

Miracles

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the book of Acts, the New Testament, Acts chapter 5. It's a relatively short reading this morning. Acts chapter 5 and verses 12 to 16.

! Luke writes these words.

This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this. Our Lord God, we pray for our reception of your word this morning.

It's a great gift to us that we have the words of the Creator God in our Bibles. That every time we open them, we get to see something of the mind of God. And so won't you teach us this morning?

[1 : 41] Won't you feed us this morning with the food that we can get only in this place? Bless us, Lord. Build us, change us, let us see Jesus, and let us see Him clearly. We ask this for Christ's sake. Amen.

So we're back in Acts for the next couple of weeks. And we're now in chapter 5. For those of you who've missed the last part, and I was actually looking back at a sermon, because I was looking at what we'd already said in the sermon series around the issue of miracles, which we'll touch on in a moment.

And I was looking at a sermon that we did on Acts chapter 3 on miracles, and I realized that that was in October of last year. So it's taken us from October to May to get to chapter 5.

So we might be getting close to some sort of Guinness Book of Records thing for the longest sermon series ever in the book of Acts. We'll see if we can break that together. We will keep breaking up the series with other stuff, so don't worry if you're getting a little bit bored of Acts.

But we're in chapter 5. What's happened so far is that Jesus has commissioned His apostles to bear witness to Him. He's resurrected. He's ascended to heaven. And He said to His chosen apostles, go out and bear witness to Me.

[2 : 50] Pentecost comes. The Spirit of God is poured out. The church grows. The church faces all sorts of threats. It faces external threats from the Jewish ruling class, the Sanhedrin.

It faces internal threats from people like Ananias and Sapphira, who want to, in hypocrisy, undermine the efforts of the church. And so we're following the story along. And as you follow the story along, and as you read the different accounts, and this will be a feature as we go forward in the book, is one of the obvious features of the book of Acts is that time and time again, you run into this prevalence of miracles in the storyline.

There are roughly 20 to 25 different references to miracles in the book based on how exactly you define a miracle. And even sometimes those are not just like a reference to a single miracle, but they're a reference to a cluster or a group of miracles taking place, like in the passage that we just read.

So there are miracles all over the place. And the question is, well, what do we make of them? What do we make of these miracles? What are they doing in the story in Acts?

Are they normative for us today? You might read like the passage we just read and think, well, that's very different from my experience of Christianity, my day-to-day experience of Christianity.

[4 : 07] So are they normative for us today? Should we be seeing the types of miracles that we see in Acts and the volume of miracles that we see in Acts in the same way today?

And if not, if the answer is no, because I think most people would say, well, I'm not really seeing that, then what are we to take for ourselves by way of application from these accounts?

What do they mean for us today? So two things we're going to do this morning. Number one, I'm going to make some general comments about miracles in the Bible. And then number two, I want us to see that miracles make us or help us see heaven.

So some general comments about miracles and then miracles help us see heaven. Here are the general comments, and there's a bunch in here. So here's the first one. Number one, Christians should affirm miracles.

Christians should affirm miracles. Verse 15 there, if you look down, we're told that people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed.

[5 : 19] So several commentators on the book of Acts, and particularly the more sort of critical commentators, have speculated that this must be some sort of wild superstition amongst the people. That they're so desperate for healing, they're resorting to all sorts of stuff.

And the text doesn't actually tell us if anyone was healed in this very particular way, that Peter's shadow fell on a person and then voila, they were healed. But it does tell us that the people were desperate for miracles. And so what's very clear from this whole account is that the people were very expectant, and they were very open to the miraculous.

They even start to now travel great distances to come and experience these miracles. Now that's not the case so much nowadays. This is in part thanks to the Enlightenment philosopher David Hume.

David Hume, a Scottish philosopher, posited a very, very influential argument against the existence of miracles. In fact, he was kind of so successful in his thinking, and his thinking pervaded so much of Western thought, that it even crept into the church, and it crept into theology.

