

The Gospel, Not Miracles

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 16, where we are going to be finishing up the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. We've gone through the parable and looked at different aspects of it. Today we're going to finish [by] looking at one more interesting angle from this really well-known parable that Jesus gave toward the end of His life.

As you're finding Luke 16, I want to talk to you about miracles, signs, wonders, [and] things like that. God has done a lot of miracles. If you read through the Scriptures, He's done some incredible miracles. Some He's done just on His own, like creation [and] things like that. Other things He's done through people who have been gifted or empowered to do various miracles. A lot of times, when [you] read these things in the Bible—[this] probably happens to you as it happens to me—you think, "I'd kind of like to see that. I'd like to be there at the dividing of the Red Sea [see Exodus 14]. I'd like to see somebody raised from the dead [see John 11:33–44]. I'd like to see some blind man healed [see Mark 8:22–25]. I'd like to see those things." Maybe you have thought some of those same things, too. One of the things that would be great is if you could do some incredible miracle or something [and] then [to] all those people who don't believe in God you could say, "Ah ha! I told you! Did you see that? That mountain just leapt out in[to] the sea [see Matthew 21:21], so obviously God exists."

I think we all have that little desire to have some supernatural manifestation of power so that people will be compelled to believe there is a God. You see in the media that the whole world is really kind of consumed with the supernatural, right? Think about all the different things in TV shows, movies, books, and magazines about the supernatural, the paranormal, and [other] powers. [In them], people can create things and move things [with their minds] and do all of these different things. [People watching or reading these things think], “If I could just be like Superman. If I could just be like Spiderman, or the Invisible Man, or X-Man, or a vampire.” These are the kinds of things that are being thrown at the world at an ever-increasing rate until pretty soon there’s hardly any show [on TV] that doesn’t have some manifestation of some supernatural power or miracle.

Now, why would Satan, who is the god of this world [see 2 Corinthians 4:4], want to promote these external signs and wonders through the media and so thoroughly saturate society with that? You have to wonder. There’s this tsunami of miracles coming at us through the media. As we’ve learned before, God doesn’t do miracles to entertain people. God doesn’t say, “Let Me show you this. Check this out. I can do this and that.” He’s not an illusionist. He’s not here to impress us with wowing miracles. At certain times—really, three major instances in history—God has given men the power to do miracles for the purpose of authenticating the messenger and his message. [During the first of] those three time periods, [God empowered] Moses, who, of course, wrote the first five books of the Bible. [Moses also] went and did a lot of miracles—dividing the sea [see Exodus 14], making water come out of [a] rock [see Exodus 17:6], and all those things that happened that you read about in Exodus. Later on, [in the second time period], Elisha and Elijah, two prophets, did miracles. Elijah was first and his disciple, Elisha, came after. They did miracles and the Bible was being written then. Then [in the third time period], Jesus and the disciples c[a]me on the scene, and a few of the early Church disciples had the power to do miracles. We see that in the whole course of the history of the world there are three groups in specific locations, for a specific time, for [the] specific

purpose of authenticating the message and the messenger while the Bible is being written. That's pretty much it.

In addition to this, God has done miracles apart from people being given the gift of miracles. I think the most common miracle is salvation. A lot of you here this morning are miracles. There are people here who, if you were to look at them now, you would have no idea they used to be the Satan worshipper[s], the drug addict[s], the criminal[s], or whatever. They look pretty good next to you. They don't even look scary. God has so transformed their [lives that] at one moment they were coughing up blood in the park and wasting away from drugs, and now they're clothed in their right mind[s] and [are] business [people]. You think, "Well, what happened? How did that happen to them? How did their whole [lives] change? What enabled them to just walk away from their sin and to get a whole different drive, purpose in life, worldview? What made them become so different than they ever were before?" Well, the answer is [that] God, by His grace, helped them understand that they were sinners, that Christ died on the cross for their sins, in their place, suffered the death that they should have died, and [that] by believing in Christ, by trusting in what He accomplished on the cross, they were given the free gift of eternal life and their whole lives changed. It is the story of every Christian.

