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A Review of Miracles

1 Samuel 6

Prayer: *Father, again I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness. I thank you for still giving us the freedom to gather as we do. I pray that this morning as we open up your word you would give us the privilege and the presence of your Holy Spirit. Lord, we are back in 1 Samuel and so I pray that you would be accompanying us, I pray that you would be guiding us and that you'd be making this of permanent value. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, way, way back in June of this year, we broke off our study of 1 Samuel for the summer. I said we'd have to wait until summer's end and the start of fall to pick it back up, and here we are.

I want to give you a very brief, kind of ten-thousand-foot summary of how we got here though. I want to do that by just going through all of the chapters. We're up to almost chapter 6 in 1 Samuel. So I want to give you a background of the first five chapters.

1 Samuel opens up in chapter one and it's the story surrounding Samuel's birth. The story starts with Samuel's mother Hannah and she's pouring her heart out before God; she's pleading to have a son. We spoke about how desperately Jewish mothers needed to produce sons for the simple economic survival of the family and as a means of prolonging the family line. The need was so great that Hannah's husband Elkanah took on a second wife, Peninnah, in order to produce sons, and that produced a bitter rivalry between the two women and it caused Hannah deep distress.

We pick up on *1 Samuel 1:6*, which said: *Her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.*

So Hannah was distraught and she went to the temple and she's lifting up her heart before God. It says: *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."*

So Hannah's praying before the high priest Eli. Eli sees her

praying and he mistakenly thinks that she's drunk. Now Eli's been the leader in Israel during a wicked time, this is a time in which everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And Eli was at least faithful but he had two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who served as priests at the time.

So there's Hannah pouring out her heart to God, and God hears her prayer and he gives her a son named Samuel. And at the time of his weaning he was brought to the temple where his entire life is dedicated to God. That's chapter 1.

In chapter 2 we learn the extent of Israel's corruption. We learn the extent of the wickedness of Eli's two sons Hophni and Phinehas and God rejects them.

In chapter 3 we see Samuel called now as a young man -- young boy actually, he's sleeping in the temple and God repeatedly calls and God tells him -- quote -- *"Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of*

Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

This is what Samuel hears from God, and of course he's still a young boy and he's terrified to tell Eli this dreadful news. And finally he relents and he tells him this curse that is on Israel, Eli and his family and Eli recognizes that this young boy is being set aside as God's prophet.

1 Samuel 3:18 says: Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he -- that is Eli -- said, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him." So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD.

Well if you recall chapter 4, in chapter 4 we find Israel is now at war with the Philistines. The chapter opens up with a terrible defeat in battle. I just want to go back to what I said concerning that defeat.

This is from 1 Samuel 4:1-3, it says: And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines

encamped in Aphek. Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

Now, I pointed out this was not the first time that Israel had found itself in a situation like this, and that many, many years before in the time when Joshua was leading them, they had a similar crisis. God had given them many, many victories and suddenly he seemed to have withdrawn his support and the result was they experienced a resounding defeat.

If you go back all the way to Joshua 7, it talks about what happened. It says: *And the hearts of the people melted and became as water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the*

Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?"

Well Joshua's concern was -- it's naturally for him and his people but his greater concern was for the great name of his God which would suffer at their defeat. So he brings his people's fate before God, and God explains to him that someone from their camp had stolen and buried items from a previous victory. And so after a systematic inquiry discovered and punished the thief, Israel itself was restored.

Well consider that reaction to a battlefield defeat back in the days of Joshua with the reaction that Israel now has under Eli and his sons and its leaders. You see, their response, their response was wildly and sadly different. They responded to their defeat by saying -- quote -- *"Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."*

Now there's no concern whatsoever for God's great name or reputation. They're not even questioning God to determine where they had failed. Instead there's now nothing but a grotesque

desire to use the ark of a covenant as a talisman, as a good luck charm. I mean, they literally thought they could put God in a box and trot it out to guarantee themselves a victory.

You know, we often use a phrase to describe having a false and narrow perspective on God that where we perceive God much more from our own prejudices and our own desires so that we literally are putting our own restrictions on God, and we call that "putting God in a box." Well here we have Israel doing literally just that. They genuinely believe they have the God of the universe in a box, and in this case it's the ark of the covenant which was literally a wooden box that God had agreed to temporarily covenant with his people in.

And so Israel has fallen so far so that they think they can bring this "God in the box" with them and thus ensure victory over the Philistines. Well it turns out to be an absolute disastrous conclusion.