So that in the 19th century, you get what we might call these liberal Protestant theologians in Bible colleges, particularly in Europe, saying, we really shouldn't take the miracles of the Bible seriously.

[6 : 37] We certainly, certainly can't regard them as historical realities. Instead, we've got to just basically look at them and then look for deeper spiritual truths behind them. But don't take them as history. Don't take them as fact.

One very famous German scholar called this demythologizing the text. So read your gospel accounts of Jesus. Read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Read Acts, but then take all the sort of what you consider to be the fairy tale sort of elements out and just try and derive moral precepts and spiritual truths from the text.

Now that has today, both inside and outside of the church, created a lot of skepticism towards the miraculous and claims of the miraculous.

I want to say, I don't think that a natural reading of the Bible allows for that kind of skepticism or that sort of form of demythologizing. So the miracles certainly serve other purposes, and we're going to see that as we go forward.

[7 : 38] They certainly serve other purposes. It's clear that Scripture wants us to see the miracle and then also think of some other stuff as well. But it's also clear that Scripture wants us to see these miracles as historical realities, things that actually happened.

Think about, I know this is going to make you cast your minds way, way, way back, but think about how the book of Acts opens up. In Acts 1, verses 1 to 3, Luke writes, Now notice how Luke slipped in that little phrase there.

Many convincing proofs. So he's being very, very careful to point out to the recipient of his book, this guy by the name of Theophilus, that when he's talking about Jesus rising from the dead, this great miracle, he's really talking about Jesus in history dying, dead, and then rising from the dead, coming to life again.

And there were many convincing proofs, he says. Like there were actual proofs of this. You don't say that, you don't say there were many convincing proofs if you're merely using this miracle as sort of a literary tool, a literary device, to bring out some sort of deeper spiritual meaning.

Because it's irrelevant whether there were convincing proofs or not, if it's just about the spiritual reality behind it. Your overall point stands whether he provided proof or not. But Luke is wanting to underline this.

[9 : 24] It's like he's standing there talking to Theophilus and he's saying, just to be clear, Theophilus, I am not talking about Jesus rising in your heart here. I'm not talking about some sort of metaphor about new life coming out of the ashes of your dead old life.

That's not what I'm talking about. I'm telling you that Jesus miraculously came to life again and he gave many convincing proofs to his disciples of this. And you'll see this sort of rhetoric over and over again in the New Testament.

There's just no evidence in the Gospels or in the book of Acts that the authors are wanting us to read these miracles in a sort of purely figurative sense. So you might sit here this morning, maybe you've got a philosophical objection to the existence of miracles like David Hume and you're welcome to go and think about that.

I'm not spending much time on that this morning. But that's not the view the Bible has. It's not the view that the Bible has about miracles. So we should be, as Christians, affirming and open to the miraculous.

Number two, miracles occur infrequently in Scripture. So while as Christians I think the Bible compels us to believe in the miraculous, we need to actually be circumspect about the frequency with which miracles occur in the Bible.

[10 : 41] Sinclair Ferguson is a well-known Scottish Presbyterian theologian and minister and he says this, he's written a lot on the Holy Spirit. It's one of his areas of expertise and he writes, Contrary to a common assumption, miracles are not everyday events that do not occur with consistent frequency in the pages of Scripture.

In fact, miracles performed by the servants of God tend to occur in clusters and only in a handful of periods in biblical history. So he points out, if you read your Bible from start to finish, there are basically four areas where there are four clusters of miracles.

That's during the Exodus, towards the beginning of your Bible. There's another cluster of miracles around the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Then there's another cluster of miracles around Daniel and his time in exile.

And then there's another cluster of miracles around Christ and the apostles. There are large, large sections of your Bible, large sections of what we might call redemptive history where there's no miracles.

