

SEEING THE LIGHT

how to prepare your heart for learning and sharing the gospel

LESSON 5 | PAUL SAW THAT CONVERSION IS NOT A MIRACULOUS EXPERIENCE | 1/10/2021

It is not uncommon for some to say that the salvation in Christ is a miracle. One simple example is here:

1. It is a miracle that [Jesus](#) resurrected from the dead and conquered the grave ([Luke](#) 24; Revelation 1:8; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
2. It is a miracle that man, who is naturally at enmity with God (Romans 8:7), can live at peace with His Creator through [faith](#) in the Lord [Jesus](#) Christ (Romans 5:1).
3. It is a miracle that Christ can deliver man from the power of [sin](#) and [death](#) (Romans 7:24, 8:1, 2), and empowers him to live a perfect life in [obedience](#) to the divine will (Romans 8:3, 4).
4. It is a miracle that a sinner can be [born again](#) ([John](#) 3:3-9), that an imperfect person (Romans 3:23) can be changed (Romans 12:2) by the grace of Christ into a perfect man ([Matthew](#) 5:48) and become a child of God. (bibleask.org)

Although people use "miracle" regularly to refer to a broad range of wondrous events, the biblical idea is limited to those events not explainable *solely by natural processes* but which *require the direct causal agency of a supernatural being, usually God*. These occur throughout Bible and see the most frequent in the early part of the century of Jesus' presence on earth. One definition often used for a miracle is "an event which the forces of nature—including the natural powers of man—cannot of themselves produce, and which must, therefore, be referred to a supernatural agency" (Fisher, *Manual of Christian Evidences*, 9).

In Biblical history, the act of Creation meets the description of a miracle. God spoke (Hebrews 11:3) and it was done (Psalm 33:9). Since this is the beginning of nature, it stands unique in consideration. However, there are events described as miracles where there is a temporary cessation of natural laws: Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee by His words (Matthew 8:23-27); Walking on the waters of the same lake (John 6:16-21); Instantly healing the human body of blindness (John 9:1-7) and lameness (Acts 3:1-10); And there were the raising of the dead (John 11:43-44). Other events described as miracles occur when demons are excised (Matthew 12:22ff) and controlled (Mark 5:1-11). Other events manifest as miracles when material things are instantly changed into another materially like water to wine (John 2:1-11), and multiplied, like a small amount of loaves and fishes to feed thousands (John 6:1-14).

That Jesus was raised from the dead – is indeed a miracle. But the question at hand is if what God has done from man's salvation in his offer is defined as a miracle. Further, is it true that the human response to the offer of salvation is anything like a miracle? There is no question that the whole offer of grace is amazing, stupendous, and wonderful. But is it a miracle.

Just as modern so-called miracles do not meet the Biblical criteria above to be miracles, we will learn from the conversation of Paul when he did indeed "see the light" that there was a miracle he that he SAW but his obedience to it was not.

On the Damascus road, Saul had an unrivaled religious experience.

- He saw a light from Heaven (Acts 26:13)
- He heard the voice of the Savior (Acts 9:4; 22:7).
- He had a "heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19)
- Jesus "appeared" also to him (Acts 9:17) in the same way He appeared to those other witnesses (1Corinthians 15:8).

So indeed, it is fair to say that Paul say the risen Savior in the light that blinded him (Acts 26:13). This "miracle" for Paul was that it was a vision – a suspension of natural laws where those with him saw light but could not comprehend the sounds they heard (Acts 22:9). But they were not saved, in the narrative, only Saul of Tarsus was. And the voice of Jesus told him to "go into the city what is appointed for you to do" (Acts 9:6; 22:10) and Paul's defense to Agrippa states that Jesus told him the work of servant and witness to which Jesus had appointed him.

SEEING THE LIGHT

how to prepare your heart for learning and sharing the gospel

When Ananias came to Saul, he commanded a restoration of sight to Saul and told him what the Lord had already said: “And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name’” (Acts 22:14-16). “Then he arose and was baptized, and taking food, he was strengthened” (Acts 9:18-19).

Jesus’ appearance was miraculous. The healing of Saul’s blindness was miraculous. The offer of Apostleship to Saul was grace (Romans 1:5). However, Paul’s response to both the call to Apostleship and the call to be saved by “washing away your sins” was obedience (Acts 22:16).

Further, if the conversion itself was miraculous, it is the first time any miracle takes three days to complete (Acts 9:9) and Saul is praying (9:11) but he is taught what he must do as a witness and Apostle – and he is taught what he must do to “wash away your sins.”

Christianity is a taught religion (Matthew 28:19; John 6:44–45), and a person is not taught until he understands facts and assimilates meaning. In Jesus’ own words of what discipleship would look like: God would draw the one to Him by being “taught” of (or, about) God. This was evidenced in the Apostolic ministry: “Make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.... And baptize them.”

To **believe** (Mark 1:15; Acts 10:43; 11:17; 14:1; 15:7; 16:31; 17:34; 18:8), Saul needed time to process what he had seen and heard. He had been told he was fighting against God’s will. He had been told that he was persecuting Jesus. And he had been told Jesus was the way of life he had been seeking and that he would declare that message to the Gentiles.

To **repent**, he needed to think of the persecutions he had perpetrated and be deeply saddened over them (2Corinthians 7:10). Even in his later reflections he said that he “received mercy because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief” but that Christ came to save sinners “of whom I am foremost” (1Timothy 1:12-16).

To be **baptized**, Paul had to yield to the obedient call Ananias made to him: “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Paul affirmed that his keeping of the heavenly vision was to declare “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

It is important to note that Paul’s conversion was not instantaneous like a miracle would be. His conversation manifested the same reflection that Jesus described in counting the cost of a decision to belong to the Kingdom (Luke 14:28–32). In fact, it is worth noting that God does not favor rash decisions (Proverbs 4:26; Psalm 119:59) – how much more in the matters of the soul. Trembling and blinded on that roadside, he was in no condition to make such a life-altering decision and he sat praying for three days until a message came to him from Ananias what he should do.

One person has said that Christ usually dawns upon sinners as a sunrise rather than coming upon them like a thunderstorm. Cornelius’ conversion was a result a divine vision because he would be the first Gentile (c.f. Acts 10:30-33) but he was not saved until he responded to Peter’s words (10:48). Paul would see a blinding light, hear a Divine voice and receive a heavenly vision; but his sins will not be washed away until he is baptized (22:16).

In application, what are the ways you have seen yourself process the elements to be able to say, “I believe!” What did you have to overcome to show that you would truly repent? What amount of exhortations did it take you to finally obey the Lord in baptism?

This was not a miracle. This was the story of how people like you and me finally yield to the Love and the Authority of a God who used miracles to authenticate and to demonstrate His message for people like you and me to obey.