1 Samuel 4:4 says: So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all

Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness."

Now you have to understand, Israel at this point, they have no relationship whatsoever with the living God. And in fact all they had was a history of that relationship and the fact that the Philistines, they also remembered that history. It wasn't just the leaders of Israel who had reduced God to a symbolic box, it was the people themselves who genuinely thought they had this magic God box that would give them a victory.

And so the Philistines, they hear this uproar in Israel's camp, and in spite of their shouts, they start steeling themselves for battle. And they say to themselves: *"Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."*

And so we find the ark has the exact opposite effect of what Israel had expected. I mean, at first the Philistines were terrified but that very terror energized them to respond with a fury that only desperate people can muster.

Verse 10 says: *So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*

Now again, Hophni and Phinehas are the priests who were accompanying the ark thinking it would provide the ultimate weapon and just as God had prophesied through his prophet Samuel, they both lost their lives.

Now Eli is awaiting news of this and he gets the news. It says this: *A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. Now Eli was*

ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?"

Well the first thing we can gather from this exchange is that the ark is really what Eli is concerned about, and in fact this turns out to be one of Eli's saving graces. I mean, his concern is not so much for his sons Hophni and Phinehas, I mean, they were crooks, they were thieves who had ignored his father's pleas. So his concern was not for them, it was for the ark of God. He may have realized that it had been reduced to a good luck charm because his concern is now focused on that ark and he's breathlessly listening to the battlefield report from someone who's just returned to the front and the news is nothing but awful.

Verse 17 says: *He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.*

So the sad reign of Eli as prophet and priest comes to a tragic end. And from the perspective of the average citizen, God has now completely abandoned Israel in her time of need. God's prophet and high priest Hophni and Phinehas are now dead but the tragedy doesn't stop there.

It says: Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Just picture the news that this woman has received, I mean, Israel has been utterly defeated, her husband is dead, her father-in-law's now dead, she's about to go into labor. And as we mentioned before, the birth of a son is a highlight of a Jewish woman's life but there's no life left in this woman. For her there's no reason to live including the birth of her son. So she appropriately names

the child Ichabod which basically means "no glory" or "the glory has departed."

How would you like to be saddled with a name like that? I mean, you have to understand the ark of the covenant, the very place where God has tabernacled is now in the hands of the gloating, victorious Philistines. No doubt, all Israel is now filled with abject terror with what the future's going to bring since God has clearly abandoned the ark and the nation. But once again we have the advantage of knowing the whole story. And the fact is God has not abandoned Israel at all. He is clearly, clearly and deeply disciplining her severely.

The Philistines think they have every reason to gloat over this capture. It is they who are deeply mistaken. And it would soon become such a disaster to them that they seek desperately to rid themselves of that ark, but it points out two things about God that we need to keep in mind constantly.

Number one, that is God is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of men and in these days especially that means including our politics. The rank and file Jews who saw the ark being captured, they must have thought that God was either too weak to defeat their enemy or that he had altogether decided to abandon them and they had no idea

that neither was true.

When Eli heard the bad news about the battle, he had to have remembered a prophesy that was spoken by the prophet over twenty years before way back in *1 Samuel 2*. It says: *And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day.*

And even though everything seemed to wreak of chaos and destruction, it was obvious that God's still completely in charge. He was then and he is now. I mean, there is still not one square inch of this earth that Christ isn't able to call "mine."

And number two, God will never forsake or abandon his own. You know, the beauty of scripture is that in many of these historical books we get to see the big picture, that's the picture that nobody else got to see. You know, God's ark packed up on a Philistine cart and carted away must have seemed like the very end for the Jews. They had no idea that it was just the beginning of a brand new era of God's dealing with Israel.

And I pointed out that there is a lesson right there for them for us. There's a temptation, I said, I believe right here and right now for us to be doing the exact same thing as Israel did with

their God in a box except the box that many evangelicals are looking to is now called "MAGA" and the god inside is Donald Trump. Now, I don't have time to go into that message, it's still up there on sermonaudio, if you want to hear an expanded explanation of what I was saying, it's called "Putting God In a Box."

You see, there was and there still is a very real and present danger of seeing what is clearly a spiritual problem in terms of politics. Israel's need was not for a magic box, it was for national repentance, for a turning back to God; and their need was no different than our need today.

And sure enough when we get to the fifth chapter, we find in the Philistines and not just Israel, that both are no different than we are. The Philistines captured the ark of God and in triumph they place it inside the temple of their god Dagon. The very next day they go to the temple to find their statue's been knocked over. Well they set the statute back up again only to find the next time that not only has it been toppled but now it's been beheaded and its hands have been cut off. God is showing the Philistines in no uncertain terms just who he is and that Dagon is no match.

