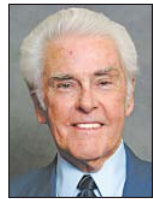


Redeemed from crippling doubt

Do you believe in miracles?

An article in Parade Magazine (3/13/16, pp. 10-13) affirms the belief in miracles by members of the Beam family after their daughter survived a fall that her doctors declared would take her life. “Today, more than four years after the December 2011 incident, Annabel still takes no medication and has no symptoms. Somehow, an experience that should have left her with serious injuries exacerbating her life-threatening disorders instead erased any trace of either condition.”



John Howell

The family’s research concludes that eight of 10 Americans believe in miracles (according to a Pew Research Center study). What about religious beliefs about miracles? Many of the problems modern people have in identifying and understanding miracles spring from their difficulty in understanding the nature and activity of God. God is love. Since the human fall, he has been actively involved in human redemption. Most of the miracles in both the Old and New Testaments may be described as redemption in nature.

Jesus’ miraculous signs “are written that you may believe (John 20:31). Yet Jesus resisted the temptation to work miracles in order to provoke faith (Matthew 4:1-11). He works miracles in response to faith, not doubt” (Disciples Study Bible, “Summary of the Doctrine of Miracles,” p. 1671).

God’s Word is sure (Luke 1:11-17). Zechariah and Elisabeth (Elizabath) were of the family of Aaron serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. They were “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless.” The only problem to their marriage was Elisabeth’s infertility,

so they had no children. In a devoted Jewish home this was a serious failure, but it did not hinder their faith in Jehovah.

While Zechariah was fulfilling his ministry responsibility in the Temple, he was chosen by lot “to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense” (Exodus 30:34-38). A messenger from the Lord appeared to tell him that God had heard his prayers, and “your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”

Doubting God’s Word hinders our walk and service for God (Luke 1:18-20). Based on his old age and Elisabeth’s age, Zechariah questioned the messenger Gabriel about how this could happen. Gabriel then told Zechariah, “you will be silent and unable to speak until the day these things come to pass, because you did not believe my word, which will be fulfilled in their times.”

Why would the couple doubt the message from God? The physical impossibility based on their ages led Zechariah to question the possibility, which is an understandable question, but Gabriel calls it “a lack of belief” and assigned Zechariah to be silent the nine months of the pregnancy.

There are several occurrences in the New Testament when followers of Jesus doubted him. When Jesus condemned the fig tree for not producing fruit, the disciples “saw it and marveled, saying ‘How did the fig tree wither at once?’”

Jesus declared, “if you have faith and never doubt, you will be able to do even greater things than this” (Matthew 21:21). Peter learned the certainty of God’s will when he was delivered from Roman captivity (Acts 12:15-17). James instructed disciples facing persecution to seek God’s help but they must ask “in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind”

Bible Studies for Life

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Scripture: Luke 1:11-20, 63-65

(James 1:5-7).

Why do people doubt?

As with Zechariah, physical impossibility, without a miracle, may hinder certainty. Insufficient information can lead to doubt as well as mental uncertainty. Doubt sometimes involves leaving a conclusion open to question. Fear may also create the unwillingness to speak boldly. Alfred Lord Tennyson, reflecting on some stressful times in his life, wrote, “There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds” (In Memoriam).

The biblical individual who best symbolizes some of these causes for doubt is the one whom we call “Doubting Thomas.” When Jesus met with his disciples after the resurrection on the first day of the week, Thomas was not with them (John 20:24). When they told him, “We have seen the Lord,” he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nail, I will not believe.”

Eight days later Thomas was with them when Jesus appeared. Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:26-28).

Obedience to God’s Word leads to joy and praise (Luke 1:63-65).

The time came for John to be born. “Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord has shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.” The praise of God’s plan for John and Jesus is echoed in the three hymns of praise following these births.

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