

## SLIDE 1

# Miracles and Demands

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Mark 7:31-8:13  
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Lazy Mountain Bible Church  
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## Introduction

Dr. Katrina Firlik was the first woman admitted into the neurosurgery residency at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Her recent book, *Another Day in the Frontal Lobe*, provides a glimpse into the training of a brain surgeon. In one chapter she shares a story from the last year of her residency—a time when she was already becoming jaded to the tragedies of neurological devastation:

I walked into yet another examining room ... a brand-new consult from out of town: 18-years-old, cerebral palsy, spasticity. Okay, okay, I've seen this before, I just need to get a good history before my attending walks in. Efficiency is key. I looked at the patient for a second: very skinny, special wheelchair, arms contracted, head support in place, mouth hung open. It was clear I wasn't going to get the story from him, so I turned to the parents, my back toward the patient, and started to take down the history. ...

[When my mentor walked in], I cringed. ... He sat down on the examining table, the only seat left in the cramped room. After introducing himself, he surveyed the compact scene—the patient, the parents—and then focused his gaze back on the patient. After what seemed like several, almost uncomfortably quiet seconds, he looked the patient in the eye and asked, "So, when did you graduate from high school?" The young man's face lit up like I had no idea it could.

My mentor had noticed something I had missed. The patient was wearing a large high-school ring, so large that it looked a little silly on his bony finger. His body, far more than his mind, had borne the brunt of his cerebral palsy. He was a proud, beaming high-school graduate, who used a specialized computer to help him communicate. For the remainder of the visit I sat in the corner, duncelike, humbled by the enormity of this ring now staring me in the face.

We make snap judgments everyday. Many are innocuous, dealing with the routines of life. But God is always speaking, especially in our everyday routines. When we pre-judge another person and assume we know their story, choosing not to listen to their verbal and non-verbal communication, we make the saddest mistake of all. It's so easy to view people as a statistic and not as a person for whom Christ died.

*Hugh Poland, Kingwood, Texas; source: Katrina Firlik, Another Day in the Frontal Lobe (Random House, 2007), pp. 138-139*

## Engagement

Today we return to the Gospel of Mark, we are going to discover a Savior who does not see people as statistics, but as people of potential, people for whom he has come to die, and rise, and rescue.

It all begins with two miracles and a demand. First a miracle.

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**Mark 7:31–37 (ESV)**

**<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.**

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**<sup>34</sup> And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”**

### *Explanation*

Two weeks ago we read as Jesus was on the sea coast near Tyre. He was trying to get away from the demands of the crowds to be with his disciples alone, when a woman who was desperate to have her daughter healed from the oppression of a demon, interrupted Jesus during dinner. With compassion, Jesus gives the command and her child is freed in response to her faith in Jesus ability to do this.

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Now Jesus has traveled back into the interior to a Gentile region called Decapolis. Polis means city in Greek, so this is the region of ten cities.

The people have heard about Jesus, the miracle worker. Again, this is a time before hospitals and clinics, so they bring to him a man who cannot speak and cannot hear.

Clearly they believe Jesus can fix the problem.

Rather than healing the man in front of all of them, he takes him away privately, and Jesus heals him.

Now why privately?

For several reasons.

The relationship God wants with his people He wants to be based on the currency of faith, not miracles. The blessing God wants to give is to those who believe without seeing. Jesus has already told them, the poor they will always have with them, but he will only be here a short time. If faith was to be based only on God doing a work, a miracle, then Jesus isn't going to be here very long. Jesus is confirming that God wants us to put our trust in Christ not by proof, but by faith. Not by demanding a miracle, or expecting a miracle, and then believing in response to a miracle, but rather believing based on faith.

Jesus told that to doubting Thomas

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#### John 20:27–29 (NIV)

**<sup>27</sup> Then 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.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

The second reason I believe Jesus healed him privately, may be because he wants to preclude copy cat or counterfeit miracles. We remember in the early days of the church that some men when out healing not by faith, but by using Jesus name as part of an incantation. It did not last long. The demons attacked the men and sent them fleeing for their lives.

