

Miracles of Jesus 12-11-04a

This is Sunday, the 4th of November, 2012, and we're in the second part of the miracle, the healing of the man born blind, John chapter 9. We'll take a moment to dedicate our study to the Lord, and then we'll begin. Father, thank you for this opportunity to gather and to share the blessings of fellowship and of the esprit that is in our midst as we share enthusiasm and appreciation for you and for the Lord Jesus Christ, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the information that you reveal to us in your Word that raises our life out of the mundane, out of the dust and the temporary ephemeral nature of life on this earth and transforms it and guilds it and energizes it and makes it a part of your eternal glory. We thank you for this brief time that we have on earth, something the angels have not known, to be lost, to recognize the Lord Jesus, to receive Him as Savior, to be transferred out of darkness into light, to be the beneficiaries of all of those things that we have in Him.

We pray that as we dedicate this time to study and effort to understand this portion of your Word that God the Holy Spirit will superintend, that He will teach us, that He will make it memorable in each heart so that in the hours and days to come it will be a source of application, of guidance, of encouragement, of exhortation, of correction, and of motivation to lay hold of righteousness by faith, to be more fully prepared and more fully equipped for those things that you have ordained for us to do and to receive. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

John chapter 9, if you remember, it begins with a question. And the title I would give to our study is A Questionable Miracle. It's a questionable miracle.

Not because we don't know for sure if the miracle took place. If you want to be a bit more precise you could say it is a miracle of questions. If you glance through John chapter 9 there are 16 different questions that are asked in connection with this miracle.

It is a miracle of questions. Now, it has long been recognized that questions are a good thing. There are whole teaching models that are built on inducing questions on the part of students or raising a question at the beginning of a period of instruction to spark interest and to draw attention and to focus concentration on the issue.

So questions are good. If we knew everything we would have no questions and we would have no qualms. We would have no challenges.

We would already know the best thing to do. Life would be dull and boring if there weren't mysteries, if there weren't questions to be asked. But there is a challenge involved in it and that is asking the right questions.

I did this this past week and you might try this just on a lark. Google the phrase, asking the right question. You will be amazed at how much attention has been placed on this

idea.

There have been books published. You can get them on Amazon about asking the right question. Inc.

Magazine, Inc. period magazine, a business journal, recently had an article, problem solving trick, ask the right question. This is in the business world.

When groups of people get stuck on a problem it says, this is by the way from the July issue this year. It's an article by Tom Searcy. Problem solving trick, ask the right question.

When groups of people get stuck on a problem, whether over culture, systems, process, understanding or something else, the best solutions can come from asking the right questions. And he goes on to suggest a question to dislodge an impasse or being stymied or coming to a crux where you can't figure out what to do, ask this question. Is this an issue of heart, head or hands? Isn't that interesting that in a business journal it almost immediately turns, when looking at questions, to the immaterial realm.

Is this an issue of heart, head or hands? And by that, to clarify it a bit, he says of heart, do you have the will, the passion, the leadership, the clarity of goal to rally people to the task? This is the same thing in the spiritual realm. When we look at an issue, we look at a problem, we're trying to find a solution and we start asking questions. Well, is this a heart issue? And hopefully we have the spiritual common sense to look at this in the light of God's goals, God's will, God's leadership.

Back to that calling. How would this fit into God's larger plan? We are bereaved, someone dies. We are disappointed, something doesn't come through.

We expected something, we were hoping for something, we were working towards something and it doesn't come to pass. Well, that's a disappointment and we could ask all kinds of questions about that. Why did God take my loved one? Why did God let me lose my job? Why did I fail this test? Why did I fail this course? Why was I not accepted to this school or this position or this thing I applied for? Why, why, why? But it's a better question to back up and say, what is the nature of this whole challenge? How does this fit heart-wise? What is the will of God in this area? And we may have to back up and see God's general will.

We don't necessarily know if God wants me to pass or fail or if God wants me to go hither or go thither or various issues. We can't look in the Bible and over here in 2 Philistines it says, Behold, God doth will and here's the answer. We back up and look at God's general will.

Now, how do you look at God's general will? Well, who am I and why am I here? I use myself as an example. I am a husband, so there are certain very clear communications

from God about what a husband should be and should do, right? We know those passages. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, gave himself for it.

It's a sacrificial love. I am a father. The Bible has things to say about parents, about fathers.

Fathers don't incite your children, don't aggravate them. Be kind, be fair. Your judgment should be rational and not emotional.

