

Life!

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[0 : 0 0] Now, like us to read together from a passage of scripture in the New Testament, God's word, John chapter 20, and we're going to read from verse 19 to 31. This is a passage about the resurrection of Jesus, and we're beginning a series over the summer, just for a number of weeks over the summer, about the miracles of Jesus. So, we're looking at his resurrection today as one of the greatest miracles. John chapter 20 from verse 19 on page 1089 of the Pew Bible. On the evening of that first day of the week when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands inside. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone, his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now, Thomas called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, We've seen the Lord.

But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his sides, I will not believe it. A week later, the disciples were in the house again. And Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. And he 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. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Because you have seen me, he said to Thomas, You have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

So we're going to look over the next few Sunday mornings at the miracles of Jesus. And it's really great to welcome everyone here today. It's great to have so many visitors with us. I can probably count on about one or two hands how many of our own folk are here. But it's so good to have so many visitors with us today and the lads and everyone from the camp. And having so many from the camp is great. It's Lord, our average age is a congregation by at least 30 years for which we're very glad. And the other thing that's really, I'm really delighted about the guys that are here from the football camp. I love when they come to St. Columbus because it gives me an excuse every year to use all football illustrations during the sermon. And that's great because I don't get that opportunity during the rest of the year. Or if I do, the congregation get tired and ask me to use illustrations about horse riding and stuff like that. So it's really excellent. I can use football and use some illustrations, which I'll hope to do during the service. But above all, what I want everyone to do today as we are around God's word is to be thinking, okay? Everyone to be thinking and being challenged by the living word of God. I've said this, I say this again and again from the congregation here that although you're listening, it's not a passive thing that you're being asked to do. We want you to be active in your listening.

[3 : 50] We want you to be engaged in the way that you listen so that although you might look like you're passive, the inside you're just buzzing with activity and you're thinking about what is being said and you're applying it to your own life and you're looking for what God is saying from his word. And some of the questions that coming to church should provoke within us in our ongoing lives is, well, why are we here? Why am I in church?

Or what is my life about? Who is Jesus? And why do we worship with Jesus and think about Jesus? And what does it matter? Is Jesus important to me in my life? Or is it just something that I have to do a couple of times a year when I come to camp or just when we're on holiday or whatever it might be? So the whole thing is to challenge and point people today to Jesus Christ and do so by way of the miracles and by using or at least in the next number of weeks using the miracles as ways of teaching us about Jesus Christ. So what are the miracles in the first place of Jesus Christ? What does it mean when we talk about miracles? Paul, when he was speaking, was talking about miracle of provision and that undoubtedly is very true for us in our Christian lives. There are miracles of provision that God gives to us and amazing answers to prayer. But in terms of the New Testament and the gospels, miracles are really specific extraordinary acts of Jesus Christ in both life and in nature. Now we know that there's different, I'm sure at least some of you would think that there are different definitions of miracles and there's some that are maybe more accurate than others and maybe we think of some in a different way to others. I want to say a couple of things about what miracles are in. So what I don't think miracles are is when Jesus kind of specially comes into society and suspends nature and takes a time out. You know how it is in American football, the coach says time out, time out and the play is suspended and the coach intervenes and is able to influence what's happening. And something, miracles are like that, that everything is suspended, God is taking a time out and then he comes and intervenes because somehow he's not intervening the rest of the time. But the Bible makes clear that God's power is at work all the time in the world in which we live. You're here today, I'm here today because God's power is at work. He has allowed you to breathe, he's allowed you to live and Hebrews 1:3 says the Son Jesus Christ is sustaining all things by his powerful work. So God is working all the time. It's not like God's a distant clockmaker who's put the world into motion and every so often when a special thing happens he creates a miracle and intervenes. God's always intervening but certainly miracles are about recognising that he intervenes particularly in the gospels in a very special way. So the question for all of us today is do we acknowledge the fact that it is by God's grace and by God's power and by God's strength that we're here. It's not just about ourselves, it's not just what we decide to do, it's not just our own independent lives that matter. We are to be people who are hugely reliant on the dependent on the living God in our lives through Jesus Christ.

So it's not that he's just doing time outs. And the other thing that miracles aren't which sometimes people will say is that it's magic. The miracles Jesus do, well he's just doing magic, he's just showing off. He's using all kinds of trickery and illusions to be popular and to be important. But that is clearly not what the Bible teaches about miracles. Miracles are not like that. Derren Brown or Dynamo, they're the ones that do magic or are illusionists sleight of hand, quickness of eye and all of these things. But Jesus is not an entertainer.