There's no record of miracles. And certainly nothing like what we see in the book of Acts. The frequency and the volume that we see in the book of Acts. In fact, I think you can even make the case that by the end of the New Testament, by the end of the timeline of the New Testament itself, miracles are starting to become rather infrequent.

[12 : 01] So take what we call the pastoral epistles, for example. Those are the books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. These are letters written to Timothy and to Titus, written late on in Paul's life, so close to towards the end of his life.

And in those letters, he's giving pastoral instruction to these guys on how to run churches. That's what he's trying to tell them. This is how you set up a church and order it in God's way. This is how you think about worship.

This is how you think about discipline and discipleship. This is how you think about how to evaluate and appoint elders and deacons and church leadership.

That's all the sort of stuff you find in those books. Now it's interesting that nowhere in those books does he give any instruction about how to perform miracles, how to regulate miracles, how to distinguish between false miracles and genuine miracles.

You would think that they would kind of be vital information to include in your church manuals if you were regularly expecting to see the scale and the volume of miracles that were taking place in a place like Acts 5.

[13 : 19] So it raises questions then about just how normative these miracles should be for Christians in all times and all places. That's the second thing.

Then the third thing is this, and this is building on from this point, and the fact that miracles seem to occur in the Bible in clusters. It seems that miracles seem to mark out important moments in the story of redemption in the Bible, and particularly important moments in the unfolding of God's covenant promises to His people in the Bible.

So think about those different clusters that I mentioned a second ago. Think about what's happening in each of those situations. If you think about Exodus, you've got God rescuing His people, establishing them as a nation, going to Mount Sinai and establishing His covenant with them at Mount Sinai.

And you've got all these miracles around that. You go to Elijah and Elisha, and what's happening now is that the nation of Israel are starting to freefall into abandoning God's covenant.

And so what he does is he sends prophets to try and direct them back towards covenant faithfulness, starting with Elijah and Elisha. You go to Daniel.

[14 : 38] Now Israel had broken the covenant. They've been judged by God. They're in exile in a foreign land, and they're thinking the covenant is all but gone. It's dead. It's done. It's finished. We've messed everything up with our sin.

But God starts to give glimmers of hope that the covenant is not irreversibly broken, and there's still hope for redemption in these clusters of miracles around Daniel and his life and his friends' lives.

And then fast forward to Jesus and the apostles, and they mark the arrival of the new covenant, the pouring out of God's Spirit, the demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness.

Now this covenant that I promised in the Old Testament is being realized. So it seems that these clusters of miracles, what they're doing is that they're serving an important role in identifying key moments, key hinge moments in the story of God, God's covenant faithfulness to his people.

Almost as if to say to the nation at the time, the people who were there at the time, and also to us as readers in the future, to sort of say this is a really key moment. If you see all these miracles happening, this is a really key moment.

[15 : 49] God is doing something big now in the story of redemption. Take note. And that fits completely with what we see in the book of Acts. It's actually explicit in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the famous sermon that he does at Pentecost, where he quotes from the Old Testament.

He quotes from the Old Testament prophet Joel, and he says, I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below. Now that passage in Joel is clearly prophesying about another big move, another big hitch point in redemptive history.

And Peter is using that quote in saying to the crowds, guys, what you're seeing now is that big change, is that big shift, is that big move. You're seeing this big new development in God's faithfulness to his covenant, as he pours out his spirit and inaugurates this new covenant.

So these miracles, what they do is they mark out these moments, these key moments in redemptive history. That's the third thing. Fourth thing, the miracles do point beyond themselves.

They point beyond themselves. One of the most common words that the book of Acts uses for miracles is the word sign. It's probably the most common if you look across the whole of Acts, talking about miracles in terms of signs.

[17 : 09] It's in our passage there. Look at verse 12. The apostles perform many signs and wonders among the people. And what do signs do? You should all know what signs do.

We're in the process of putting some new signs up in the church building to help you navigate all the dark, dusty corridors so that you don't get lost in a room that hasn't been open since the 1960s somewhere. But what do signs do?