There's all kinds of guidance about being a father. I have a job. There's the will of God about working quietly and being diligent and being faithful and trustworthy and consistent.

Being orderly as we saw on Friday night. Having a plan and sticking to it. Having a schedule and sticking to it.

Disciplining myself in all of these areas. This is a part of the general will of God. So we back up when we're looking at foggy things and look at what is not foggy, what is clear.

Who am I? I am a son. I have a certain obligation to my parents. I am a brother.

I have certain obligations to my fraternal siblings and my sister. I don't know if she counts as a fraternal sibling, but in a general sense, we have brothers and sisters in Christ to whom we have a responsibility. We have all of those one and other passages.

So we look those up. If you don't know the answer to a question, how do you solve it? In algebra, what do you do? Start with what you know. Use your knowns.

Use your factors and your equation manipulation principles and solve for the unknown. But you can't get X if you don't look at what you do know. If you don't know that $3X$ plus 7 equals 19, then how are you going to find out that X equals 4? Well, you're not going to because you don't have the 3 and you don't have the 19.

You've got to solve. You've got to start with what you know. So is it an issue of the heart? Is it an issue of the head? Does your team have the available capabilities, knowledge, processes, experience, and other components necessary? You think about what the circumstances are.

What has God allowed? What has God prevented? What provision has God made? What promises has God made? Is this in the realm of stepping out in blind faith or is this in the problem of, in the area of God helps those who help themselves, so to speak? That's not scripture, but it is a principle. So we look at it rationally and reasonably. What is available in terms of capability? Here's someone that has a great need.

Well, do I have the ability to help that person with that problem? I really don't. It's just God hasn't equipped me for that. I have neither the means or the opportunity or the

motive.

I would have to disregard 14 other responsibilities to go and do this thing. You read a letter and somebody says, hey, Village Ministries International, we could sure use somebody to come over and teach classes to this African village. You think, well, that's a wonderful thing.

I wonder if that's God's will. Should I go or should I not? Well, it would be a wonderful thing in the abstract and in a vacuum, but what about other responsibilities? What if you have a job? What if you have a family? What if you have a church? What if you have obligations and commitments where God has already plugged you in? You say, well, this is a wonderful opportunity, but not for me. This is the head aspect.

It's no question that it's the will of God that African believers hear good teaching of the Word of God. That's not a question. It's not a matter of the heart or the will or the goal, but when you look at it from a head point of view, I am not that guy.

I can't leave the commitments and the ministries and the opportunities and the requirements and obligations that I have here. It is very clear to me that although that would be a wonderful and exciting and fulfilling thing to do, it is not appropriate for me to do so. This is a head analysis.

This is recognition that not everyone can do everything that comes up. God has people assigned. I have an assignment here, and if I leave all of my assignments, it would be very difficult to fulfill.

There are other people who can fulfill that. There aren't other people who can fulfill most of the things that I do here. Then finally, hands.

Do you have the right resources in the right quantities to make this happen? It might be desirable. It might be a matter of heart. You say, well, surely this is the will of God that His Word go forth and run swiftly and be glorified, as we saw in Thessalonians.

Surely I am motivated and I don't have things tying me down. I see no roadblocks in the way. But resources.

If it is the will of God, not only will it be in the overall plan of God consistent, not only will it be in the head analysis, no serious objection, but God will make provision. And that provision is going to be of an appropriate nature. We do not go begging to accomplish God's will.

Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus send His disciples or did God send His prophets out to beg. If God detailed someone to accomplish a task, God made their provision. There were offers made.

If you go to a village and someone asks you to their house, Jesus said, go there and stay. They asked you. They invited you.

He didn't say, go door to door and say, hey, can we stay here? Would you mind feeding us? Do you have a scrap of bread? Could we camp in your backyard? It's unseemly. It's improper. It is not God's way.

There is no begging to accomplish God's plan. God's people and God's emissaries and God's prophets and disciples are not beggars. And we in ambassadorship are not beggars.

This is one of the biggest objections to Christianity in the modern world is its constant sucking sound in asking for money. Well, we'll send you this cheap 50-cent cassette if you'll send us \$15. We'll send you this badly bound paperback book full of platitudes if you'll send us \$35.

We'll send you this resource, quote, unquote, if you'll send us your resources. It's begging and it's shameful. God will make provision.

So this is all about asking the right questions. Life is a series of decision points, isn't it? Almost every waking moment, we are either implementing a decision or making another one. And the nature of those decisions, the quality of those decisions, whether they partake of the good in Romans 8.28, depends on us asking the right questions as we approach these decision points.