Jesus is not doing miracles to gain popularity. He's doing miracles because they are saying something very important and they are changing lives. Can I just ask maybe ask the campers just to tell me one or two of the miracles, you know, think of the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament. Put your hands up and then tell me some of the miracles in the New Testament.

Water into wine, that's the first miracle that Jesus was at the one you were going to do. How annoying and you put your hand up first, sorry. What else, what are the miracles in the New Testament? He fed 500, was it more than? 5000 people, yeah, with five loaves and five fish, two loaves, two loaves, five fish. Yeah, he rose Lazarus from the dead.

[9 : 03] Any other miracles in the New Testament, this is good. Excellent, someone who was blind, he made to see a resurrection. Ah, well done. Sorry, he made a paralysed man walk, Robbie.

He walked in water, that's great. He taught them well at camp and they're knowing their stuff really well. That's excellent, tremendous. And these are all different miracles and we're going to look at these miracles in the next few weeks, some of the different types of miracles and the reasons that he did these miracles. But we recognise that in the Bible the miracles are there for a special reason, several special reasons. One was to lend authority and authenticity to Jesus and to his work and to his person. Someone mentioned the miracle of changing water into wine, that was the first miracle Jesus did and we're told that he did this and when he did so, it was the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee, thus revealing his glory and his disciples put their faith in him. So it wasn't just to make a whole lot of wine for a wedding, it wasn't just so that they could celebrate more and the family wouldn't be embarrassed because they'd run out of wine. But it was because he was revealing himself and how significant and important he was. In Matthew chapter 8 it speaks of Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, being the Messiah, because he took our power and firmities and carried our sorrows and that was after he had created, after he had done a miracle of healing. And we recognise and know that even Nicodemus, who was a leader, who was a teacher at the time, when he went to meet with Jesus by night, he said, bravo, I know you're a great teacher who's come from God. No one can perform the miraculous signs you're doing if God were not with him. So it was to make people think about who Jesus was and where he was coming from. It was to inspire faith and worship.

The disciples began to put their faith and trust in him after they saw the miracle at the wedding of Canaan. And in the passage we read right at the end of the Gospel of John, doubting Thomas when he sees and meets with the resurrected Jesus, he says, my Lord and my God, and he is able to worship him. But there's something else about miracles as well, as well as inspiring worship and authenticating who Jesus was. Miracles were pointing to something better. Jesus said in Luke 11, if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. So it was about the kingdom of Jesus Christ coming into the world. It was about Jesus being the Messiah and pointing to something better. You mentioned nearly all the miracles when I asked you lads, and that was great because these miracles are pointing to certain things, aren't they? They are pointing to His kingdom coming in all its fullness, where there will be no disease, where there will be no death, where there will be no evil and no storms, and where there will be celebration.

And so there's a much more positive aspect. They're touching a world that's still to come. They're speaking about the fact that Jesus has come and begun this kingdom and it lives in our hearts by the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. But one day in the new heavens and the new earth, we will see that kingdom coming in all its fullness. And all of these things that Jesus came to put right, it wasn't that He was acting against nature, He was returning to what the nature of God had been in the beginning. And that is what we, part of the reason that we look forward as believers, not just to tomorrow, not just to the rest of the week, not just to the future that we might hope for, but to the great future we have in Jesus Christ, in His new heavens and His new earth, which the miracles point to in the healing and in the wholeness and in the joy and in the correction that they involved in people's lives. And so we come to this miracle, the greatest in many of all miracles, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a sense it's on a different scale to all the other miracles that we have talked about, to the very heart of Christianity. That's why we worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. The day was changed because it was so significant. We come together on this day of the resurrection. And you know, some people say, well, the resurrection, does it really matter? Absolutely. Because if it's true, all of Christianity is true. And everything that Jesus said is true, because He is Lord and He is God. For all of us, you know, however young or however old, however, for whatever reason we've drifted maybe into church today, for whatever it might be, it is absolutely relevant for us. And if it's not true, if the resurrection is not true, then Jesus is just another voice to ignore. And He is not worthy of our praise and of our worship.

Now the resurrection is the great miracle that authenticates and gives great weight to who Jesus is and what He teaches. And can I just give a quick football example here?

[14 : 42] If you wanted, you guys wanted to learn more about football. Say someone in the second row with a kind of purplish. What's the name of your maths teacher? Can you remember? Anyone?

