obvious. Let me just make very clear what's obvious here. Jesus did this miracle for a reason, to reveal his glory. Because he revealed his glory, his disciples put their faith in him. This is a powerful evidence. This is what I want

you to remember today is that miracles, people believe in Jesus when they come to see that this was in fact a miracle because a miracle, when they realize ...

You know, you've been in a room before and sitting there and suddenly become aware of a presence. Maybe you thought a burglar was in the house. Do you remember that sense of overwhelm, that sense of dread, your heightened awareness? Your senses are full alert. Suddenly you can hear every little thing. You can hear every shadow in the house. That's what happens when God reveals his glory to a man or to a woman or to a child. It is a precursor, one of the precursors to belief. That's what's happening here. That is the obvious thing. Gosh, I feel like I'm almost out of time and I haven't even really gotten started yet. Well, here's the Big Idea from this then. **Miracles release faith. Miracles release faith in people. Boldly explain them. Don't explain them away.** Of course, we live in a modern sophisticated age where there's a tendency to want to explain away the miracles, give them some sort of a naturalistic explanation, something that will satisfy the skepticism that abounds, but I think what Jesus wants us to take away here is the understanding that miracles release faith so be bold about explaining them but don't explain them away.

WHAT DO MIRACLES DO FOR US?

Next, what do miracles do for us? Well, we've looked at these things already. The first thing they do is they reveal glory. What is glory? If you'll look it up in the dictionary and this is David Delk, who's on the board of directors of Man in the Mirror, formerly the President and CEO. David loves to talk about the glory of God, to do things that we do for the glory of God. What is glory? Watch this. Glory is very great praise, honor, distinction, fame, admiration, adulation, very great. It takes all the things that are fantastic in the world and glory is very great, the very greatness of all of that. He's revealed his glory here. It's very interesting. He does it at the transfiguration. Remember that? Where Moses, Elijah, and Jesus appear on the mount, Mount Hermon. What was the response of Peter? "It's good that we're here, Lord. If you want, let me build three tents. You know, one for you, one for Elijah, and one for Moses." He was just overwhelmed. He was overwhelmed by this presence, this glory reveal, this transfiguration took place. If Jesus did not reveal his glory, do you think the disciples would have put their faith in him?

Say, "Behold the lamb of God."

Speaker 2: Behold the lamb of God.

Patrick Morley: Say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Speaker 2: He who has seen me has seen the Father.

Patrick Morley: Back away, back away, back away. All right. What else you have for me?

Speaker 2: The Bible.

Patrick Morley: The Bible. You see what I'm saying? That's just not going to be enough. That's just not going to be enough for me. Amaze me. Turn some water into wine or some coffee into iced tea or something. Anyway, you get the point. This was extremely important that he would reveal his glory. You know, you think about it, Jesus was walking around and John had to point him out. He's right there in

the crowds. John the Baptist had to point him out. He said, "There he goes. See him? He's over there." It wasn't obvious that he was the lamb of God. Then, of course, the Isaiah 53 passage that I quoted from earlier. Then when we do have this miracle, now we have a legitimate basis to say, "Oh my gosh. This claim. This assertion. I have some basis upon which to believe in." There are many miracles of course. We'll be getting to them in the due course, the principle one being the incarnation and the second principle one being the resurrection, of course, walking on water, things like that.

Big idea today. **Miracles release faith so let's boldly explain them, not explain them away.**

WHERE DOES BOLDNESS COME FROM?

Then, finally, where does this boldness come from? Okay. I'm so excited to talk to you about this next little piece here. Confidence, boldness comes from understanding what is true. The starting point for confidence is to have a worldview that's consistent with miracles. Now, what in the world is that? I've never done anything like this before, but this is a picture of my notes from my seminary class in 1994. Professor Ron Nash, the subject, apologetics. Apologetics is that branch of theology that deals with defending or explaining faith. Dr. Ron Nash, brilliant man. It's hard to have a favorite seminary professor, but he was certainly in the group that would be right up at the top. Loved that man and he loved me too, of course, which is really why I loved him. He put up on a board and I copied down these different worldviews. There are several of them but they're kind of like the three big categories I'll just talk a little bit about.