Ask the right question. So this is a good way. This is a way that secular business has come up with.

What are your goals? What is the direction that the company in general needs to be moving? And is this a part of that or not? Do you have the capabilities, knowledge, processes, experience, and other components to put this thing into practice, the head side? And finally, do you have resources? It might be a great thing to do, but if you have no resources, then that's not wise. It's not smart because what will you have to do? You'll have to go deeply in debt and borrow the resources. You can sink your ship before it ever gets out of the bay by overloading it with debt.

So I say, well, I think it's the will of God that I have a new Lexus. And I could do all of my things better if I had a new Lexus car. Well, I might convince myself it's God's will, and I might think that I've got the ability to drive it, and I can come up with all kinds of reasons why it would be good for me to drive around in this shiny car, but I don't have the resources.

And it would be foolish for me to invest resources or dedicate resources that I do not have, and I have to go get them from others. So that's one idea of asking the right question. Higher education is dedicated to asking the right questions.

This is an article by Dana Katropa from August of this year, and she says, here, Sweet Strategy. This is in a journal for higher education people, professors and administrators of colleges. Asking the right questions.

What do chocolate chip cookies have to do with higher education strategy? In the 1930s, a salesman at Nestle asked why the sales of chocolate bars had suddenly increased in the town of Whitman, Massachusetts. The answer to this question resulted in a lucrative 40-year contract, Nestle's venture into chocolate chips, and would associate Nestle forevermore with the newly invented chocolate chip cookie. According to the book, How the Hot Dog Found Its Bun, the reason chocolate bar sales increased was because Ruth Wakefield decided to use an ice pick to chop up chocolate and add it to her cookie batter.

She served the resulting treat to guests at her inn, the Toll House. They were widely popular, so she bought more chocolate bars, leading to the Nestle salesman's inquiry, and the rest is sweet history. This is why you have Toll House cookies.

They were invented by Ruth Wakefield in Massachusetts, and Mr. Nestle made his fortune by asking the right question. Why is chocolate suddenly selling so well in this little town? Ask the right question. Peter Drucker has said, the most common source of mistakes in management decisions is the emphasis on finding the right answer rather than the right question.

And I would submit that this is true spiritually as well. We are always going to God for an answer when we haven't really stopped to ask the right question. How does this miracle begin in John chapter 9? The disciples ask a question.

Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? This has been a season for polls. We'll take a little quick poll here. How many people think this is the right question? You look at the blind man and you say, who sinned that this guy can't see? Is that the right question? From Jesus' answer, it's clear that it isn't.

Because if it was a good question, Jesus would have said, well, I'll tell you what, it was actually the parents. The parents sinned and God judged them and disciplined them and set them back by giving them a little blind child to take care of. It's their fault.

Good question, Jesus says. Actually, it's this man. God the Father looked down and knew that he was going to be a real rascal.

And he would have been a master criminal and a leader of a big gang here in the city. And so, you know, my father just said, we've got to hold this guy in check. He just happened to be born blind.

He's going to be a big fat sinner anyway. But this will limit him. He can only do sins that a blind man can do.

He'll be a terrible thief because he's mumbling around. He can't see what he's trying to steal. He can't escape well.

Jesus says, no, that's the wrong question. Let me quote Drucker again. The most common source of mistakes in management decisions is the emphasis on finding the right answer rather than the right question.

This wisdom is all throughout the world. And we ask ourselves, why is it not more prominent and given more attention in the Christian world, in the spiritual arena? Career coaches, talking about going to interviews. You're trying to get a job.

Some of our young people are going to be looking for jobs or are looking for jobs and getting jobs and leaving school and so on. At the Robert H. Smith School of Business, representatives from several companies have information sessions with students. Observing these sessions highlights the importance of knowing how to ask great questions.

It's a skill that could make or break your next job interview. There are steps you can take to make sure you are ready for that inevitable point in every interview. And this is true.

I have asked this question. I've interviewed dozens of people for jobs. The recruiter asks, what questions do you have? You're applying for this job.

You're hoping to get this position with a company. You're hoping to be hired by this firm. And the person interviewing will say, well, what questions do you have? With proper preparation, you can be sure you close strongly.

And the advice in that regard is, first of all, do your homework. If you're applying to a company, learn something about it in advance. Know what it does and why it does it and how it came to be and what its competition is.

Consult multiple sources. In other words, get information. This goes back to our notion of getting facts in order to solve for the unknown.