And as I put it the last time, now the priests of Dagon, they've got a real dilemma to solve. I mean, the facts quite clearly point

to the superiority of the God of Israel over Dagon but to acknowledge those facts would be extraordinarily costly.

Just think about it. To acknowledge God's superiority over Dagon would mean that their livelihood as temple priests would be over. Their respect for their place in Philistine society would be completely overturned, and they would have to give allegiance to this new God of a superior power.

So what are these priests going to do? I mean, do they say, "We yield to the inevitable proof of the superiority of Israel's God"? No, of course not. They say what really exercised superior strength in all this was not Dagon but it wasn't the God of Israel. Instead it was the very threshold that Dagon's statute was found on. Yeah, that's it, it's the threshold. That's what has the power here. Instead of making the obvious conclusion that the God of Israel was demonstrating, they chose to look anywhere but to God for a solution, and the solution they came up with, as ridiculous as it was, was that the threshold where the statute was found on, that was the power. And how do we know that? Well, they said so.

In verse 4, it says: *And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were*

broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it.

And this is how they reacted. Verse 5 says: *Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.*

So not only did the priests of Dagon buy into that nonsense but they effectively sold it to all of their subjects. So much so that it became part of their religious dogma of the worship of Dagon. Whatever you do, do not touch the threshold.

And you know, as laughable as that solution may seem, it's not that far removed from the way lots of folks relate to the evidence for God today. We laugh at them for giving credit to something inanimate like the threshold while we give credit to something equally inanimate and powerless that we call "chance." I mean, what made the world and everything in it to our minds today? Well, random chance plus extraordinary time. I mean that's a conclusion that's not simply mistaken, it's extraordinarily insulting.

I pointed out last time the overwhelming evidence that exists for God in nature itself, it's so abundant, it's so self-evident, so overwhelmingly convicting that anyone who rejects it does so just like the priests of Dagon did, not because of but in spite of overwhelming evidence. So much so that God himself says you are

without excuse. In *Romans 1:20*, he says: *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.*

Just think about, if nothing, nothing created the most complex forms of life like an orca or a chimpanzee, then why is it that all of our collective scientific efforts couldn't possibly create even a single simple celled creature or bacteria? I mean, apparently nothing is a greater creator than all of our sciences. I mean just think about it, if anyone in the world could create even the most simple life form that exists on earth, it would be earth shattering. The entire world would beat a pathway to that person's door. Well, the fact is with all of our scientific advances, we couldn't make a rat-tailed maggot. And if we did, even the entire world would direct its energy, if it directed energy to that one task, we still couldn't do it.

I mean, God surrounds us not just with simple life but with complexity beyond imagination, a complexity so profound that only now with the advances that we've made in science can we begin to discover the enormity of that complexity. You know, the Philistines insisted it's the threshold that had the power to topple their god, and today we modernists claim that chance plus

time is what has that power, and both are equally absurd.

And what follows in chapter 5 is what happens when God steps up his proof that he is the real God, because the Philistines are going to discover that the ark of God is bringing death and destruction wherever it resides. You know, the temple of Dagon was located in the city of Ashdod. And after the statue toppled, tumors began breaking out on the citizens of Ashdod and folks literally start dying.

1 Samuel 5:7 says: And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away. So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them. Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!"

And so from Ashdod to Gath to Ekron, people start dying of a dreadful disease that causes tumors. And again, the language isn't clear. We don't know if it was hemorrhoids or bubonic plague or simply the rats that brought a disease that terrified each single town that welcomed the ark, but we do know that every time that ark arrived in a town, disaster followed immediately.

I mean, how would you like to be a citizen of Gath upon learning you're now going to be gifted with this cursed ark of the covenant? It's a gift nobody wanted. And first it was in Ashdod and when the disease broke out where it broke out and by the time it was shipped to Gath, everyone knows that this God of the ark is not to be trifled with and that there are huge penalties for doing so. You'd think the citizens of Ekron would acknowledge what those in Ashdod and Gath refused to acknowledge, that a superior God was upon them and their only recourse would be to seek to be reconciled to that God, but if you think that, you would be thinking wrong.

It says: Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!" So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the

God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The men of Ekron, they're not stupid, I mean, they see disaster coming and they say, "You're trying to kill us." So now we have Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron all reeling from the exact same disease, they're all knowing exactly where it came from and they're all seeking the exact same solution: Not to be reconciled with the God who's responsible but simply to just ship the ark somewhere else -- anywhere else -- to get it away from them.

