

INTRODUCTION

In light of all the economic news about the debt ceiling and Wall Street's wild ride, you might have missed the news of the death of a very important American recently. If you ever sung or danced to the song "Hokey Pokey," you might be interested to know that Larry LaPrise, who wrote the Hokey Pokey, died recently at the age 83. The most traumatic thing for his family was when they tried to get his body in the coffin. They put his right leg in...and that's when the trouble started.

Of course, that's a joke. Mr. LaPrise was buried, but there was no report of problems. But there's one line from that song worth noting. After you put all your body parts in and out and shake them all around you sang, "You do the Hokey Pokey, and that's what it's all about." I saw a sign recently that asked the question: "What if the Hokey Pokey REALLY is what it's all about?"

If "it" refers to life or your total existence, I can most definitely say the Hokey Pokey ISN'T what it's all about. I'll be glad to tell you what IT'S really all about. It's all about the cross of Jesus. The most important event in all of human history is when Jesus went to the cross to die for our sins. Since this is a series on Parables and Miracles I want you to take a moment and think about "The Miracle that Never Happened."

Earlier in the week I polled some of my Facebook friends asking, "Can you guess what the miracle is that never happened?" I got some interesting answers. One person posted, "The Cowboys going back to a Super Bowl!" Someone else posted, "Congress voting to limit themselves to only two terms of service."

And several people pointed out that when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the Wilderness, He could have turned the stones into bread, or jumped down from the pinnacle of the temple and been caught by angels. Those are indeed miracles that could have happened, but didn't.

But the miracle that never happened that has the greatest influence on us is when Jesus could have called for 12 Legions of angels to rescue Him from the hands of those who arrested Him, and He didn't call to be rescued. That's the miracle that never happened, thank God!

Matthew 26:47-51: "While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear."

There are a couple of important details about this we learn from John and Luke. John 18:10 says, "Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)" Luke 22:51 says, "And he touched the man's ear and healed him."

Matthew 26:52-56: “‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’ At that time Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”

There were several people around Jesus that night when He was arrested. In addition to talking about the miracle that never happened I want to examine some of these people and learn an important lesson from each one.

1. JUDAS: You can kiss the door of heaven and never get in

As we think about Judas, I’m reminded of a summary of the New Testament written by a child. “Jesus is the star of The New Testament. He was born in Bethlehem in a barn. [I wish I had been born in a barn too, because my mom is always saying to me, “Close the door! Were you born in a barn?” It would be nice to say, “As a matter of fact, I was.”] During His life, Jesus had many arguments with sinners like the Pharisees and the Republicans. Jesus was a great man. He healed many leopards and even preached to some Germans on the Mount. Jesus also had twelve opossums. The worst one was Judas Asparagus. Judas was so evil that they named a terrible vegetable after him.”

Judas was the worst of the apostles, because he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. The name “Judas” will forever be associated with treachery and betrayal. I’ve heard of a dog named Judas and a goat named Judas; but mothers don’t tend to name their sons Judas.

While there are thousands of songs written about Jesus, nobody sings about Judas—Lady Gaga being the exception. But even in that song Gaga says, “Jesus is my virtue, but Judas is the demon I cling to.”

Jesus wasn’t surprised by Judas’ betrayal. Earlier that night He had predicted one of the disciples would betray Him. And early in His ministry, Jesus pointed out that Judas was a traitor. Jesus said, “‘Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!’ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)” (John 6:70-71) Judas was fulfilling scripture when he betrayed Jesus. Psalm 41:9 says, “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

Judas kissed Jesus and Jesus said in John 10:9, “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” He kissed the door of heaven yet never got in.”

Judas is a warning to everyone that you can have both religious association and religious participation and not really be saved. Judas was associated with the followers of Jesus, in fact, he was in the top 12! He was sent out on the same mission as the other disciples. He had an association and participation, but he didn’t have salvation. I’ve said many times that you can

have an association with a church; be a church member, and still not really be saved. You can have participation; you can work and serve until your fingers are worn to the bone, and that doesn't mean you're saved.

Could Judas have been saved? I think He could, but he wouldn't. We read later that Judas regretted what he did, but he never repented of what he did. After the cross, he went back to the religious leaders and said, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" He tried to give the money back, but they refused. Then instead of waiting with the other disciples to ask for the forgiveness of Jesus, like Peter did, Judas went out and committed suicide. He kissed the door of heaven and never got in. What a warning to those who think religious affiliation and activities will get you to heaven.

2. PETER: You don't have to defend the Lord; just trust Him

When the mob arrived, Peter drew his sword took a hefty swing at a man named Malchus. He wasn't trying to cut off his ear; he was trying to split his skull. But remember, Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman.

Peter made three mistakes that night. First, he fought the wrong enemy. Malchus wasn't his enemy; he was just a servant of the High Priest doing his job. As Christians we sometimes think we're in a physical fight against physical foes. But the Bible says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) Our battle isn't against other people; our battle is against the devil and his demons.

Peter made a second mistake when he used the wrong weapon. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. The Bible says, "We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

Fifty days later, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and used another sword—the two-edged sword of the Word of God. And when he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in Acts 2 here's what the Bible said happened: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37) Peter told them to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name and 3,000 of them were saved that day. The Word of God is the best sword to use!