They point beyond themselves to the greater reality. The sign is not the reality itself. If there's a sign over there that says the cry room is over there, that is not the cry room. That is the sign. The cry room is over here. Signs point beyond themselves to greater realities.

And what are these signs pointing to? Well, Luke actually tells us in several places in the book of Acts. He tells us that miracles serve to point to and accredit Jesus Christ in the preaching of His gospel, the preaching of His word.

That's what they do. They point to and accredit the person and work of Jesus and the preaching of the word about Jesus. Acts chapter 2, verse 22.

[18 : 15] This is Peter preaching at Pentecost. He says, These fellow Israelites, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him as you yourselves know.

So he's saying, How do you know Jesus is Jesus? How do you know He's the Messiah? How do you know He's God in the flesh? How do you know you can believe all this stuff? Well, He was accredited to you by miracles. The miracles pointed to the reality. Acts chapter 4, verse 29 to 30.

This is just after Peter and John get released by the Sanhedrin. They gather with a bunch of Christians to pray for boldness, to keep on going in the face of persecution. Here's what they pray.

Acts 4, 29 to 30. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

So they, in their prayer there, they connect the preaching of the gospel with authenticating miracles. Did you see that? Acts chapter 8, verse 6.

[19 : 22] Now this is beyond where we go. We might get there maybe in about the year 2027 or whatever. But Acts chapter 8, you meet Philip. This traveling evangelist.

And he's preaching in a place called Samaria. And it says this. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

So again, this close connection between the signs and the word. Acts 14. You'll have a new minister by the time you get to Acts 14. But Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are preaching in the ancient city of Iconium.

And it says, So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

The message of grace is confirmed by the miracles. So you have this connection all the way through the book of Acts. The miracles serve to confirm the message about Christ.

[20 : 24] That he is the Messiah. That he is resurrected. That the apostles are continuing his work by preaching this gospel. So there are signs that point beyond themselves to the gospel.

The truth of the word preached. Authenticating the truthfulness of that gospel so that you can believe it. So let me sum up these general comments about miracles.

Miracles really happen. And Christians should not be closed to the miraculous. But miracles happen infrequently.

And often with very specific purposes that are connected to key moments in redemptive history. And so if you say, Stephen, what was your particular take? How would you describe your view on miracles?

This is the view I hold. This has been sort of the traditional view of the Reformed Presbyterian churches for several centuries. And that is that miracles can and actually do still happen today.

[21 : 30] But the frequency with which it happens in Acts is not normative for the church today. We shouldn't be expecting to see things happening quite the same way we see them happen in Acts.

See, I believe that a very, very careful reading of Scripture shows that the miracles in Acts are for a specific purpose in a specific time. And so we should not expect the same sort of volume of miracles today.

We should pray for people to be healed. For God to heal people. And when we see people who seem to be healed miraculously, we should praise God and thank Him for miracles. When we see people come to faith in dramatic fashions through miraculous circumstances, we should praise God and thank Him for that.

God does heal in miraculous ways, I think. But that does not mean that you should, those of you who have chronic back pain here, should be lining up after the service to try and get under my shadow.

So, I don't think Acts 5, 12 to 16 is a pattern for ordinary church life. I think it's trying to tell us something very specific in the context of the bigger story.

[22 : 41] And so, with that being said, then I am skeptical of certain branches of the church that would claim that we should be having those sorts of experiences all the time in our worship gatherings and in any sort of Christian interaction.

That we should be seeing that level, that volume of miracles all the time. In fact, I actually think there's real pastoral danger in over-promising healing and miraculous work that can really, really sort of shake the foundation of people's faith.

I once, in the early days of starting this church, counseled a woman who had struggled on and off with cancer. She was very young and had cancer on and off, struggled with cancer.