I submit to you things are absolutely no different in our culture today. The advances that we've had in science have revealed such levels of complexity and wonder that the simple understanding that Darwin and his contemporaries had is clearly seen as stunningly primitive and naive. But you know, to most people, even to most scientists, that doesn't even matter because just like with the inhabitants of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, they have no inclination whatsoever to make the journey from the evidence to the God who produced the evidence.

And so the Philistines come up with a plan. This is 1 Samuel 6:7. It says: *Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us—it happened to us by"* -- and there's that god again. By what? -- *"by chance."*

The Philistines already have overwhelming evidence that it's God's hand that is heavy upon them, and just as it is with any type of external evidence, there's always a need for more. If it's one town that's been afflicted that would seal the deal, well then two towns would be even better. If two towns are afflicted, then three towns would be even better. And each time in each town God has brought absolute destruction and everyone knows it. Still they can't help but make one more plea, that all of this has happened by that same God that we all know that God even back then that God that was known as "chance."

So they make this effort and their final effort stacks the deck

against God. They take two cows who had just given birth and they take their calves away. They know that separating the calf from her mother creates this intense drive for the cows to want to stay. They send the cows off knowing the only possible way that they would ever leave their calves and head off back to Israel is if God actually powered them, and that's exactly what happened.

It says: Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

Now don't miss that little statement "*lowing as they went.*" I mean, that indicates that even the cows were extremely unhappy and they were calling for their calves as they were driven by God's spirit up that pathway.

See, to the very end the Philistines are determined to go for anything other than repentance to the living God. In spite of overwhelming evidence that it was God's heavy hand upon them, they chose to have a contest between two cows and the sovereignty of God. And when the cows once again prove that the God of Israel is behind all of this, they still refused to repent. They still refused to seek him out.

You know, so far we've come from the thresholds as the cause of distress to the rats and the tumors which they offer up in sacrifice to God to now finally we're at the level of trusting in cows to avoid seeing the hand of God. I mean, if it's not the thresholds, it's the tumors. If it's not the tumors, it's the rats. If it's not the rats, it's the cows. I think you can see there's a pattern here.

Okay. Well, what does that have to do with us today? You know, I can't tell you how many times people have asked me: "Why doesn't God make himself more obvious?" "Why doesn't God show himself more?" "I mean, why doesn't he just write the gospel in the sky so everybody can just see it and respond to it?" "Why doesn't he make it so obvious that people really can't ignore it?" You mean, just like he did in Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron? I mean, the folks there were moved enough to be terrified but not moved enough to repent.

You see, there's a disconnect between miracles and belief and it goes from ancient Israel all the way through Jesus's public ministry on earth to the very miracles that Jesus is going to perform when he returns.

I mean, think of this, when Jesus returns -- we know we had that

series on Revelation -- when he returns, all hell is going to break loose. Everyone is going to know that it's directly from the hand of God. But listen to what *Revelation 6* says.

It says: I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

These folks know, they know exactly why the world is exploding. They say, I'd rather have a mountain fall on me than repent. You see, it doesn't matter how big the miracle is, it will never be enough to change a heart of stone, and that's what's in every single heart before God does the unique miracle within it.

Think about Israel, they saw ten incredible miracles in a row.

They saw darkness and hail and flies and frogs and blood, death and destruction in ways that could only be attributed to God. I mean, they marched out of Israel in the middle of the Red Sea which had been split in two, leaving them dry ground to walk on with water piled up on either side, and guess what? That wasn't enough to convince them. You know why? Because nothing is enough to convince anyone. I mean, within months after that event they were actively bemoaning the fact that God brought them into the desert to kill them.

And you know, Jesus did spectacular miracles as well. You know, he fed thousands with loaves and fishes. You know what that did? It made the crowd insistent on bigger and better miracles. In *John 6*, it says: *Therefore they said to Him -- to Jesus -- "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD FROM HEAVEN TO EAT.'"*

You have to unpack that a little bit to understand that this was an unbelievably outrageous statement. First of all, it was made the day, the day after Jesus had fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. And essentially what they were telling Jesus, what they were trying to say, you know, we're not impressed at all with that miracle because after all you started with a couple of loaves and a

couple of fishes. Our Moses, our guy, he didn't need that. He made it rain bread from the sky. I mean they're literally telling Jesus, "You know, thanks for yesterday's miracle but if you want to impress us you're going to have to do something a little more spectacular than that."

Well, Jesus did stuff even more spectacular like raising Lazarus who was not only dead, he was decomposing. And we find some people were actually moved by that miracle to see him as God but a significant percentage were also moved to see Jesus as threat who needed to be killed. Raising the dead was not enough.

So why doesn't God do spectacular miracles today? Well, two reasons. First reason is that even a miracle can't change a fallen heart. I mean, there's only one really rational response to encountering a God of overwhelming strength and power and that's to acknowledge that God and see what you can do to be reconciled to him. Well, that never seemed to have occurred to the Philistines is testimony to the fact that everyone, including your friends, your neighbors, your associates, your relatives who don't know Christ, they all have an internal aversion to the living God that will overwhelm even a desperate need for common sense. It will preclude them from turning to the living God. You see, it's a heart problem, it's not a head problem. The priests the Dagon

refused to see it. It's a threshold, no, no, no, it's the golden tumors, it's the golden rats that we now offer up. It's never seeking out the God who's behind all of the travails. In essence the bottom line is that these folks would rather die than submit to the living God.

When I pointed out in our series before previously that Jesus himself acknowledges that unwillingness repeatedly. He acknowledges as he was coming into Jerusalem and this is at the height of his triumphal entry. He said in *Matthew 23*: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*"

He told a parable about the invitation that God makes to all to come into the kingdom. In *Matthew 22*, he said: "*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.*"

He told the Pharisees in *John 5*: "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may*

have life." Just like the Pharisees, the Philistines were also not willing to come to God.

You know, when that ark was in Ashdod and the surrounding territories, it says *"the hand of God was heavy on their people."* Well the actual word "heavy" indicates these folks were literally being crushed by the hand of God. And they could have said, "God, you are clearly all powerful, more powerful than our god Dagon, how can we be reconciled to you?" But instead they said: *"The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god."*

And there's another reason why God doesn't do more miracles. It has to do with the nature of faith itself. You see, what matters most to God is faith and faith is about what you can't see.

Hebrews 11 says: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Miracles are about things that are seen, usually spectacularly seen. Abraham's faith couldn't see the reason for taking his own son's life and yet he trusted in God even in that. And that's why God said in *Romans 4*: *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

The centurion in the New Testament told Jesus, "I don't need to see you come to my house. Just say the word and my servant's going to be healed." Well Jesus saw that faith and Matthew's gospel says: *When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"*

We have doubting Thomas who famously refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead unless he's able to put his hands into the wounds of his side and his hands he needed to see, to feel, to touch. After Jesus appeared to him and told him to do just that, Thomas says to him: *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus replies, *"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Jesus is making it crystal clear, seeing is not necessarily believing. Miracles are not capable of bringing people into the kingdom. God alone can do that. And it was Jesus who said: *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."* And the Greek word "draw" in this text is the word "helkuo," it means to drag literally or figuratively. What Jesus is saying, we come to God because he grabs us and he drags us. Jesus said: *"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose*

nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."

And so the next time you're feeling kind of low, kind of rejected, maybe wondering why you've not gotten the best that life has for you, I'd like you to consider the privilege that believers in Christ have been given. You see, if you've trusted that God became a man, that he lived a perfect life and then took that life to the cross in order to exchange his perfect righteousness for our sin so that by faith in his sacrifice we by that faith could be made righteous enough for heaven, then you've received the greatest gift a human being could ever receive.

God says in *Ephesians 2*: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

If you've received that gift then you can see spiritually speaking, you don't live in Ashdod, you don't live in Ekron, you don't live in Gath where nothing can change your aversion to the gospel, you now live in a new Jerusalem of the kingdom of God where the very same cross that is foolishness to the world makes absolute sense to you. Your eyes have been opened and your ears have been given the ability to hear, and for reasons known only to Him, he has saved the likes of you and me so we can spend the rest of our lives

bringing honor and glory to Him.

So the next time you're down, consider this simple fact that Jesus proclaimed to his disciples in Matthew 13. He said: "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." Let's pray.

Father, I just want to thank you for the gift that we have received that we so often just don't even think about. We're believers, we're Christians. That is so enormous. A hundred million years from now the enormity of that will still be sinking in to us. I praise you and I thank you that we are more gifted than we could ever imagine. We've been given eyes that see and ears that hear. I praise you and I thank you for that gift, and I pray it would energize us to share that with those who have not yet received that gift, knowing that you alone are the one who can give it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.