The more knowns we have, the easier it is to find the unknown. Go with what you know. Stop and think, what do I know? The disciples have been traveling with the Lord Jesus now for how long? Approaching a couple of years at this point.

How many times have they seen him heal all sorts of maladies? All day long, people bringing the sick and the afflicted, the lame, the halt, the blind, the deaf, the demon-possessed, the near-dead, the dead. And has it not occurred to them that these diseases are not related to moral failure? That this is not, wow, what a perverse and wicked generation we have. Look at all these sick people asking the wrong question.

They've got information. They haven't done their homework. They haven't sat and

meditated.

And apparently, they haven't asked the Lord Jesus, Lord, what is the purpose of your healing? Does any disciple ever ask Jesus, Lord, why do you heal? That would be a good question. Not, did this man or his parents sin? The Boston Globe had an article recently about asking the right question. They were looking at students at a school whose teacher had broken them up into small groups.

They had been reading Albert Camus' *The Plague*. If you've ever read Camus, say no more. But Albert Camus' *The Plague*, this was their study.

And the teacher had them break up into groups, and they wrote in rapid fire on sheets of butcher paper, why is everyone acting normal when people are dropping dead? Are the doctors aware of this great danger? Is there any benefit from the plague? Will it help anyone change or grow? By the end of the exercise, the class had generated more than 100 questions and exactly zero answers. In the back of the classroom, the teacher, Dan Rothstein, watched approvingly, taking notes. Though the kids didn't know it, Rothstein was the one responsible for the unusual way they were spending their class time.

Dan Rothstein is the co-founder of the Right Question Institute, a Cambridge-based non-profit that exists to promote an idea he's been nursing for more than a decade, that asking good questions is a life skill far more important than we realize. You can go on to read the rest of this, but asking the right question, it's critical. Well, if you want some entertaining reading, look up what the rest of the world and the rest of the web has to say about asking the right question.

But here in this miracle, we've got, count them, 16 separate questions. 16 questions. Is there any other miracle, any other parable that generated 16 questions? I know of none.

So what are these questions? Well, the first one, of course, is asked by the disciples, number one, who sinned? Right question or wrong question? Wrong question. What is the right question? How can the glory of God be seen in this situation? Where can the glory of God be found in this blindness? And it isn't always in the healing. There are people who have a disability, and in and through that disability, the glory of God shines, and if they were healed, it would be the worst thing.

Joni Erickson Tada, Joni Erickson Tada, would not have had the career she has had as a Christian speaker and witness and so on if she hadn't dived into the water and bonked her head and become a quadriplegic. She will be the first one to tell you that nobody is happier than she is that she got paralyzed, because in and through that experience she developed a relationship with God she never would have had otherwise, and thousands and thousands and thousands of other people have been encouraged and inspired through her ministry. Many times we have a deficit, we have a shortfall, we have some lack, and we say, oh, if there's only a way I could get rid of this, if I could only overcome

it, if I could only reverse the ravages of time and be what I was before, if this deficit or this adversity or this hardship wasn't there, I could just stick in my thumb and pull out a plum and say, what a good boy am I, it would all be great.

Wrong question. How can I solve this problem? How can I remove this obstacle? How can I get rid of this challenge? Wrong question. First good question, where is the glory of God to be found? And this may be an opportunity, this may be a rare opening that not everyone has, to enter into the glory of God, to turn what might be viewed in human terms as a disadvantage or a deficit or a shortfall or a handicap into a positive, into a benefit, into a strength.

And what does the Scripture say? In our weakness God's strength is made manifest. If we were capable God wouldn't need to intervene and fulfill and compensate and glorify Himself. If this man had not been born blind, John chapter 9 would not exist.

So what's the right question? Where is the glory of God? Now, second question in this passage, when He said these things He spat on the ground, made the clay, washed in the pool, we've seen all that last time. Therefore the neighbors, verse 8, and those who previously had seen that He was blind said a question, Is not this He who sat and begged? Is it or is it not? And there's people that say some say He is and some say He's not. He says He is, but there's some question.

So the glory of God has entered into this situation. The man was blind and now he sees. And the question being asked, and this is asked by the people, I've got little abbreviations, D for the disciples, P for the people, PH for the Pharisees, and BM for the blind man.

I could call him the FBM for the formerly blind man, but this is asked by the people, Is not this He who begged? And in verse 10 when He says, Yes, I'm the guy, they say, How were your eyes opened? So the observers, the neighborhood, the people around there have two questions. First of all, did God really intervene in this situation? Is this really the presence and the power of God? And how did He do it? And you can go two ways with this. The scientific answer is, Well, there's no such thing as miracles and there's no such thing as God.