Her previous church had told her that the reason that her cancer was not being miraculously healed was because she didn't have enough faith or she had some sort of unconfessed sin that she wasn't bringing to the fore.

Friends, I think that is incredibly destructive pastoral advice. And it has no basis in Scripture. And so we must think carefully, we must think biblically about the role of the miraculous in the life of the church, lest we destroy the faith of people.

[23 : 48] Now, I said that miracles are signs. Signs that point beyond themselves. And so I want to spend the remainder of the sermon then digging into more of what is really a beautiful reality being pointed to here.

Being confirmed by these miracles in Acts. And here's what I think it is. I think that miracles help us, make us see heaven.

So here's the second point. Miracles make us see heaven. B.B. Warfield is a great Presbyterian theologian who taught Reformed theology at Princeton about 100 years ago.

And towards the end of his life, he gave a series of lectures on the subject of miracles. And in those lectures, he said this. He said, So Warfield looked at miracles in the Bible and he said, You know what we're actually seeing when we see all these miracles in the Bible?

We are seeing heaven. We're tasting something of the glory of heaven. We're getting this little preview, if you like. Now, he was referring to Christ's miracles there.

[25 : 16] But you'll notice that the apostles in the book of Acts, they seem to perform very similar miracles to the miracles that Jesus does. Some of them look almost exactly the same as Jesus' miracles. And I think that's deliberate.

That's precisely because Luke is wanting to see, he's wanting us to see, he's wanting to show us that the apostolic ministry is a continuation of Christ's ministry. It's one and the same ministry.

They're carrying on the same ministry. He actually says as much at the very beginning of his book. And so it's really helpful for us to think of Christ's miracles and the apostles' miracles as all sort of one batch of the same miracles serving the same purpose.

And a key purpose of those miracles, particularly for our own hearts as we sit and we think about them today, is to pull back the curtains and give us a glimpse of heaven.

Let us see in. Look down at verse 15. Luke says, These are broken, damaged, harassed, desperate people.

[26 : 41] Desperate people. I mean, they're being laid down on mats and on beds by friends in the hope that when Peter passes by he's going to take notice of them.

That means that many of these people couldn't walk. They couldn't walk. Think just how debilitating that is today with our medical technology, with our accessibility rules around buildings and spaces, public spaces.

Imagine just how debilitating that was in the first century. Many of these people were grievously sick, the text tells us, in an age where many things that we today consider sort of minor were a death sentence or would greatly, greatly diminish your quality of life.

And then some of these people were possessed and tormented by evil spirits. Helplessly harassed by forces outside of their control.

There's no doctor you can see about that one. But look at those beautiful last few words there of verse 16. You see, this is the loud message that's ringing out through the apostolic ministry and acts.

[28 : 10] Heaven has arrived. Heaven has come near. Heaven has arrived. In Jesus, the resurrected Lord, heaven has arrived. The ultimate end of pain.

The ultimate end of suffering. The ultimate end of illness. The ultimate end of all of that tragedy. Heaven has arrived. Nick Batsig is a Presbyterian minister in South Carolina.

In an article on this a number of years ago, reflecting on Christ's miracles, he wrote this. He said, Christ came into the world to reverse the miserable effects of sin brought into this world by Adam.

See, think, friends. Where do we see that reversal most fully experienced? Where is that? Where is that place going to be?

It's in heaven. That's the hope. It's in heaven. That is where the misery of sin is gone. And it's removed. And it's taken away once and for all. And it's never coming back again. Reformed theologians have often talked about the human condition in the way of saying that we are both sinners and sufferers.

[29 : 57] We're sinners and sufferers. That is Adam's initial transgression not only plunged us into sin through our inherited guilt and our sin nature, but it also placed us into a world where we experience misery.

The misery of a world alienated from its creator. If you go to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, you look at question 17, it says, Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

And the answer given is the fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. So there's two categories there in their thinking. That misery finds its expression in all these ailments.