Satan knows, though, that men long for miracles. He uses [this] against us. You say, "How is that?" Listen to what Jesus said when the disciples came to Him in what is called the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:24–25. When the disciples came and asked Him, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" [Matthew 24:3], this is one of the things that Jesus said: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance." Jesus says [that] in the last times right before He comes [back], there [are] going to be all these people saying, "I am the Christ!" There are going to be false teachers and they're going to do signs and wonders. Interesting, isn't it? Jesus says, "I have told you in advance. Don't you come to heaven, don't you show up, and say,

‘But, Lord, I didn’t know they were going to be doing miracles!’ I’ve told you in advance. None of this ‘I didn’t know’ [stuff]. You know because I told you.”

Paul, in [2] Thessalonians 2:8–12, also speaking of the time directly before the Second Coming of Christ, during what is often referred to as the Tribulation, speaks of the antichrist. Listen to [how] this antichrist figure, who is empowered by Satan, deceives people. [Second] Thessalonians 2:8 says: “Then that lawless one,” speaking of the antichrist:

will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Did you see that? Satan comes on the scene, working through this man called the antichrist, and he deceives people through lying, false signs, and wonders. What people are deceived? The people who won’t believe in this Book, the Bible, [are deceived]. They become easy prey.

You might be wondering, “Why doesn’t God show more miracles today? I mean, if He is God and He is still powerful, why doesn’t He do some more wowing tricks to show people He’s hiding behind the scenes [but] He’s still there? Why not give some people the gift of healing [so they can] go down there and just empty out St. Joe’s and then run over to Glendale Memorial and just empty it out, [too]?” That’d be kind of fun, wouldn’t it? You’d see all [these] cameras and movie people just looking in [as someone is] going from bed to bed, healing everybody. Everybody is walking out [of the hospital] trying to get out of their little jammies, leaping around, laughing, having fun. Why doesn’t [God] do that? You know what? The reason is this: God expects you to read your Bible and believe it. You want to see some miracles? Read the Scriptures. A lot of times we want to see miracles happen because we don’t want to believe the Scriptures.

Let me just ask you: Do you remember when Ananias and Sapphira lied about giving to the Church in Acts 5 and God struck them dead? Do you think God should keep doing that, too? No, no, we don't want *that* to keep happening. That miracle was bad. You see, the thing is [that] sometimes we don't want to just learn. We don't want to believe the Scriptures. Well, thankfully, God killed Uzzah [as an example to us] when he touched the ark [see 2 Samuel 6:6–7]. Whew! Thankfully, God killed Nadab and Abihu when they didn't worship acceptably [see Leviticus 10:1–2] and He doesn't do that to everybody [today who doesn't worship properly]. Thankfully, He killed Ananias and Sapphira, but He didn't do that to everybody [who lied]. He does it as an example and then He puts it in the Book so we can read it and learn from [those examples] so we don't have to go through it [ourselves], thankfully.

But in this world, what we find is people are just hungering after the miraculous. People will tell you, “Oh, God spoke to me.”

“Oh, I had a vision from God.”

“Oh, I went to heaven and I came back ninety minutes later.”

“If you give a lot of money to my ministry, God might heal you.” These are the kinds of things that are going on. In Jesus' time it was what was happening then. In John 4:48, Jesus, speaking to the religious leaders, said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:22–23: “Jews ask for signs...but we preach Christ crucified.” When you go through Acts you discover that in the [time of the] early Church, Paul did a lot of miracles, didn't he? But whenever he came to people who said, “I want to see a miracle, do a trick, do a show, wow me,” [or] something like that, what did they get? [They got] the gospel, the good news that Christ died on the cross for their sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. [They were told to] believe in that. That's what they got: “Believe and your life will be changed. That's the only miracle you're going to get.”

A lot of times I think we think we might need miracles today and that is why there are so many false teachers on TV saying, “Send money so we

can do these miracles. Send money so soon we can begin healing all the sick and raising the dead,” as if money had something to do with their ability to do miracles. Do you remember Gehazi in the Old Testament? Gehazi was Elisha’s servant and [do you] remember what happened with Gehazi? Naaman the leper was there and Elisha healed him. [Naaman] wanted to give [Elisha money for his healing]. He was very wealthy [and] he wanted to give Elisha money or whatever [Elisha] wanted. [Elisha] said, “No, no, I’m not going to take money for miracles,” and so he sends [Naaman] on his way. But [Elisha’s] servant, Gehazi, was thinking, “I could use some [money]. I’m going to follow him.” So, he sneaks out, catches up [to Naaman, and says], “Yeah, my master changed his mind and I think he would like a little reward. What do you [have]?” Pretty soon, Naaman starts giving [Gehazi] all this stuff, and as soon as [Gehazi] takes it, what happens? The Lord strikes him with leprosy [see 2 Kings 5:9–27].