Peter's final mistake was the wrong attitude. He was angry. He was mad that they were attacking his Lord, so jumped forward to defend Jesus. Jesus said, "Peter, put away your sword, I'm doing something here today that goes beyond your understanding. Don't mess it up!" One of our problems today is that we have a lot of angry Christians who think it's their job to draw their swords and defend Jesus. But the Bible says we should be, "Slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." (James 1:20)

Have you ever been listening to a radio talk show when a Christian calls in and they're so angry that they spout off and swing their verbal sword without thinking about the damage? Christians

can be mean-spirited at times. And when unbelievers hear that they think, "If that's a Christian, I don't want any of that!" Sometimes when I read some of the threads of comments on Facebook or YouTube, I want to say, "Hey, Christians, put away your sword!"

God doesn't need us to defend Him. He didn't call us to be His defense attorney or a Prosecutor; He called us to be a witness!

I'll be saying more about this on September 11, but we all know we face the threat of a false religion with a history of using the sword. In modern times they use bombs or hijacked airplanes. This religion is based on a lie, and you can't kill a lie with bombs or bullets. The only way to kill an idea is with a better idea. These people will never be impressed as long as we have a sword in our hands. I believe we have a better idea: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15)

Peter was trusting in his sword for his confidence, but as long as his sword was drawn, He couldn't trust in Jesus. Here's a question for you to consider: What sword are you tempted to rely upon rather than upon God? Is there something going on in your life right now and you have your sword drawn and you're slashing away with all your might? Jesus says, "Put your sword away. I'm up to something here, don't mess it up." The battle isn't yours; it's the Lord's!

3. TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS: Jesus could have saved Himself; instead He surrendered Himself for us

I wonder if Jesus didn't smile a little when He looked at Peter's pitiful little sword. He said, "Put it away, Peter. I could call on my Father and RIGHT NOW, in this second, He would send more than twelve legions of angels to my rescue."

Several years ago I wrote a couple of books on angels because I wanted to provide a Biblical corrective to all the false beliefs about angels. One of the most popular myths about angels is they are cute little babies with wings who are sweet and playful. Like the song from the '60's, "Cupid, draw back your bow..." There's not a single reference in the Bible to a baby angel. Instead angels are most often described as mighty warriors with swords. The first time angels are mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 3 where God placed angels with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

So when you think of angels, don't imagine sweet little beautiful "angelic" beings. Instead you should visualize trained supernatural soldiers like those members of the Navy Seal Team who took out Osama bin Laden. Angels are the mightiest warriors in the universe.

And Jesus said His Father could send Him OVER twelve Legions. A legion was a word used by the Roman Army that meant 6,000 soldiers; so twelve legions would be 72,000 angels. How much damage could they have done that night?

To see the destructive power of just one single, angel-warrior, let's go to the Old Testament. Sennacherib was the King of Assyria and he had surrounded Jerusalem. The Israelites were vastly outnumbered and Sennacherib publicly taunted King Hezekiah and blasphemed the God

of Israel. Hezekiah went into the Temple in sackcloth and ashes and prayed these words, "O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on the earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God." (2 Kings 19:19) Here's how God answered that prayer. "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there." (2 Kings 19:35-36)

So based upon that, let's do a little angel arithmetic: If one angel warrior could kill 185,000 soldiers, then 72,000 angel warriors could kill 13.2 billion soldiers. That's over twice the population of the earth today! And the night Jesus spoke these words, it is estimated there were less than one billion people on earth. In other words, if Jesus had given the word, these angel warriors could have literally wiped out the entire population of the planet.

And I suspect that, in heaven, the angels were armed to the teeth standing on the ramparts of heaven. They were locked and loaded and ready for the Father to give them the word. As they watched the Savior being slapped, whipped, and ridiculed, I wonder if the angels said, "How dare they treat the Son of God that way! Father, can we go?" But Jesus surrendered Himself to the cross rather than saving Himself. It's the miracle that never happened, thank God!

4. MALCHUS: When you're wrong or wounded, let Jesus touch you

John points out that the servant's name was Malchus. Many scholars suggest John identified him because he later was numbered among the believers. This must have been a life-changing experience for Malchus.

Let's imagine Malchus is here giving his testimony. "I'd been told by my boss, Caiaphas, that Jesus was a treacherous blasphemer—another phony Messiah. I was convinced the best thing to do for the good of the nation was to get rid of this dangerous fraud. I was in line with the other guys when I heard someone shout, 'There He is! That's Jesus, let's get him!' As I moved forward to pin his arms I didn't notice the big fisherman behind him. I saw the flash of a sword out of the corner of my eye and my brain registered that this guy had a sword and he was trying to chop off my head. At the last instant I ducked, but it was too late. The sword glanced off the side of my head and sliced off my right ear. I screamed in pain and fell to my knees. I reached up and my ear was gone—my hand came back full of blood! I thought, 'What a disaster! I'll be scarred for life! Not only am I disfigured, I'm now ceremonially disqualified from even visiting the Temple.' I saw my mangled ear lying in the dirt. With a roar of pain I was getting ready to jump up and nail that guy with the sword. But as I looked up I heard Jesus telling him to put up his sword. What happened next changed my life forever. This madman, this imposter, then reached down and picked up my severed ear. With a look of love and compassion I'd never seen before in human eyes he placed the ear back on my head and closed His eyes. In a split second, my ear was reattached as if it had never been severed! I thought I had imagined it all, but the blood was all over my robe. In that one instant, I realized this man really was the Son of God. I came into the garden to arrest Him, but as they dragged Him away I just stood there touching my ear. I don't care what Mr. Caiaphas says; this man is no imposter. He really IS the Son of God."

Malchus was wrong and wounded and Jesus touched him and healed him. Maybe you are here today and you've convinced yourself that Jesus really isn't the Son of God. He can touch you today and change you. Maybe you've been verbally abused by some hotheaded Christian like Peter who didn't reflect the love of Christ to you. You don't have to live with your hurt. He can touch you and heal you today.

CONCLUSION

J.R. R. Tolkien, who wrote the Lord of the Rings trilogy, was a committed Christian and his faith can be seen in his story of good winning over evil. Tolkien was instrumental in the Christian conversion of an agnostic writer friend named Clive. Clive Staples Lewis, or C.S. Lewis, became one of the most respected voices of Christianity in the 20th Century. As I was studying this week about how Jesus willingly surrendered Himself to His captors, I thought of the parallel scene from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. You might have seen the movie, but reading it in the words of C.S. Lewis' is better.

Aslan, the mighty Lion is a picture of Jesus. In the climax of this book, Edmund was found guilty of eating the forbidden Turkish Delights, and the White Witch comes to claim his blood. But Aslan offers to take the place of the guilty Edmund, one of the sons of Adam. This section describes the Witch's mob carrying Aslan to his death. Lucy and Susan are following behind, and they expect Aslan to escape at any moment. As I read these words from Lewis' book, try to picture, Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who could have saved Himself. Lucy and Susan held their breaths waiting for Aslan's roar and his spring upon his enemies. But it never came. "Bind him, I say!" said the White Witch. The hags made a dart at him and shrieked with triumph when they found that he made no resistance at all. The others—evil dwarfs and apes—rushed in to help them, and between them they rolled the huge Lion over on his back and tied all four of his paws together, shouting and cheering as if they had done something brave, though, had the Lion chosen, one of those paws could have been the death of them all. But he made no noise, even when his enemies pulled the cords so tight they cut into his flesh. Then they began to drag him toward the Stone Table.

"Stop! Said the witch. "Let him first be shaved." Another round of laughter went up from her followers as an ogre with a pair of shears came forward and squatted down at Aslan's head. Snip-snip-snip went the shears and masses of curling gold began to fall to the ground ..." And thus, Lewis describes the humiliation and scorn Aslan silently endured, just like the Lord Jesus Christ being tortured and mocked. After their fun, the White Witch plunges a knife into the shorn lion, and he dies, and the imps of the wicked one celebrated.

But of course, we know that's not the end of the story. In Lewis' story, the next morning Lucy and Susan come and find the lifeless body of the great lion. They cry and weep, and lose all sense of time. Finally, they decide that all hope is gone, and they turn to leave. I'll pick up with Lewis' words: At that moment they heard from behind them a great noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate. "They're doing something worse to Him," said Lucy. "Come on!" And she turned around pulling Susan.

The Stone Tablet (death) was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end and there was no Aslan. "Oh, it's awful," sobbed Lucy, "they might have at least left the body alone." "Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"

"Yes!" said a great voice behind their backs. They looked around. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had ever seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself. "Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad. "Aren't you dead then, dear Aslan?" said Lucy. "Not now," said Aslan. Then in Lewis' story, the two girls and the great Lion rollick and play in joy until they are all exhausted; but Aslan's job isn't finished. I love this next part! "And now," said Aslan presently, "I feel I am going to roar. You had better put your fingers in your ears." And they did. And Aslan stood up and when he opened his mouth to roar, they saw all the trees in front of him had bent before the blast of his roaring like grass bends in the meadow before the wind. (Selections from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis, pp. 40-47) Listen. I still think I can hear that roar, can you?

I love the words to that song Sandi Patty used to sing: "He could have called His Holy Father, and said, 'Take me away! Please take me away!' He could said, 'I'm not guilty! And I'm not gonna' stay; I'm not gonna' pay!' But He walked right through the gate; And then on up the hill. And as He hung beneath the weight; He cried 'Father, not my will.' And I'm the one to blame; I caused all the pain. He gave Himself the day He wore my crown."

The reason Jesus didn't call for angels to rescue Him is because He loved us so much He was willing to suffer to absorb the punishment for our sin. That's "The Miracle that Never Happened." Jesus didn't call for that miracle so that another, greater miracle CAN happen: He can come into your life and forgive your sins, and make you a new person. That's the miracle that CAN happen!

OUTLINE

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Personal question: What sword are you tempted to rely upon rather than upon God?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes