

INTRODUCTION

We're in a series from Matthew studying the Parables and Miracles of Jesus. Every time you come to church you can be sure that the main theme is Jesus. And remember, there's a parable in every miracle and a miracle in every parable.

Today we're going to look at some of the healing miracles of Jesus. One Sunday, a pastor asked, "Does anyone need special prayer?" Old Frank stood up and said, "Pastor will you pray for my hearing?" The pastor motioned for Frank to walk down to the front of the church and when Frank arrived, the preacher slapped both of his palms over Frank's ears and began to pray in a loud voice, "Dear Lord, restore Frank's hearing. In Jesus' name Amen!" Then the preacher said, "Well, Frank, how is your hearing now?" Frank was a little startled and he finally said, "I don't know preacher, my hearing isn't until next Wednesday at the courthouse!"

We sometimes misunderstand what others really need, but Jesus knows exactly what you need today, and He is STILL performing miracles.

Matthew 8:14-17. "When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our infirmities and carried our diseases.'"

There are a variety of miracles in this passage. We don't know much about Simon Peter's family, but we know he was married, because his mother-in-law was ill and Jesus healed her. Ron Dunn used to say that's probably why Peter later denied the Lord three times! In addition to that specific miracle, Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick. Some people say all sickness is due to demonic influence, but that's not true. Our text says Jesus drove out demons *and* healed the sick. Just because you have the flu doesn't mean you are under demonic attack. But other than the miracles of healing and liberation from demons, there is a MAJOR miracle in this passage that you might miss unless you are looking for it.

I. THE MIRACLE OF FULFILLMENT

After Matthew reported these various miracles he wrote, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" (Matthew 8:17) Fifteen times in Matthew we read that exact phrase, "This was to fulfill what was written." Matthew quotes the Old Testament 36 times in his 28 chapters—far more than Mark, Luke, or John. Don't forget, Matthew was a tax collector before he became a disciple. As a CPA, his job was to reconcile columns of figures. As he wrote his account of Jesus' life, he was comparing two columns: On one side were the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah, and on the other side were the details of Jesus' life. As an accounting type, he couldn't miss the fact the two columns agreed!

(1) There are over 40 Messianic prophecies Jesus has already fulfilled

A Messianic prophecy is a passage in the Old Testament that predicts things about the life of the coming Messiah, the King of Kings. Some scholars suggest there are around 300 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, but some of the passages are open to debate about whether they are about the Messiah. So that's why I'm using the conservative number of forty. For instance, the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and Daniel even predicted *when* He would be born. The prophecies predicted that in an attempt to kill Him, there would be a slaughter of innocent children, and the young Messiah would be taken to Egypt. It was predicted the Messiah would be betrayed by a friend for exactly 30 pieces of silver. And centuries before crucifixion was even invented, the Old Testament predicted the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced, but none of His bones would be broken. I don't have time in this message to report all the fulfilled prophecies, but if you're interested in seeing a list, I've posted one on my September 1 blog at www.daviddykes.com.

The fact that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies is powerful evidence that the Bible is a supernatural book and Jesus is who He claimed to be—the Son of the Living God. Why? Because the odds of one person randomly fulfilling 40 predictions about the details of their life are astronomical! To help you understand the science of probability, let's use a coin as an example. If I flip a coin, what are the odds of it coming up heads? 1 in 2 chances. But then what are the odds that I can flip it and it will be heads twice in a row? 1 chance in 4. The odds of getting three heads in a row are 1 in 8. To jump ahead, do you know what the odds are of getting 10 heads in a row? 1 chance in 1,024. But watch how the probability changes. The odds of getting 20 heads in a row are 1 chance in 1,048,576!

Using the science of probability, a mathematician named Dr. Peter Stoner, the head of the science department at Westmost College, conducted research into the probability that a person could have randomly fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. Given the time elapsed from the prophecies and the number of people who had lived on the planet when Jesus was born, Dr. Stoner determined the odds of a person randomly fulfilling just EIGHT of these prophecies was 1 out of 10 to the 17th power (that's 1 chance out of 10 followed by 17 zeroes, which is a hundred quadrillion or 1:100,000,000,000,000).

To put that number in perspective, if you had one quadrillion silver dollars, you could cover the entire state of Texas to a depth of two feet. Now place a check mark on just one of those silver dollars. Next, blindfold a person and send him out to wade through that pile of one quadrillion silver dollars. The chances of him picking the one silver dollar with the check mark on it in his first attempt are the same odds of one person randomly fulfilling just EIGHT predictions about their life.

But wait, there are many more than eight prophecies, and like flipping the coin, the odds increase when you consider more prophecies. Dr. Stoner calculated the odds of one person fulfilling 48 prophecies about their life is 1 chance in 10 to the 157th power. That's a 10 followed by 157 zeroes. That number is far too large to use the silver dollar illustration. Instead, think in terms of tiny electrons. If there was a way you could mark a single electron, then mix it up with 10 to the 157th power electrons, it would make a cloud so large it would be six million light years from side to side—but not just one cloud of electrons, but billions of these clouds of electrons—then

put a spacesuit on a person and have them choose one electron. The chance of him choosing that marked electron is the same as one person fulfilling 40 predictions about their life. So there is no way Jesus or anyone else could have *randomly* fulfilled this prophecies.