Do you remember Simon the magician in Acts 8? He sees the apostles in the early Church doing these miracles, and he is so fascinated, envious, and jealous because he wants fame, power, [and] to make money off these miracles. He says to Peter, “Can I buy this ability from you?” Peter rebukes him, tells him to repent, and [says] he is “in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity” [see Acts 8:18–23]. Why? [It is] because [Simon the magician] thought that he could purchase this ability to do miracles as if it was for sale or [as] if it was for self-promotion to make one[self] wealthy. This is what you see going on in the world today. [People] come on and they’re weeping and crying on TV, [saying], “Give to my ministry. We just need to heal people in the name of Jesus!” and then they drive away in their Rolls Royce[s].

What about evangelism, though? If you’re talking about doing miracles, you’d think that evangelism should [factor] in there. What about the people who say, “We need miracles to do evangelism. We need miracles because that will get people’s attention, then we can share the gospel with them, and then people will come to Christ.” Well, surely that is a good motive, right? Surely we need miracles to happen so that people will see that there is a

God, that the messenger is true, [and] to authenticate the message so that [people] will come to Christ because isn't that what happened in the Old Testament? Isn't that what happened with Jesus and the apostles? Well, we're going to find out from the parable this morning. Follow along as I read Luke 16:19–31. The text reads:

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us." And he said, "Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" But he said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and

the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

We have learned from this parable about the great reversal that takes place between the wicked and the righteous after they die. We have learned about the agonies of hell—some scary things—and [about] the glory of heaven—[some] really wonderful things. But now, this morning, I want to show you four reasons why lost people need the gospel and *not* miracles. Hopefully this will keep you from being led astray [by] people who are telling you the exact opposite.

The first thing we learn from this parable is: You can't be an evangelist in hell. Look at [Luke 16:]27–28. The rich man has just been refused his first request to have Lazarus come, bring some water, and [touch it to his] tongue to cool him off because he is in agony in the flames. And he, the rich man, said: “Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Notice the five brothers are in the same place the rich man [was]. They have a blatant disregard for the Scriptures. They're Jews. They're living in Israel. Surely they were raised up [in the Jewish tradition], went through their bar mitzvahs, went to the temple, offered their sacrifices, [and] celebrated the feasts. They were doing the ritual things that the Jews did—trusting in their inheritance from Abraham, in [being of] his line, being descendents of Abraham. Surely they were going to get into heaven. But now, the rich man, he's concerned. He, all of a sudden, has this interesting motivation to evangelize because he realizes his brothers are in the same place he [was] and [that] if something isn't done, they will end up in hell [as] he is. They are no closer to God than the lost Gentile idolater. [Yes], they are religious. They would say, “We believe in the Hebrew Scriptures. We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We believe in the coming of the Messiah.” They believe all these things, [but] the problem is they don't know God. They just know

facts *about* God. Like their brother [the rich man], they are on their way to hell for they have not believed the Scriptures.

The rich man in hell is now interested in evangelism, but the lesson we learn here is [that] you *can't* evangelize anyone from hell. It's too late. You don't get to be sent back to earth. You don't get to be like those ghosts in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, who come back to warn the unrepentant [that] they need to repent and get their lives right so that they don't go to that same place [to which] you've gone. No one goes back because there is no evangelism [from hell]. You have people telling you stories like, "Well, I died and I came back from the dead," or, "I died and I went to hell and came back," or, "I died and came back from heaven ninety minutes later" or something like that. Listen, it didn't happen.

I've had people say, "How could you say that?" [I say that] because the Bible says different[ly]. When Job is speaking of death in Job 7:7–10, this is what he says:

Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer; Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be. When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol [or the grave] does not come up. He will not return again to his house, Nor will his place know him anymore.

So, when someone comes to you, and says, "I died and I've come back to my house," who are you going to believe: God or the guy with the *New York Times* bestseller? If you're out there right now, and you're rejecting Christ and you're putting Him at arm's length, and [thinking], "I don't know if I want to give my life to Christ. I don't know if I want to follow Christ. I don't know if I want to let go of my sins. I'm just going to postpone it because, after all, I've got some sins I need to enjoy or I want to first pick my husband [or] my wife before God interferes. I want to make sure that I enjoy my immorality, my pornography, or my entertainment. I'm just going

to set Him off [to the side].” Listen, you’re really not any different than the Jews of Jesus’ time who, when Jesus was being crucified, [and Pilate] said, “What do you want me to do with your King?” said, “Let His blood be on our heads. We have no king but Caesar” [see John 19:14–15]. If that’s what you’re saying by postponing, by procrastinating, by saying, “I know the truth but I’m not going to give my life to Christ,” what you’re really saying is, “[I] will have no one rule my life but Satan. I want Satan to stay my father [see John 8:44]. I want him to steer my course. I don’t want God controlling my life.” But think of those you love. Think about being in hell and thinking of those you love, like the rich man here in this parable. Your own soul is perishing in hell, and you’re looking out, and you’re seeing those you love headed to that same place where you are now suffering and you can’t do anything about it.

Know this: You will have a difficult time in this life leading them to the Lord if you have rejected the Lord. [You would be saying something like], “Listen, you need to give your life to Christ. You need to turn from your sins. You need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection to save you. You need to do that because if you don’t do that you’re going to perish in hell. Now, it’s not for *me*, but it would be good for you. I have chosen to have my sin and perish in hell for eternity, but you need to repent.” See, that just doesn’t work, does it? No. You need to first give your life to Christ, and then when your life changes, you can go to them and you have some credibility. The salesman is suspect who will not use his own product. So, be warned: there is no evangelizing in hell.

Second: You can’t send missionaries from hell either. Look at [Luke 16:]27–28 again. [The rich man] says: “Then I beg you, father, that you send him,” that is, Lazarus, “to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them.” Do you see what’s going on here? He’s saying, “Now, OK, I can’t go, [so] send Lazarus.” It’s clear, if you look down in [Luke 16:]30, [where it says], “but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” [that] he wants a missionary sent. The rich man has now created his own missions agency—Hellfire

Missions—and he is the chairman. He wants Lazarus to be his first missionary. “Can you send Lazarus to evangelize my brothers? Send Lazarus back from this place of paradise he is [in] now to evangelize my brothers.” But, of course, Abraham twice denies his request. Why? [He denies the request] because there’s no sending missionaries from hell.

Let’s say you’re a grandparent. Imagine being in the new children’s building. You’re standing there and you’re looking out toward Main Street [from] the second floor. You’re thinking, “Man, this is a good view up here. This is nice.” All of a sudden, you see out of the corner of your eye a little child out[side]. You [think], “Huh, that’s my grandson and he’s on the sidewalk and no one is out there.” You see him walking toward the road, and so you yell, but we’ve got these super-insulated windows, so no sound goes through. You scream louder, but he doesn’t hear you. He is walking toward the street and he steps off the curb. You see [that] a car is coming. You’re screaming, you’re calling for other people, [but] no one is there. You see the collision about to happen. Does that create tension in you?

Imagine being in hell and seeing your loved ones headed not just for an accident, but for eternal hellfire, and not being able to do anything. Now is the time to do something. Now is the time to talk to them. Now is the time to get right with the Lord because in hell there is no sending [of] missionaries. You need to get involved in your own personal missions. You need to tell people about Christ. Tell people about Jesus [and about] how they can get to heaven. Invite them to church. Talk to them. Why? Because a lot of people are out there and they just don’t know [the truth, that’s why]. They just don’t know. [With] most churches, you go [there] and they just have ritual[s]. They don’t teach the Bible, they don’t show people what the Scriptures say. Talk to [people].

You may think, “Well, I don’t really know that much.” Yes, you do. You know way more than most people do. Get involved in missions. Go on a short-term missions trip. I think everybody here needs to go on a short-term missions [trip]. If you can walk and breathe, you need to go. Show up and just be [involved]—especially in a third-world country. It will fix

your complaining. You will come back and kiss the tarmac after you get off the plane. You need to go out there and do your part to bring other people to Christ, to pray for our missionaries, to give to missions, to be your own missionary because if you die without Christ, you won't be able to send anybody to your loved ones.

Third: You are deluded if you think miracles can save or are necessary instruments of salvation. Sometimes we have this idea that if [people] could just see a miracle then they would believe. That's what the rich man is saying, isn't it? He says, "Can you raise [Lazarus] from the dead? He shows up, [and my brothers say], 'Lazarus? Aren't you the guy who was outside my brother's mansion, dying out there, that we kind of snubbed our noses at? I thought you died.'

'I did. I'm back. I have a message for you.' Surely that would be compelling." See, that's his thought. The problem is [that] Abraham says something [that], if you don't know Christ, seems a little cold, maybe a little cruel, maybe even mean. He says, "They have Moses and the Prophets." What? "Let them read the Bible" [is what he is saying]. Then [the rich man] argues. He says, "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." In other words, if there is a miracle, that will cause them to repent. Now he says "someone," he doesn't even care if it's Lazarus or not. Anybody will do.

After Jesus cleansed the temple in John 2:18, the Jews asked, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" They want to see a sign. In John 6:30, the [Jews said], "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You?" In Matthew 12:38 it says, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'" [Do] you remember Jesus' words in Luke 11:29: "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah"? They had no idea what that meant and missed it. Jesus, [in this parable of the rich man and Lazarus] has put the theology of the Jewish leaders into the mind, into the person, of the rich man. And so, though they're shocked that the [rich] man is in hell, when Je-

Jesus says, “The rich man says, ‘Raise him and then they will believe,’” all the Pharisees who were listening right [then] to this parable [were] [thinking], “That’s right. That’s right. Do the miracle,” because that’s what they’re all saying. They want the miracle, too.

Notice, couched in this request, really, is kind of a subtle rebuke to Abraham. [When the rich man says], “If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent,” [he is implying], “If that [had] happened to me, then I wouldn’t be here in hell.” That’s what’s happening, right? Do you see his pride here? “You can’t just expect them to believe the Bible, to believe the gospel. You can’t just expect them to have faith in this Book.” This is the huge error that is going on today. You [have] to have some scientific proof, you need a miracle, or you need a vision, you need a revelation from God. [But consider this.] Moses gets the staff and he turns it into a snake. Now, did pharaoh just break down and repent and submit himself to God? No [see Exodus 7:8–13]. Then, [through Moses, God] did ten plagues that wiped out all [of] Egypt [see Exodus 3–12], then [the Israelites] leave, this huge pillar of fire comes down out of heaven [see Exodus 13:21], the Red Sea parts [see Exodus 14], all of Israel walks through, and then all of pharaoh’s army, they all break down and give their lives to the Lord, [right]? No! They run into the miracle, and they all perish by the miracle in unbelief.

But [it’s a] good thing the Israelites saw all this and were on the other side, being fed every day with manna from heaven [see Exodus 16:4], having water come out [of] rocks [see Exodus 17:6], seeing God judge grumblers with serpents [see Numbers 21:6], and opening up the ground [see Numbers 16:23–34], and fire proceeding out from the Lord every day, a pillar of cloud covering the camp every day, a pillar of fire lighting it [at night], their food falling from heaven, water miraculously appearing every day. Every day—[there were] miracles every day. What does the author of Hebrews say in Hebrews 3 toward the end? What happened to that generation? They all died in unbelief, though they had seen His works for forty years [see Hebrews 3:17–18]. Don’t let anybody tell you, “You have to have a miracle! If you don’t have a miracle, they’re never going to believe!” No.

R. Kent Hughes says:

This is exactly what our culture says today. “The Bible is not enough. The Resurrection is not enough. We need special ‘signs and wonders.’ Then we will believe. How arrogant we humans are, daring to tell God what He must do if we are to believe. If God would just send ambassadors from the other side, great multitudes would believe.” Would they? Jesus’ parable shouts a resounding, no!¹

That’s what they’re looking for. At the end of Jesus’ ministry, John tells us in his Gospel, “But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him” [John 12:37]. So, don’t ever think that miracles are compelling. Don’t ever think that miracles force people to believe or are so convincing because the fact is [that of] the people in history who saw the miracles, very few of them believed. [Miracles] are authenticators of the messenger and his message, and the message is what brings people to Christ.

If there is no evangelism from hell, if you can’t send missionaries from hell, if even miracles won’t bring people to Christ, then what does? That’s what we’re going to look at [in our] fourth point: You must trust in the sufficiency of the Word of God. Right after the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to evangelize his brothers, in [Luke 16:]29, Abraham says, “They have Moses and the Prophets.” This phrase “Moses and the Prophets” is one of many synonyms for the Bible, the Word of God, the Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets, the Writings. They had many terms to describe it in the Scriptures, and this is just one of them. [Abraham is saying], “Let them read their Bibles.” You think, “Well, why does he say that?” [He says that] because that’s how people escape the consequences of their sin. God has put this very simple message in the Bible and that

¹R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word Collection, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), p. 160.

message is [that] if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. That seems very simple. “You mean I don’t have to walk on glass?” No. “I don’t have to lay on a bed of nails?” No. “I don’t have to like, you know, be a hermit and whip myself? What do I have to do?” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. “But don’t I need to know. . .” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. “Are you *sure* I don’t have to. . .” Just trust that Christ died for you and rose again on the third day. Believe! Believe!

[Many people think], “Maybe I can help God out.” No! Jesus didn’t die because He needed you to help Him out. He doesn’t need you to help Him out because you *can’t* help. He did it all. That’s the incredible gift of God. That’s what we celebrate in communion, that because we couldn’t save ourselves, Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day so that we, through faith in Him, could receive the free gift of eternal life [see Romans 6:23]. We do that by faith. Even faith itself is the gift of God. You remember what Ephesians 2:8 says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Think about it.

Paul writes to the Philippians, and says: “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” To you it has been granted by God to believe in Him. Satan tells you, “Man, you need some evidences. You need a miracle. You need a proof. You need to not have faith. You need some data. You need something you can touch and handle, some facts and material goods.” But that’s not what brings people to Christ. God reveals His truth to people through the Holy Spirit. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 2:[12], where he says: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” When you believe, you receive the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit reveals to you the things of God, so your Bible begins to make sense.

We’ve heard this tons of times as we’ve listened to testimonies and [when] people [are] being baptized. They [say], “I read the Bible and it just didn’t make sense. It seemed so weird and the stories were so strange.

It just never seemed to work. All of a sudden I gave my life to Christ and the next time I read the Bible it was like, ‘Whoa! How did that get there?’”

Then [they] run to all [their] unbelieving relatives, and [say], “Did you see that?”

[The relatives say], “What’s that? That’s weird.”

[The new believer says], “Oh, isn’t this wonderful?”

“No, not really.”

“I mean, don’t you see what it’s saying here?”

“So?”

All of a sudden, [the new believer] get[s] a clue. “I’m changed. God changed me. When I read the Scriptures it’s like a whole different thing.” That’s what the Holy Spirit does. That’s why Paul goes on to say in [1 Corinthians 2:]14 that the natural man, because he doesn’t have the Spirit of God, cannot understand the things of God because they are spiritually appraised. The Greek literally says, “He doesn’t have the power within himself to understand the Scriptures in an experiential way.” Yeah, he can learn the stories, learn Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. He can be a Bible scholar, [but if there is] no Holy Spirit [in him], he doesn’t experience the life-transforming truth of God’s Word.

The rich man [in our parable] is so worldly in his view of salvation that even though he is in hell, he argues with Abraham about how to get to heaven. Think about that. My advice to you is never take the advice of someone who has utterly failed in anything. [If you ask] some guy [living] on [the] street[s] of New York outside of Wall Street, “What do you do?” [and he says], “I’m a stock broker. Let me tell you how to invest your money,” I wouldn’t listen to him.

Here [the rich man] argues, and he says, “No, Father Abraham,” in [Luke 16:]30, “if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” [He’s saying], “Listen, I know better than you. All you are is the father of faith. Granted you’re in heaven and I’m in hell, but let me tell you how it’s done.” That’s what he’s saying. But, of course, again, Abraham’s reply is: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be per-

suaded even if someone rises from the dead.” If you don’t listen to Moses, if you don’t listen to the Prophets, you’re not going to be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. Sorry.

Paul tells us what saves people in Romans 10:14–17, as he is talking about [how] we need preachers and [that] those preachers need to be sent or [people] are never going to hear the good news. Then he says in [Romans 10:]17: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” That’s how it works.

“Do you mean to tell me that all I need to do is tell somebody the gospel—the good news of Jesus’ life, burial, death, and resurrection for sinners—just kind of explain that and tell them to believe that and that’s enough?” That’s enough.

Somebody came up to me after the [first] service, and said, “When I’m sharing the gospel, sometimes I wonder if I should quote verses, or I wonder if I should do [something else].”

I said, “Well, tell them the truth. You can quote the verses if you want, or summarize the verses.”

“I don’t want to misquote the Bible.”

“You always do. It was written in Greek and Hebrew. Don’t worry about it. You’re going to get it wrong.”

One of the most definitive texts [that] teaches the sufficiency of Scripture is in 2 Peter 1. I want you to turn [there] in your Bible[s]. (Go toward the end of your Bible. There’s Revelation, which is the last book in the Bible and you go back several books, there’s a little book named Jude and then 1, 2, and 3 John are before that, and then right before the little letters to John is 2 Peter.) I want to show you this because this is really the most wonderful and definitive text on the sufficiency of God’s Word found anywhere in the Bible. This is it. Psalm 19 does a good job, and Psalm 119 is huge, but when it comes to making this statement that God’s Word is sufficient over and against experiences and even miracles, this is the text. Let me show you why.

Peter does his normal introduction in the first couple of verses, and then in [2 Peter 1:]3, he says this: “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.” Here, he’s talking to believers and says, “God has given us *everything* pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” [emphasis added]. You say, “Well, that’s good.” *Everything* pertaining to life and godliness? That’s good! Where does it come through? [It comes] through the true knowledge. Well, where do you get the true knowledge? [You get the truth knowledge] through the Word of God, the Word of Truth, the Bible. That’s it. Then [Peter] goes on to speak of this over and over and over again. In verse 4, he then refers to it as “His precious and magnificent promises.” Where do you get [those]? [You get them] in the Bible.

Then he goes on to talk about knowledge at the end of [2 Peter 1:]5 and at the beginning of verse 6 and the end of verse 8. Then he alludes to them as “these things” [2 Peter 1:10], referring back to the knowledge and the true knowledge he has just mentioned six other times—“these things” that [are] the truths of God’s Word. He does it again in verse 10, and twice in verse 12, and again in verse 15. The theme of 2 Peter is false teachers and how to deal with [them]. [However], he starts off his book by arguing the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Why? [He does this] because when you know the truth and you’re living the truth, you’ll be protected from false teachers. So, he does that, over and over and over again. It’s all the way through [the book]. But then when we get to verse[s] 16[-18], at first glance it appears there’s a ninety-degree turn in the road because [he] writes this:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ”This is

My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

So, [to] what is he referring? [The holy mountain to which he is referring] is called the Mount of Transfiguration. Do you remember in the Gospels what happened there? What happened there is [that] God speaks directly to Peter, James, and John when Jesus is with them up on the Mount of Transfiguration. [Matthew 17:5] says, “We heard this voice, [saying], “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.” Jesus takes them up there, He is transformed into kingdom glory, they see Elijah, Moses, and Jesus talking, and then God Himself speaks to them from heaven, and they hear the voice of God the Father speaking to God the Son, and they’re just blown away. It was the most incredible experience that Peter ever had. It’s just like, “Wow!” It was more incredible than when he walked on the water [see Matthew 14:28–32], when Jesus calmed the sea [see Matthew 8:23–27], when He raised the dead [see John 11:33–44], when He healed the sick [see Mark 5:21–34, etc.], cast out demons [see Matthew 8:28–34, etc.]—everything. It was the most incredible [thing he had ever witnessed].

So what Peter does is he’s arguing—get this now—he’s arguing about the sufficiency of Scripture in [2 Peter 1:]3–15, stops, tells about the most incredible miracle and experience he has ever had, and then he goes on in [2 Peter 1:]19–21 to talk about the sufficiency of Scripture again. Now, there is a rule in Bible interpretation and what is that? Context is king. If the context is [the] sufficiency of Scripture, sufficiency of Scripture, sufficiency of Scripture to verse 16 and then after [verse] 18 [it continues with the] sufficiency of Scripture, then what is that about? This has stumped Bible interpreters. It [irks] me when I read them because some of them [say], “Well, we don’t really know what’s going on here and why Peter actually started talking about the Mount of Transfiguration. We’re not quite sure because I think he mentions this experience to let us know that he has

apostolic authority because he was one of the choice ones to be able to go up on the mountain.” [Beep!] Not a good [interpretation].