Secondly, there's nothing anybody can do that can take a congenitally blind man and make him see. So this is some sort of a fraud. This is a scam.

This has been done in some other way. It's a magic trick of some sort. There's twins and one's blind and they've substituted the guy.

He just looks like him. We're going to explain it away. And this has happened all down through history.

And we want to be careful to recognize when God has acted, when God has provided,

when God has entered into a deficit situation. We don't want to miss it. It's not a bad question.

Is this God? And how is God working? You can come up with negative answers and say it's not God and God's not at work. Or you can recognize where God is at work and how God is working. So not a bad question on the part of the people.

But this one depends on the answer. How do you answer it? And many times, you've seen this in the election season, we have these ideologue answers. Pick one of the two presidential candidates.

Neither one of these men is 100 percent evil, twisting his mustache, meeting in smoke-filled rooms, plotting the destruction of the world. Neither one of them. But there are people who think so.

They have ideas. They have positions. They have predetermined thoughts.

But anybody that is an ideologue will find nothing but problems with the opposite party. They will find nothing but evil behind every decision, every action. Listen, the president we've had this last four years, I've disagreed with a lot of things that he's done.

But he has done some good things. But if you listen to the opposing party, nothing he's done is good. Nothing he has done made any sense.

Everything contributed to the rot and destruction of the country. It's just not true. Be objective.

Ask the right questions. And be willing to accept the answers. Why do I consult bad commentaries? I've told you this many, many times.

Why do I keep terrible commentaries on my shelf? And why do I look at them and read them? You know, as the old saying goes, even a broken clock is right twice a day, right? And even these bad commentaries occasionally have an insight. They'll see something good. They may misconstrue it.

They may take it and run across the wrong goal line with it. But it's something other people didn't see because other people are always thinking in the same ruts, always looking down the same well-trodden corridors. And here's somebody that's thinking outside that box.

And they make a helpful observation. I say, well, I don't agree with your conclusion, but that's a great insight. That's a great observation.

All of us are a mix. And because we are fallen and corrupt, we're not qualified to judge the rightness or wrongness and the morality of everything somebody else does. Only God can see the heart.

And I leave it to God to judge the heart. I'm not going to impugn and impute bad motives all over the place. I look at the result.

I look at the policy. I look at the decisions and try to judge that as best I can. But we've got to break out of ideology and look at practicality.

Is not this he who begged? Well, let's try to figure that out. Is there a way to determine it? You know, I saw him last week fall off a curb. Let me ask this guy when's the last time he fell off a curb.

And I can find out if this is the right guy or not. I can ask around, do you know him? Let's find the parents and see if they'll own him as their son or not. It's an answerable question.

And it's a good question. Other people are just opining, oh, that can't be him. Because if it is him, then the blind has been cured and that can't happen.

Therefore, this can't be him. It's a faulty line of reasoning. This guy can see.

People born blind can never see. This must not be him. Well, that sounds like good reasoning, but it's faulty because this is him.

And he says he's him. Got to be objective. The fourth question is in verse 8. I'm sorry, it's in verse 12.

That's a letter P for the people. It looks like an 8. Where is he in verse 12? Now, this is a great reaction. This is a good question.

You say that this man cured your blindness. Where is he? I want to see this guy. This is a great thing.

If God is active in our lives, if God's glory is funneled into the deficits in our lives, if it causes people to say, where is he? Isn't that great? That's a great question. Where is he? This is the activity of God in the deficit of a man's life producing a response of curiosity, of seeking. That's why we're here.

We shine as lights and people who are looking for the light are going to be drawn to the light and we hope that that's us. So, are we having a hardship? Are we having a challenge? Are we working through a difficult time? God can use this to spark interest. If we are relying on the Lord Jesus, if we have faith and patience, if we have joy in the midst of our troubles, people are going to look at that and people who are asking the right question are going to say, where is this Jesus? Where is this Lord? Where is this faith? This is our witness.

We don't witness by handing out tracts. We don't witness by cold calling people at their doorstep and, are you a godless sinner? Can I help you go to heaven? It's the wrong

approach. God's glory in the shortfalls and the deficits and the problems of our life is recognized by those who are in our periphery and they ask the question, where is he? Great question.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at the remaining 12 questions in this passage because looking at these questions will hopefully help us improve our skill as we go through our days and face the challenges that God puts before us, not just of trying to find the answers but of asking the right questions. Let's pause here and take our break.