(2) There are hundreds of prophecies about the return of Christ He will fulfill

Jesus spoke prophecies Himself. He predicted the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, and in 70A.D. it happened exactly as He said. He also made predictions about His return. In fact, there are many more prophecies in the Bible about the second coming of Christ, than there are about His first coming! So, if Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about His first coming, you can be certain He will fulfill all the prophecies yet to come.

So what's the point of this? Like Matthew, why don't you honestly examine the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah? In one column you have these predictions. In the other column you have the details of the life of Jesus. Compare the two. What's your verdict?

Lee Strobel was a Yale Law School graduate and a journalist for the Chicago Tribune. When he was a skeptic and an atheist, he undertook an investigation into the claims of so called "prophets." He set out to debunk the prophecies of Jeane Dixon, Nostradamus, and the Old Testament writers. Jeane Dixon was the easiest target. He found she was right about 6% of the time. She predicted World War III would start in 1954 and that Castro would be thrown out of Cuba in 1970. And Jeane Dixon predicted Jacqueline Kennedy would never remarry and the NEXT DAY she announced her engagement to Aristotle Onassis. When Lee studied Nostradamus, he discovered his writings from 1555 were mysterious and often mistranslated. He was intentionally vague and has been misquoted to make his writings fit modern events. It was easy for him to debunk the prophecies of Jeane Dixon and Nostradamus. But when he studied the predictions of the Old Testament, he was unable to refute the evidence. They aren't vague or enigmatic: They are specific and clear. When Strobel studied them and compared them to the life of Jesus, he became convinced Jesus was who He claimed to be—the Son of God. Today he is a leading Christian speaker and author.

We sometimes speak about blind faith, but when it comes to believing that Jesus is the Messiah, it is a faith based on evidence. To ignore this absolute truth you must close your eyes to the evidence. So to me, it's not faith that is blind, it's UNBELIEF that is blind.

II. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE MIRACLE

Isaiah 53 wasn't just fulfilled when Jesus walked on the earth 2,000 years ago. I believe Jesus is *still* fulfilling the prophecy from Isaiah today! Let's look more closely at Isaiah 53:4-5, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Some people claim the age of miracles are over, but I believe miracles are still happening. Jesus is no longer physically in our midst but He promised that where two or three people gather in His

name He would be there. Jesus is here right now in the Person of the Holy Spirit and in His body, the church. And whenever Jesus shows up, miracles happen. The Bible says He is "the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) Do you need a miracle? Based upon the promises found in Isaiah 53, there may be four areas where you need the touch of Jesus.

This passage says, "Surely he took up our infirmities." The Hebrew word "infirmities" is one that means "moral weakness." So let me ask you:

(1) Do you have weaknesses? Jesus can take them away

That evening in Galilee, Jesus cast out demons from people who were struggling with a variety of obsessions and addictions. I'll be speaking more about demonic weaknesses in a future message. But for our purposes in this message, think of demonic interference as a tendency or weakness in your life that recurs and prevents you from experiencing the fullness of life God has for you. We make a mistake if we think demons are hideous creatures you see depicted in movies. I believe they are more like unhealthy urges and habits.

Just as Jesus had authority over demons 2,000 years ago, He can still liberate you from them today. But in order to receive help, you must admit you have a weakness and then ask the Lord to help deliver you. However, we're often too proud to beg the Lord to help us.

I love the words of that great old hymn written by Joseph Scriven: "Are you weak and heavy laden? Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior still our refuge. Take it to the lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the lord in prayer. What a friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry—everything to god in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." (What a Friend We Have in Jesus, 1855.)

Not only will Jesus take away your weaknesses, we also read that He has "carried our SORROWS." So,

(2) Do you have grief? Jesus can carry it for you

Grief and sorrow occur when you lose something. You may be grieving over the death of a loved one. Or you may be grieving over a divorce, or a lost job. But sorrow is a part of the human experience. Some people try to "drown their sorrow" in alcohol. When some people are stressed, they head to the refrigerator for what they call "comfort food." God has a better offer. Instead of carrying the load of your cares, why don't you cast your cares on the Lord? 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

The choice is yours. You can carry your grief, sorrows, and anxiety yourself, or you can let Jesus carry them for you; and His shoulders are much broader and stronger! In her book *You Can Too*, Mary Crawly describes her philosophy for worry-free living. She writes: "When things go wrong, I just don't go with them. Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway." That's great advice!

The Bible says Jesus was, "pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities."