Then somebody [else] says, “No, I think what’s happening here is he’s trying to show that the things he wrote about are sure because he was an eyewitness and everybody knows that the testimony of eyewitnesses is better. That’s why his letters and things are authoritative.” [Beep!]

You say, “Well, what *is* it doing there?” You [have] to keep reading. Look at [2 Peter 1:]19: “So we have the prophetic word made more sure.” Notice he’s back to the Word of God now. “We have the prophetic word made more sure to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” The Greek here literally reads, “We have the more sure prophetic word.” Think about that. “More sure” than what? It’s amazing that people look at that and [say], “I have no idea.” Well, what did he just talk about? The most incredible miracle he ever witnessed! Did you get it? Our Bibles are more sure than any experience, even miraculous experience, you could ever encounter. That’s so amazing!

Peter goes on, then, after he says, “We have the prophetic word made more sure,” [to say] “to which *you* do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” [emphasis added]. Keep paying attention to the Word until Jesus comes back. Then he says, “And I want you to know why it’s more sure.” [Look at 2 Peter 1:]20[-21]: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” That’s why you can trust the Bible. Isn’t that what Isaiah 55:10–11 says, when Isaiah, speaking from the Lord says:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;

It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

When you share God's Word with somebody, God accomplishes whatever He wants. It is the bomb. In Jeremiah 23:29, [it says], "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'" You don't need a miracle, man; use the hammer of God! Use the consuming fire of God! Hebrews 4:12 [says]:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Why do you use the Word of God? Because, man, it goes in [that's why]. It penetrates to the very core of that person. It judges their thoughts. It makes them realize, "I am a sinner and I need Christ." In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul writes:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

James says in James 1:18: "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth." It's God's Word. That's what they need. Let them hear Moses and the Prophets.

J.C. Ryle said: "We learn...that the greatest miracles would have no effect on men's hearts if they will not believe God's Word." He goes on to say:

Faith, simple faith in the Scriptures, is the first thing needed for salvation. The person who has the Bible and can read it and yet waits for more evidence before he becomes a convinced Christian is deceiving himself. Unless he wakes up from his delusion he will die in his sins.²

Have you been looking for a miracle? Have you been putting God off? Have you been setting him on the [sidelines, saying], “Wait. One of these days, if I see the antichrist come on the scene, if I see these plagues, if I see some prophecies, if I see somebody rise from the dead, if I see somebody’s sight restored, if I see some sort of miracle, then I will believe,” listen, you’re not going to wake up until you’re in hell. You’ve got to believe the gospel, that Christ died for our sins, that He rose again on the third day, that by believing in that and trusting in that alone to save you, you will be saved. But if you live your life and you’re always putting God off, and you’re saying, “No, I don’t want to get that. I don’t want Him to have control,” there’s no evangelism in hell. There’s no sending missionaries from hell. [Even] if you saw [a] miracle, it wouldn’t work.

Paul says in Romans 10:8–9:

But what does it say? ”THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

That’s how people have always been saved and that’s how they always [will] be saved. But the false teachers will come, and say, “Let me show you a miracle. The Bible isn’t enough.” When you leave here today, you know that the Scriptures are sufficient. If you need Christ, go to the Word. If you know Christ, speak the Word. Let’s pray.

²J.C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Luke*, available at: <http://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/116.htm>

Father, we are glad to be here this morning so that we can be reminded of what the rich man never knew in this life, and which even in hell [he] seemed to be reluctant to admit: that your Word is sufficient. It is that instrument which You have chosen to use to bring people to a knowledge of You so that they can be forgiven of their sins, so they can walk before You in holiness, so they can know their Creator, so they can escape the entrapments of this world, so, Father, they can grow, and so they can know [that] their reason for existing in this world is not merely to have pleasure, eat, sleep, and die. Father, I pray that all of us would leave here with a firm conviction that Your Word is truth and that we need to trust in it. For those [who] don't know You, may they right now confess their sins in their heart[s]. May they say, "Lord Jesus, save me," and may You save them, and [may] they confess that they believe that You died and rose again for them. For the rest of us, may we take the truth, which is sufficient, and share it with the lost, because we know it is Your power for all who believe. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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