God wants a relationship with people not based on “cause and effect” but based on faith and faith alone.

Where do you land? Sometimes, when I ask people, “How is it going?” They respond, “Very well, God is doing this or that in their lives, blessing them.

But I wonder sometimes would the answer be the same if God wasn't answering their demand for his direct intervention. Would they respond, “Things are going well, walking by faith through dark times when God's immediate action and response to their prayers is not so evident.”

Don't hear me wrong. Is it wrong to ask for God's help in prayer? Absolutely not! Jesus commands, “Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.” But the mark of maturity is patience, is delayed gratification, is waiting upon the Lord. One verse says:

#### Psalm 40:1–4 (NASB95)

<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup> He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the LORD. <sup>4</sup> How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.

Do you see any demanding spirit in this? None.

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Here is a question: **Do you have a demanding spirit?**

- ✓ **Is your belief in God based primarily what you can see and touch and experience.**
- ✓ **Or is it rather based on faith and a deep trust in the providence of God through the ages.**

Jesus said, "Blessed are those how have not seen yet believe."

Jesus then goes on to show his compassion, by feeding the crowd that has been with him three days.

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**Mark 8:1–10 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, <sup>2</sup> "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away."

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<sup>4</sup> And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" <sup>5</sup> And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." <sup>6</sup> And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd.

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**<sup>7</sup> And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. <sup>8</sup> And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. <sup>9</sup> And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. <sup>10</sup> And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.**

But then there is a turn in the story. The Jews confront Jesus and demand a sign.

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**Mark 8:11–13 (ESV)**

**<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. <sup>12</sup> And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” <sup>13</sup> And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.**

The Jews only want to put their trust in Jesus if he can do a dog and pony show for them. If he can summon up something in the heavens. If he can perform a miracle at their demand.

Those things we already know will come in the end, but Jesus will not “perform” for those without faith in order to produce faith.

How many times have you just known, “That if God would only heal my friend, they would believe.” If God would only fill in the blank. And then we know that then people would believe.

I remember sometimes I have prayed in desperation, God shake the room just like you did in Acts, then those who are on the fence, and those who don’t believe will believe. But then I read the story again, and God shakes the room because they have already believed.

Is it time to believe as God desires. Is it time to open your eyes and look as the Scripture declares.

#### **SLIDE 13**

**Psalms 19:1 (ESV)**

**<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

As yourself, who would you like to be teamed with? Someone with an unwavering relationship with God based on faith, or someone who has a conditional relationship with God based on “what has God done for me lately?”

Jesus now confronts his disciples with this very question. It happens on a boat.

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**Mark 8:13–21 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. <sup>14</sup> Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup> And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”<sup>16</sup> And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

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<sup>17</sup> And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? <sup>18</sup> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”

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<sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, “Twelve.” <sup>20</sup> “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.” <sup>21</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

What is it that He wants them to understand?

He wants them to not develop a demanding spirit with God, that is the yeast of the Pharisees. He doesn't want their relationship with God to be based on miracles, but based on faith.

He would tell them if they faith as small as a mustard seed they could move mountains.

**SLIDE 17****Luke 17:5–6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

An appeal for a miracle can be a legitimate expression of one's faith (e.g., Mark 5:23; 7:26, 32). But such an appeal is illegitimate if it arises out of unbelief, as was true of the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup>

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e.g. e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Mk 8:12). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## *Conclusion and Application*

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So where do you land on the continuum?

Are you a demanding Christian, or a patient Christian.

Is your faith based primarily on the reponse of God to your requests? Or the evidence of God in the heavens, the Scriptures, and the history of the people of faith?

God makes sure we have these events recorded for us so that we can move from away from the “milk” of a works based relationship with God, to the solid food of people with unshakable faith.