Give me a name of your maths teacher, school. Mr. Who? Mr. Abid. Okay. Mr. Abid, your maths teacher. Right. If you want to learn a great deal about, more about your football and learn how to play, would you be happy if Mr. Abid came and told you or if Lionel Messi came?

Who would you listen to more? Now, don't give me the smart answer. Who would you listen to? Messi? Okay. You would, wouldn't you? Because he's done it, isn't he? He's the guy that is proving week after week after week that he knows all about the game. He trains tremendously hard and he's got outstanding skill. So Mr. Abid might be great at maths.

But he probably isn't going to carry much weight if he's going to tell you how to play football. And in a much, much, much more important way, obviously, the resurrection is something that gives Jesus and what he says great weight, great importance. Don't just shove him away.

Don't just ignore him as someone who's irrelevant. This is Jesus Christ because what we recognise is that it's a matter of life and death. What the resurrection is about. The spiritual story behind what Jesus has done, the spiritual story behind the resurrection is that death isn't something that's natural. It isn't just part of life. It has come about as a consequence of ignoring God's law of love and of life. Right from the very beginning. So if we move right back to Genesis chapter one, we've got our first parents Adam and Eve and they rejected God's simple law of love and trust and they decided they would do their own thing.

[16 : 45] And as a result of that, they have paid the price. They introduced separation and it introduced death into the world and the curse and judgment of God. Great consequences, decay. That's why Jesus needed to come and heal the people. Illness, brokenness and death and separation.

Now I'm going to use another football illustration here just to give you an example. Hands up of the lads who are here who have been, you've played a game so far, have you? You play last night? Have you not played yet? Okay, but I presume you play normally. Hands up here of the lads at the camp are defenders. That's their position, they play in defence. Okay.

Right, maybe you'll see, you'll know what I mean then when I'm talking about the example here. If you're in a game and you're a defender and there's an attacker playing the other team and he's really, really excellent. He's fast, he's skillful, he's technical and he's going to beat you every time and you think, there's no way I'm going to be able to stop this guy. No way at all. So what you decide to do, don't do what I say. Okay, there's just an illustration. What you decide to do is you decide to take the law into your own hands. See, I'm not going to stop him legally by the laws of the game, so I'm going to cut him in half. Okay, I'm going to do a two foot tackle and injure him so that he can't play.

Now that's a terrible thing to do. So you do it and the guy's injured and he's not going to win, he's not going to score any goals because of what he's done. But the trouble with doing that is that you've walked outside of the laws of the game and you will pay the consequences of that. You'll pay the price. You'll get a red card. You'll no longer be able to play either. And you've rejected these laws and it destroys the game. How often does that happen in a game? Games kind of destroyed because of that. And you can't take the law into your own hands without paying the price. And again, a much more significant level, that's what's happened to us spiritually. As human beings, that's what we've done. We've said, not interested in God and His laws and His ways of love, and I would rather do things my own way and I would rather ignore Him and rather not believe. And I'll just go and do my own thing and be number one in my life. But of course, that leaves us in a terrible place spiritually, all of us, without Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior, because Christ came to put it right. He's not a magician. He wasn't there to entertain. Jesus Christ came with a very serious task of sacrificially living perfectly within God's love and law and then dying, banished, receiving our red card, as it were, for our sins on the cross, having broken no rules, having broken nothing of God's law, and having done nothing against God, He took the price of all the wrong things we've done on the cross and has punished for our sins. And the resurrection, this great miracle says, it's done. It's acceptable. I'm more powerful than your sin and even your death and its consequences and

I've paid the price and I've taken the punishment. And as God, I have provided the answer for every human being because all of us die and all of us need a Savior. And so the resurrection here is an amazing miracle. Now again, can I just say a couple of things, we're nearly finished. A couple of things about what it's not. It wasn't a temporary resurrection. Okay.

[20 : 32] Someone mentioned, one of the boys mentioned the raising of Lazarus from the dead. So that was a resurrection, wasn't it? But it was a temporary resurrection because Lazarus died and he went into the grave. Then he rose again because Jesus resurrected him. But then he had to die again. So it was only a temporary resurrection. And sometimes you hear about that, don't you? You hear about people who die on the operating table and it seems that they come back to life after a certain amount of time. And it's like a resurrection. But yet they will go on to die again. Or again, and I think this is the last of my football illustrations, Fabrice Malamba, who was a player a couple of seasons ago for Bolton, who died on the pitch. And in reading his biography, I think his heart didn't beat for 78 minutes.

It's an astonishing story and a very interesting story. But his heart started beating again. So he kind of was resurrected, but he then went on, of course, and will go on at some point to face death. But Christ's resurrection as death and resurrection was very different.