It finds its expression in illness. It finds its expression in suffering. It finds its expression in the disintegration of our frail bodies, in the disorderedness of our weak minds.

That is the misery that accompanies a sin-wrecked world. The miracles that accompany Christ, the miracles that accompany the proclamation of Christ, shout out this very loud message.

[31 : 15] And here's the message. The end has begun. The end has begun. The end of illness has begun. The end of suffering has begun.

The end of disintegration has begun. The end of disorder has begun. Heaven is now firmly on the horizon and Christ is bringing it near. He's making it reality.

Now it's not completely here yet. It's not right here yet. Because it's pretty clear if you read all of scripture. That although it seems everybody was healed right here in chapter 5.

Everybody doesn't always get healed. And even those who are healed succumb to death again in the end. So it's not completely here yet. But it is coming.

It is coming. And if you will throw yourself upon the mercy of Christ, the one to whom these apostles bear witness, then heaven is coming for you too, my friends.

[32 : 16] It is coming for you this morning. That's what the miracles are doing. They are wetting your appetite. They're making you long. As you sit here this morning and you read those stories, you're supposed to go, I want that.

I want that. I want heaven. They're making you long for heaven so that you will flee to Christ in repentance and faith. Notice even at the very center of this account on miracles, on these sort of wonderful miracles, in verse 14, right in the middle, Luke writes, and he keeps telling us this all the way through, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

It's always got one eye on people coming to faith in Jesus. Heaven's not here. It's not here yet. And so if our hearts are then awakened by this hope for heaven, the urgent task for us right now, the urgent task is to believe.

To believe upon the Lord who brings heaven and who has demonstrated the miracles that he performed when he walked this earth. Now you might be sitting here this morning and you might be thinking, look, my heart really is captured by heaven the longer I think about it.

And in fact, the thought of being free from suffering and free from pain and free from misery, there's really not anything better to meditate on than that. But right now I am suffering.

[33 : 41] Right now I am sick. Or right now I am wrapped up in very, very deep anxieties. My mind is a mess. Or maybe I'm not suffering intensely right now, but I'm watching others around me, people that I love, suffer.

I see illness, I see tears, I see the despair. If God can do these miracles, and he clearly can, then why doesn't he do them now?

Why doesn't he relieve the suffering now? Why don't we see the same sort of healings that we see in Acts 5? Why do godly, prayerfully dependent believers still suffer so much in this life?

It's hard to see heaven, to see that horizon when that's our present experience. Why doesn't God give me a miracle? And so if you ask me that question, my answer to that question is, I don't know.

I don't know why. I cannot give you a watertight argument for why God allows your suffering. In fact, the Bible doesn't really try to give you a watertight argument to that question.

[34 : 59] It does wrestle very deeply, very profoundly in several places with the issue of suffering. But it never gives you a pat answer. It's saying that Scripture does not leave us empty-handed in the face of suffering, in the face of these sorts of questions, in the face of despair.

It actually gives us something so big, so profound, so powerful and so moving, that you are enabled to not only endure misery, but to even find joy through misery and keep your sight set on heaven, on the horizon.

What is it that Scripture tells you? Scripture tells you this. It tells you that Christ entered hell so that you could receive heaven.

That's what it tells you. That Christ entered hell so that you can receive heaven. If you were very, very familiar with the Apostles' Creed before you started coming to the Union Chapel, you might notice that when we recite the Creed in the worship service on Sundays, it's slightly different from the traditional version.

Traditional version usually reads something like this. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

[36 : 29] He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again. He descended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead. And then it goes on and it speaks about the Spirit, it speaks about the church, and it speaks about future resurrection.

But if you've got a very keen eye, or keen ear in that instance, you'll recognize the part that we've changed. It's that line, He descended into hell.

Instead on Sundays we say, He descended to the dead. Now there's been a ton, whole books written on how we should interpret that line in the Apostles' Creed.