(3) Do you have guilt? Jesus can forgive you

These words sound as if Isaiah had been standing at the foot of the cross watching the nails being driven into the hands and feet of Jesus. Instead of the Messiah being a military king, Isaiah looked through his prophetic telescope and saw the Messiah would be a suffering servant. And there is a simple reason WHY the Messiah would have to suffer: For our sins. Our transgressions are why He was pierced. It was for our iniquities that He was crushed.

Guilt over mistakes is a universal feeling. Some people try to shake this guilt feeling through all kinds of psychological tricks. I can remember back in the 70s when one of the most talked-about books was entitled, *I'm Okay, You're Okay* by Thomas Harris. It introduced a Transactional Analysis approach to shedding guilt feelings about ourselves and critical feelings toward others. During the height of that craze I remember seeing a college student wearing a t-shirt with a picture of Jesus dying on the cross. Underneath the picture, the caption said, "If I'm okay and you're okay, then why did this happen?"

Do you know why we feel guilty? Because we are! We are all guilty of sin against a Holy God. The truth is: I'm not okay, and you're not okay, but that's okay because Jesus took the punishment for our sins, and He can forgive us.

The Christian faith is the only one that offers a remedy for guilt, and it's God's forgiveness. When people of other religions discover this, it is often a refreshing truth that causes them to want to accept Jesus.

For instance, Islam teaches you have to try to compensate for your sins by performing good works. And if you perform enough good deeds they will cancel out your bad deeds. But there are some sins in Islam for which there is no forgiveness: murder, adultery, and apostasy. That's why Islamic republics under Sharia law can legally kill those who are guilty of murder, adultery, and apostasy.

But don't think this is just something happening in foreign countries. If you've been watching the news, it is happening here in America. Rifqa Bary is a beautiful 17-year-old honor student from Columbus, Ohio who ran away from home a couple of weeks ago because she feared that her father would kill her because she has become a Christian. Under Sharia law, a father is honor bound to kill a child if they commit apostasy. Rifqa is the first Christian in her family in 150 generations. Rifqa says she became a Christian two years ago because she was tired of struggling with the issue of sin and guilt. A friend had told her Jesus could forgive her sins, so she trusted Christ and was baptized this spring. She was tired of trying to deal with the guilt. We need to pray for Rifqa and other Muslim teenagers here and around the world. Those who come to Christ face terrible persecution and even death for their faith.

The fourth promise from Isaiah 53 says, "by his wounds we are healed."

(4) Do you have pain? Jesus can heal you

There are different kinds of pain. Your point of pain may be physical, or it might be mental or emotional. But whatever the source, Jesus can heal you.

Jesus often touched people to heal them, but this verse doesn't say, "By his touch we are healed." At other times, Jesus spoke the word and healing occurred. But the Bible never says, "By his words we are healed." It says, "By his WOUNDS we are healed."

That refers to the suffering Jesus endured on the cross. It is only by His wounds that we experience the kind of healing that we most need. The greatest pain of all is sin sickness, and it is only by the blood of Jesus that we can be healed of the most deadly disease: Sin. Think about it, you can be healed of any earthly disease and you'll probably get sick again and eventually die. But the only permanent illness is sin sickness. The reason Jesus allowed Himself to be wounded was so that we could be healed of the cancer of sin.

In his book, *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy named Johnny whose younger sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained to him that his sister had the same disease he had recovered from two years earlier. Since they both had a rare blood type, her only chance for recovery was for a transfusion from him.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" The doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure. I'll do it for my sister." Soon the children were wheeled into the same room. Mary was pale and thin; Johnny was robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. As he watched the blood flow through the tube, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. "Doctor, when do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate blood to his sister. He'd thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his decision that if necessary he'd give his life for his sister. But Johnny didn't have to die. He was just donating blood for his sister.

But when Jesus gave His blood for us, He died doing it. He was wounded for our transgressions, and by His wounds, we are healed. The other place where Isaiah 53:5 is quoted in the New Testament is 1 Peter 2:24 where it says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed." When Jesus died on the cross, He took our sins and our sorrows. He took the punishment that I deserved.

CONCLUSION

Do you need a miracle today? A miracle doesn't have to be the parting of the Red Sea or Jesus walking on water. A miracle is when Jesus shows up and touches a person who is in need. When God forgives a sinner and accepts that person into His family, it requires a miracle. Salvation is the greatest miracle. George Beverly Shea turned 100 this year and he loves to tell about something that happened at a Billy Graham Crusade in London years ago. He had just finished singing when an English woman came up to him and was visibly upset. She said, "You have

insulted every British citizen here tonight." He said, "What do you mean?" She said, "I know that you Americans are proud of your country, but it was arrogant of you to sing, 'It took America to put the stars in place; it took America to hang the world in space...'" He had to say, "Ma'am I sang, 'It took A MIRACLE—not America!'" He's right, it does take a miracle! As the chorus says, "When He saved my soul; cleansed and made me whole; it took a miracle of love and grace." Jesus is **STILL** performing miracles. Will you let Him touch you today?

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes