

## ∴ that sounds deceptive

“You’re so gullible Jan. Don’t believe everything you hear.”

“Well, Bill at least I have faith. You’re so skeptical you wouldn’t believe Jesus if he were standing right in front of you.”

“That’s not true. I believe the miracles in the Bible. I just don’t believe what the church is trying to pass off as miracles. It’s obvious that some of those healings are staged. They can make ‘miracles’ look pretty real.”

“Have you considered that sometimes maybe they are real? I mean, Shauna was there. She saw the man get up and walk with her own two eyes.”

“But how did she know he was really crippled to begin with? How does she know he wasn’t planted in the audience – that he wasn’t healthy to start with? Maybe he even travels with the ministry and gets healed in every city.”

“Okay, then what about our friends who went on that mission trip to Africa and saw that little boy raised from the dead? They are our friends. We know and trust them.”

“Oh no, not that again. You already know what I think about that. I think they were gullible, too. They didn’t know that little boy. Now, do I believe they believe they saw a real resurrection? Sure. But I think they got caught up in the moment and believed what their hosts said about the little boy. They saw what they wanted to see.”

“Bill he was dead, he had been lying there for hours not breathing.”

“Jan, I didn’t see it, so I don’t trust it. I wouldn’t believe something that absurd unless I saw it with

**Jesus often rebuked people for skepticism about miracles, but there is no evidence he rebuked anyone for being too trusting of them.**

my own eyes, And even then I would be looking for an explanation.”

“You would not have made it as a disciple.”

“Sure I would. Listen, following Jesus doesn’t mean turning your brain off. If Jesus did a miracle I would believe it – because it’s him. But when someone we know in this day and age tells us something like that ... well I know we believe what we want to believe. Besides, I can’t think of any place in the Bible where Jesus told his disci-

ples to believe what somebody else told them they saw. I’m just using the brain God gave me.”

“And I’m not?”

“Let’s just say you forget to ask the right questions.”

Have you ever been in Bill or Jan’s place? How did you react?

Do miracles still happen today? How do you know? Have you ever witnessed a miracle?

Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene and at least two of the disciples, but for the others all they had was word of mouth that Jesus had risen. It seemed so fanciful, so unrealistic, so...outrageously impossible. Surely these “appearances” were the product of wishful thinking or maybe a spiritual vision from God. But a real bodily resurrection? There had to be some other explanation.

The skepticism of the disciples is a lot like our own. In spite of the fact that they had seen innumerable miracles, and had lived with Jesus for three years, they still could not believe in the resurrection Jesus had foretold until they had seen him actually standing there.

### Read Mark 16:14

Our approach, and the disciples’ approach is “don’t believe it until it is proven true.” And this perspective is worthy of Jesus’ rebuke.

We are called to be discerning. Jesus warned his followers that many deceivers would come in his name doing signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24). This warning, however, is meant to caution us that not everything supernatural is from God; it’s about the source of the event, not the event itself. It is not teaching us to explain miracles in naturalistic terms until proven otherwise. Whenever people encountered a miracle in the Gospel, they faced a choice. Those who believed in and rejoiced were commended; those who questioned whether a miracle really happened were rebuked.

The apostles encountered many rejections for their claims that Jesus had been raised from the death (Acts 17:32). Paul once declared that he was on trial for the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6). The Pharisees tried to disprove Jesus’ miracles (John 9:18). In each case, suspicion was considered wise by human standards - “discern-

ing,” to make it sound scriptural and spiritual - but disobedient by God’s standards. Most of us don’t like anyone to make a fool of us, so we regard everything with suspicion. But nowhere in the Bible are we cautioned against looking foolish for having too much faith.

### Read 1 Corinthians 1:25, 4:10

God honors simple faith more often than we think.

Are we afraid to look foolish? Why?

How do we get over this?

If someone we know well tells us some piece of gossip we are more likely to believe them than if they tell us about a miracle they saw. It is easier to doubt the credibility of people we know than it is for us to believe God would exercise his power to intervene in his own creation. It says we have more faith that God won’t do a miracle than that he will.

Those implicit statements may seem subtle, but they have profound consequences. For one thing, the more we reinforce that perspective, the harder it becomes for us to pray for God’s intervention in our lives with any measure of real faith. That’s tragic, considering the Bible tells us that it impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6).

### Read Matthew 9:29; 17:20; 13:57-58

God responds supernaturally to our faith. We can’t say that in the absence of a miracle that the believer didn’t believe enough; that’s only one possibility among many for unanswered prayer. But while missing a miracle doesn’t imply weak faith, weak faith almost always means missing a miracle.

It should be obvious that Christian faith depends on believing the testimony of others. When we believe any part of what the Bible says, we’re believing the testimony of someone we have never met. John’s first letter even spells this out up front. He tells his readers, “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life ... what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also” (1 John 1:1, 3). In other words, “You didn’t see these miracles, but we did, and we’re trustworthy. Believe our reports.”

That doesn’t mean that we should accept everything we hear without any discernment. It simply means our first response should be to assume that the miracle in questions is a real possibility

and, if the report comes from someone we trust, more of a probability.

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C.S. Lewis made this point in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. After both Lucy and Edmund, had accidentally visited Narnia, Lucy was adamant that experience had been real. Out of spite, Edmund said they had only been pretending. Their older brother and sister discussed Lucy’s “delusion” with the professor with whom they were staying. The Professor asked them:

“Does your experience lead you to regard your brother or younger sister as more reliable? I mean which is the more truthful?”

“That’s the funny thing about it, sir,” said Peter. “Up till now I would have said Lucy every time.”

“And what do you think my dear?” said the Professor, turning to Susan.

“Well, in general I would say the same as Peter, but this couldn’t be true -- all about this wood and the Faun.”

“That is more than I know,” said the Professor, “and a charge of lying against someone you have always found truthful is a very serious thing; a very serious thing indeed.”

“We were afraid it mightn’t even been lying,” said Susan; “we thought there might be something wrong with Lucy.”

“Madness you mean?” said the Professor quite coolly. “Oh, you can make your minds easy about that. One has only to look at her and talk to her to see that she is not mad.”

“But then,” said Susan, and stopped. She had never dreamed that a grown-up would talk like the Professor and didn’t know what to think.

“Logic!” said the Professor half to himself. “Why don’t they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or is mad, or is telling the truth. You know she doesn’t tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then, and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume she is telling the truth.”