

A.D.

THE BIBLE CONTINUES

AN NBC TELEVISION EVENT

EASTER SUNDAY 9/8c



SERMON #1

SERMON 1:
THE GRACE ROBBER
BY MARK BATTERSON

NOTE:

This sermon may be adapted to meet your congregation's needs, your preaching style, and preferred time length

SCRIPTURE

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

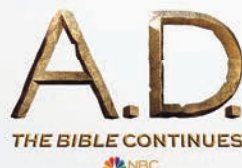
- John 11:25-26

INTRODUCTION

For nearly thirty years, the One who had crafted the universe with His voice crafted furniture with His hands. And He was good at what He did—no crooked table legs ever came out of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. But Jesus was more than a master carpenter. He was also God incognito. His miraculous powers rank as history's best-kept secret for nearly three decades, but all that changed the day water blushed in the face of its Creator. That was the day the woodbender became a waterbender. Jesus manipulated the molecular structure of water and turned it into wine—757 bottles, no less. And nothing but the best. This wasn't just wine, it was fine wine.

Thirty-four distinct miracles are recorded in the Gospels, while countless more went unrecorded. John's Gospel spotlights seven miracles, unveiling seven dimensions of Jesus's miraculous power.

In John chapter 2, the miracles begin with Jesus turning water into wine. In John chapter 4, Jesus heals a nobleman's son long distance, revealing His lordship over latitude and longitude. Then, in John chapter 5, He reveals His mastery over chronology, reversing thirty-eight years of pain and suffering with one command. In John chapter 6, Jesus feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish. In God's kingdom, 5 + 2 doesn't equal 7. His encore is waltzing across the waves on the Sea of Galilee. In John chapter 9, there is more to the miracle than meets the eye. Jesus doesn't just heal a blind man's eyes; He hardwires a blind man's brain by creating a synaptic pathway between his optic nerve and visual cortex. And just when you think you've



seen it all, the Grave Robber turns a tomb into a waiting room. Lazarus is four days dead when Jesus calls him to come out. That miracle foreshadows His own death and resurrection.

[If you watched the first episode of the A.D. series that just began on TV, you indirectly witnessed this miracle of Christ's resurrection.]

The seven miracles in John's Gospel are seven signs, and each sign points straight to Jesus. So let me offer a word of caution: Don't seek miracles. Seek Jesus. If you follow Jesus long enough and far enough, you'll eventually find yourself in the middle of some miracles.

Everyone wants a miracle. But here's the catch: No one wants to be in a situation that necessitates one! Of course, you can't have one without the other. The prerequisite for a miracle is a problem, and the bigger the problem, the greater the potential miracle. If the wedding party in Cana hadn't run out of wine, there would have been no need for the Wine Maker to do what He did. What the bride and groom perceived as a problem was really a perfect opportunity for God to reveal His glory. And nothing has changed since Jesus turned water into wine, healed a man born blind, or walked out of the tomb three days after His crucifixion.

He is the God who can make your impossible possible!

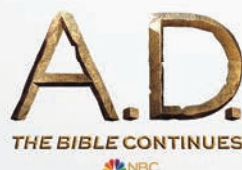
MESSAGE

One of my earliest movie memories is the 1978 version of Superman starring Christopher Reeve. Superman's heartthrob, Lois Lane, is driving through the Nevada desert when a crevice opened by an earthquake swallows her car. Superman can't get there in time to save Lois because he's busy building a natural dam out of boulders to stop a flood caused by a breach in the Hoover Dam. When he discovers that Lois is dead, Superman gets super angry. He flies around the earth at supersonic speeds, reversing its rotation, theoretically turning back time.

Now, I know the science behind that scene is suspect. After all, the earth rotates around its axis at one thousand miles per hour. So if Superman had reversed its rotation, he may have saved Lois Lane, but everyone else on the planet would have died of whiplash! But it's still a cool concept, isn't it? Don't you wish you could turn back time right after saying or doing something you wish you hadn't? The problem, of course, is that the arrow of time points in one direction.

What's done is done. Some things in life are irreversible.

You cannot unbake cookies, uncut hair, undelete documents, or unrun red lights. These are a few of the lessons I've learned the hard way. Some of those lessons were easily laughed off after a little embarrassment. Then there are those irreversible moments that leave a hole in your



heart forever—like standing at the foot of a casket.

If you've been on the receiving end of divorce papers, answered a frantic phone call in the middle of the night, or gotten lab results from your doctor that affirm your worst fears, you know that feeling all too well. It feels like your life is over. But it's not over until God says it's over!

When Jesus walked out of the tomb, the word impossible was removed from our vocabulary. And His resurrection isn't something we celebrate one day a year on Easter Sunday. It's something we celebrate every day in every way.

THE SEVENTH MIRACLE

The seventh miracle reveals the true identity, the full identity, of Jesus. He's not just the Wine Maker or the Water Walker, as impressive as those miracles are. He's the Grave Robber. And He saves His boldest claim for last: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

It's that unique claim which sets Jesus apart and puts Him in a category by Himself—the Son of God. Christianity is not built on the foundation of philosophy or a code of ethics. The footer of our faith is one fundamental fact: the empty tomb. After cheating death by calling Lazarus out of his tomb, Jesus walked out of His own tomb under His own power! That's the ultimate apologetic—there is no argument against it.

If the resurrection didn't happen, Christianity ranks as history's cruelest hoax. We're not just wasting our lives worshipping Him. We're living a lie. But if Jesus walked out of the tomb two thousand years ago, all bets are off. Or maybe I should say, all bets are on Jesus.

In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, U2 frontman Bono was asked his opinion on Jesus with this question: "Christ has His rank among the world's greatest thinkers. But Son of God, isn't that far-fetched?" The lead singer of U2 and global crusader against poverty responded:

"No, it's not far-fetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this. He was a great prophet who had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually, Christ doesn't allow you that. He doesn't let you off that hook. Christ says, 'No. I'm not saying I'm a teacher, don't call me a teacher. I'm not saying I'm a prophet. I'm saying: I'm the Messiah. I'm saying: I am God incarnate.' And people say: No, no, please, just be a prophet. A prophet we can take. So what you're left with is either Christ was who He said he was—the Messiah—or a complete nutcase."¹



While most people have no issue accepting Jesus as a compassionate healer or wise teacher or even a religious prophet, that isn't who He alleged to be. He claimed to be the Son of God. And as C.S. Lewis famously observed, Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or in fact who He claimed to be—Lord.² There is no middle ground. Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He's not Lord at all. So which is it? That one decision will determine your eternal destiny. It will also make the impossible possible!

After asserting His identity as the resurrection and the life, Jesus popped a point-blank question that punctuated Martha's life: "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26). Remember that Lazarus hadn't walked out of the tomb just yet. Yet Martha responded with her simple profession of faith: "Yes, Lord."

One little yes can change your life.

One little yes can change your eternity.

The litmus test is the same now as it was then. The only question on God's final exam is: *Do you believe this?* It's not a multiple-choice question. It's true or false. And it's the most important question you'll ever answer. That one decision will determine your eternal destiny. The good news is that it's an open-book exam, and God reveals the right answer in Romans 10:9:

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (ESV).

APPLICATION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the axis around which our faith revolves. When Jesus rose from the dead, it radically redefined reality. The resurrection is the history changer, the game changer.

But the trick is learning to live as if Jesus was crucified yesterday, rose from the dead today, and is coming back tomorrow!

The resurrection isn't something we celebrate once a year by donning an Easter bonnet. It's something we celebrate every day in every way. The resurrection of dead bodies is nothing short of miraculous, and the rematerialization of dead bodies when Christ returns is going to be must-see TV.



But the resurrection miracles don't stop there:

- God raises dreams from the dead.
- He resurrects dead relationships.
- And no matter what part of your personality has died at the hands of sin, suffering, or Satan himself, the Grave Robber came to give you your life back!

No one had laughed or smiled since the crucifixion. When Jesus walked out of the tomb, no one could stop. The Grave Robber steals back what the enemy has stolen. Then He gives it back to us, with interest.

INVITATION / CLOSING

[optional: insert personal story]

A few years ago, I had the privilege of baptizing a young woman whose life had been totally transformed by the grace of God. I'll never forget Rachel's face when she came back up out of the water. Pure joy! Rachel described it this way: "Now I'm the person I was as a child, always smiling and laughing."

When Jesus died on the cross, Satan smirked. But the Grave Robber got the last laugh. He always does. And if you give Him a chance, He'll give you a second chance.

He will give you your smile back.
He will give you your laugh back.
He will give you your life back.

Do you believe this?

If you do, He will make the impossible possible.

¹ Michka Assayas, Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 205.

² C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: HarperCollins, 1952).