Which of these makes more sense to you? Number one, that what we see is everything there is. That's the worldview of the naturalist, naturalism. I have a pointer here, don't I? This is naturalism, this second box right here. There is nature. Nature is what? That's everything we see, the entire cosmos. Then, nature, everything there is, there is nothing outside of nature. This the worldview of the atheist. Then, there are a couple of spinoffs. Let's say that pantheism would say that ... Well, I'm not going to go into these worldviews. Anyway, that's a merge of God and nature, that they're one in the same. Then the second one, what makes more sense? That what we see is everything there is or a second worldview is that, in addition, there is a powerful intelligence which is responsible for what we see but has disengaged, is not involved. That is deism. That's this worldview right here, where you have nature and you have God outside of nature, but you don't have any access point between God and nature. Does that make sense to you, that God would create something and then not care enough about it that he would abandon it like an ostrich abandons her eggs? Well, that's a worldview that's prominent and there are permutations of that too.

Then, the third one that I want to talk about though is theism. You have the cosmos. You have nature, all that there is, but there's an opening between God and nature so that God can interact with his creation like a farmer would want to take care of the soil, like a father would like to take care of his son, or this morning, like a pet owner would like to take care of its pet. I was walking by my little dog this morning, looked up at me with those cute eyes, and I walked over and I did something I haven't done in a while. I kissed that dog. I said, "Wow. That's interesting." I really don't do that very often. I was thinking, "Wow. What just happened here? Why did I do that?" It's because I love that dog. It just made sense to me that that would be a more likely relationship between a God that would create this cosmos than to wind it up like a clock and then leave it going. You've heard that one too.

Here's how this relates to miracles. CS Lewis in his book *Miracles*, it's heavy sliding. I read it a couple times. Most people consider this to be one of the best apologetics for the Christian faith that there is. I

would certainly agree, but I'm probably just agreeing because others said it before me. It really is, it's a wonderful book. He makes the point in this book that the first decision about miracles is to decide whether you're a naturalist or a supernaturalist. He makes the point that if you are a naturalist, you don't believe in the supernatural, you don't believe that God is interacting with his creation. If you don't believe that, if that's not part of your worldview, then no amount of intellect that you bring to the texts will allow you to believe miracles. There's a presupposition that basically has to take place that my worldview allows for miracles.

There's a lot of skepticism in culture today where people have worldviews who don't allow for miracles and therefore it makes Christians timid about miracles, which is ironic because it's the miracle that reveals the glory that leads people to believe. You see how the devil might lie to make you timid about miracles, to not be bold about miracles? Yeah, because some people are going to psssh at you. Some people are going to dismiss you. Some people are going to ridicule you. You might even get, who knows, maybe a little clique at the gym who begins to persecute you and make side comments to you and so forth. Who knows what might happen? Well, that's exactly what was happening in the first century. You know, the rabbis were denouncing. The Pagans were dismissing. The historians were downplaying. This was all going on, has been going on ever since. There's really nothing new here. You think that the skepticism out there is so much more radical than it was back then? I don't think so. It's just a different form.

It's an impediment to us being bold. If we do have a worldview that says, "Okay, I think it's possible that God could ..." Here are a couple things that, I take notes in the front. I don't know why I do that, but I just write down things in the front of books. You probably do something. You got your own method. The first decision, those who assume miracles are not possible are wasting their time looking for proof of existence in texts. In other words, this is Lewis, not me. He's saying it's a waste of time for somebody who doesn't believe in the possibility of miracles to be looking for proof of their existence by reading about miracles. The first decision is to help people understand the possibility of the supernatural.

The second decision, he didn't say this was the second decision, but it seems like it. Does God ever do anything to his creation beyond the general character which he gave it? Would it not make sense, that's the third thing there, that if a farmer saw that a row of corn wasn't getting enough fertilizer, that he might add a little extra? I am out of time. Third decision is nature ... Read the book. You might be ridiculed, but the reason we want to be bold is because even though you might be ridiculed, dismissed, diminished, persecuted, whatever it is, we know that some will believe. That's why we want to not explain miracles away, but be bold explaining them because miracles do release faith. That's the Big Idea today. **Miracles release faith so boldly explain them. Don't explain them away.**