He descended into hell. Did Jesus literally go to a place called hell? Perhaps during the time in between His death and His resurrection.

[37 : 29] Some theologians have taught that in history past. They've said, well we think there are some verses that maybe hint towards Him doing that. But I'm not convinced that the Bible gives us any evidence that Jesus went to a literal hell after His death.

Hence, we changed those words. And I know several churches that have changed those words at that point. But, there is actually a very strong case to be made for retaining the original wording.

Even if you don't believe that Jesus went to a literal hell. John Calvin makes this case. In his famous works, The Institutes, The Great Reformer John Calvin. So, talking about the Apostles' Creed.

He makes the case that the agony of the cross. The agony of bearing human sin. Of Jesus even sensing some form of abandonment by His Father.

When He cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Experiencing God's, His Father's wrath. That experience of Christ, Calvin says, is aptly described as hell.

[38 : 35] It's a pretty powerful case if you go back and you read it. He says this. He says, Nothing had been achieved if Christ had only endured bodily death.

In order to stand between us and God's wrath for sin and satisfy His righteous judgment, it was necessary that He should feel the weight of divine punishment. And so, it was also necessary that He should engage, as it were, at close quarters with the powers of hell and the horrors of eternal death.

At the cross, our Lord went to war with hell. Experientially, in His human nature, He entered into the experience of hell, so to speak.

He went to war with sin. He went to war with the misery that accompanies sin. In His own moment of the very, very deepest misery, naked, bleeding, hanging on a cross, He struck down the power and the source of misery, once and for all.

That's His big healing miracle right there. That is the healing miracle. Think about it this way.

[40 : 00] That same person I quoted, Nick Batzig, and later on in the article, he writes this. He says, He became silent for the mute, had the powers of evil unleashed on Him for those who had been demon-possessed and was raised from the dead in order to raise the dead.

Friends, this is an unescapable reality that we get heaven because Jesus got hell. Now, that doesn't answer the question of why God still allows suffering now.

In this period, as we wait for that final consummation when Jesus returns, the full arrival of heaven's presence, doesn't answer that question. It doesn't tell us why there's still suffering, why there's still illness, why there's still earthly death in our experience now.

But it does tell us this. It does tell us that it cannot be because God doesn't love us. Christ experiencing hell for us is love the likes of which we cannot even begin to think about.

We cannot know why people still suffer and why God doesn't always miraculously intervene. But I think, friends, this morning, we can stand here as believers in Jesus Christ and we can say these words that come from the Valley of Vision prayer book with incredible confidence.

[42 : 01] We can say this. Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy, cast off that I might be brought in, trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend, surrendered to hell's worst that I might attain heaven's best, stripped that I might be clothed, wounded that I might be healed, a thirst that I might drink, tormented that I might be comforted, made a shame that I might inherit glory, enter darkness that I might have eternal light.

If you will flee to Jesus Christ in repentance of faith, then those miracles, those signs, the reality that they point to is yours.

It is yours now by faith and it will be made yours by sight and reality when our Lord returns. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.

our father we want to see heaven because our experience of misery is real intangible we want to see heaven teach us to long for heaven teach us to long for the freedom that comes from being in your healing presence teach us to trust now in the interim as we still experience suffering teach us to know and to cling to the love of christ he who would enter hell to bring us heaven but i pray for people who are suffering right now who are really really struggling to look to the horizon i pray that you would minister to their hearts by your spirit in a very special and profound way that they would know the love of jesus i pray that for those who are watching loved ones suffer and don't know what to say don't know what to do i pray that they would hope in heaven and that they would gently and winsomely try and pull back the curtain of heaven for for for their friend for their family member that is suffering and the preaching and the proclaiming of the gospel lord i pray for any person here who's sitting who knows their sin and knows their misery but is alienated from jesus i pray that they would repent of their sin and trust in christ's blood shed find forgiveness and hope in the beginning of the end of misery have these mercies upon us we pray for christ's sake amen