He chose to die and in choosing to die, he nailed it. He nailed the power of the grave on the cross by his resurrection on the third day. He overcame it by his power and the power of his life as divine and as God. So that the interesting thing is that Jesus' miracles were never for himself. Now you might think that the resurrection was his miracle. That was very much for himself, but it wasn't really. The miracle of the resurrection wasn't for him. He was always going to be more powerful than the grave. And he would always defeat death. But the reality was his resurrection was for us. So that when we trust in him, we too can know that life in us so that as the Bible says, even though we die, yet we will live the sting of death, the Bible says will be taken from us. And we will have this reality of God's life in us forever. And just as he was resurrected, so death will not be able to hold anyone who trusts in Jesus. And we can go on and enjoy this life that the miracles of healing and wholeness and joy and power went on to speak about. He did that to take away our sins.

So as I close, what then is this miracle about and indeed all the miracles about? Well, if you look at the chapter we read, Jesus tells us, you know, blessed, you know, because Thomas had that great privilege and advantage, didn't he? He saw the resurrected saviour. But having said that, there was a lot of people around that time who saw the risen saviour and who also doubted. So don't think it would just be much easier if we'd seen the resurrected Jesus. It's not necessarily about seeing. It's about faith and trust and believing.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Now we're told in the next verse, Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in the book. One day we'll find out. You can ask Jesus about all these different miracles that weren't recorded in the Bible. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you have me a life, you may have life in His name. That is what we encourage you to think about today. That the Bible, the Gospel, the miracles, the resurrection, the death, the resurrection are so that we will believe. I'm going to say something very strange to you now. You can't believe either. You can't believe in your own sin. That too is impossible without God's help because we're spiritually dead without Him. In other words, anyone who is here who's a

[24 : 43] Christian has already received a miracle of God, the miracle of new life. He has given us the ability to believe in Him and we go to Him and we ask for faith to believe. Then we will see the facts for what they are and we will recognize that they are true and that He is the Son of God and that as we put our trust in Him to forgive our sins and to give us a new heart and a new life, then we will be saved. That is the heart of worship and that is what we seek to do when we gather together. Each of us is able to say, my Lord and my God, my Lord and my God, not somebody else's, not your mum and dads, not the leaders at camps, not your neighbours or friends, but my Lord and my God. That is what we seek, that every single person knows and understands because it is, as we say, a matter of life and death and that is so significant. Now you are just at the beginning of camp, you have got a whole week ahead of you, it will be a fantastic week, lots of good things will happen but even the best things that happen at camp, it will come to an end, won't it?

And I remember, I still remember, I know it's a long, long time ago, but I remember being your age and I remember the gutted feeling I had at the end of camp when you went home to your folks and they didn't understand the good time you had had and they didn't understand that you were broken hearted, losing all your mates and moving away and it wasn't going to happen for another year because good things come to an end in this life so much.

But in Christ we know that we have life and we have life eternal, a better life, a glorious life and a life that will never come to an end in Him. And so as we look at all the other miracles in the next coming weeks, please pray about that, pray that we will be touched by them, that we will understand what they are telling us, that it will enthuse us in our faith and as we think forward to our hope in Jesus Christ. And I really hope and pray that all who are visiting with us today, if you are on vacation or holiday, you have a fantastic refreshing, relaxing time, the boys and everyone at camp have a brilliant time and that Christ is with you all. Let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that you would bless us as we gather around your word. We thank you for it and we ask that you would follow it with your blessing. We do pray that you would remember everyone who is here today, remember our own congregation here and those who are visiting, those who are on holiday, those who are at camp. And we pray and ask and rejoice that in Christ that we are one and in Christ that we are part of a great family, that we belong to a different kingdom and that we are in our attitudes and our thinking and our desires and our ambitions and our longings and our thoughts. We are to be like Jesus Christ.

Forgive us when we are not. Forgive us when we are proud or selfish or greedy or grumpy or judgmental or impure. Forgive us when we do what Jesus so often reminded us that we do is we find terribly small mistakes in others and ignore the massive mistakes in our own hearts because it makes us feel better and because it kind of feeds our self-righteousness.

Help us not to think that we are able to earn our favour with you, but help us simply to understand grace and your unmerited favour and help us to know the difference between serving you in order to somehow earn your favour, which we can never do, and serving you because it is a blessing and because we love to do that. Help us then in our lives and help us in our worship, we ask in all that we do and say in Jesus' name. Amen.