

Does our Faith have any Effect on Miracles?

Introduction

As we are all aware, the Bible is filled with *miraculous events* - e.g. the parting of the Red Sea, giant hailstones falling from the sky, the flood, people being raised from the dead, etc.

Up until a few years ago, I was under the impression that miracles are *completely* based on God's decisions. In other words, I thought that the **only** reason why a miracle occurs is because God (or Jesus) *decides* to perform the miracle. As a result, I assumed that human beings have *no effect whatsoever* on whether a miracle occurs or not.

However, is that belief actually true? Is it really true that people have absolutely *nothing to do*, with *any* miracles occurring? Let's see if we can find out, from some examples of miracles in Scripture.

Peter walking on water

Matthew chapter 14 contains the account of Peter walking on water. When the disciples see Jesus walking on water, they are afraid, because they think that they've seen a ghost. Jesus tells them not to be afraid; because it is he himself. Let's pick up the account there:

Matthew 14:28-32 (ESV):

²⁸And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."
²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."
³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

From the above account, I understand the following: First, Jesus empowered Peter to walk on water. Then, Peter *initially* had faith in Jesus - and therefore, Peter was able to walk on water for some distance. However, when the wind picked up, Peter became afraid - and *his faith wavered*. That, in turn, caused Peter to *lose the ability* to walk on water - and he began to sink.

In other words, Jesus initially empowered Peter to walk on water - but Peter, himself, needed to *maintain his faith*, in order for that miracle to occur.

The centurion's servant

In almost every case when Jesus healed someone, Jesus was *right next to* the person being healed. However, there are a *few* cases in which Jesus healed people who were far away from him. Here is one such example:

Matthew 8:5-10,13 (ESV):

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,
⁶"Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."
⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."
⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you

come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

My understanding of the above account is as follows: In *most* cases, Jesus needed to be in the physical presence of a suffering person, in order for that person to be healed. However, in *this* case, Jesus was able to heal the person, even though the person was far away. The reason *why* Jesus could do this is because the centurion had *great faith*.

In other words, the *faith of the centurion* allowed Jesus to perform this "long distance healing" miracle.

The woman with the flow of blood

Mark chapter 5 contains the account of the woman with the discharge of blood. Here is the entire account:

Mark 5:25-34 (ESV):

²⁵And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

As mentioned in the introduction, I used to believe that miracles **only** occur when God or Jesus **decide** to perform them. Well, did Jesus *decide* to heal the woman in this case? No! Jesus did not even *know* that she was there, until *after* she had been healed! Also, notice what Jesus tells the woman: "Daughter, **your faith has made you well**".

So, this account seems to be saying the following: In *some* cases, people can be healed by the power of God, through faith in Jesus - even if Jesus does *not* initiate the healing!

Miracles in Nazareth

Matthew chapter 13 and Mark chapter 6 contain accounts of the *lack of faith*, of the people of Nazareth. Basically, most of the people of Nazareth did *not believe* that Jesus was the Messiah, primarily because Jesus had grown up among them. The people's lack of faith had a dramatic effect on the miracles that Jesus performed in Nazareth:

Matthew 13:58 (NIV):

⁵⁸And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Mark 6:5 (NIV):

⁵He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

In most cases, Jesus performed lots of miracles, in any city that he came to. However, in Nazareth - his hometown - he did *not* perform many miracles, *because* of the people's lack of faith.

The verse in Matthew states that Jesus "**did not**" do many miracles in Nazareth. With *that* wording, one might assume that Jesus simply *decided* not to do many miracles there. However, the verse in Mark states that Jesus "**could not**" perform many miracles in Nazareth. That tells me that it was **not possible** for Jesus to do many miracles in Nazareth - *because* the people lacked faith!

So, the above passages seem to be stating the following: In some cases, miracles can **not** occur, **unless** people have faith!

The "reciprocal" nature of some miracles

From all of the above information, it appears to me that many miracles require "cooperation" between God and people, in order for the miracles to occur. In other words, it appears that in many cases, God uses a *reciprocal relationship* between Himself and people, in the operation of miracles. Basically, God (or Jesus) "initiates" the miracle; but then people need to "reciprocate", in order for the miracle to be effective.

The account of Peter walking on water is one example of this "reciprocal" relationship. Jesus initiated the miracle, by empowering Peter to walk on water. However, Peter then needed to reciprocate, in order to make the miracle effective. Basically, Peter needed to actually start walking on the water - *and* to maintain his faith - in order for the miracle to occur.

An even more explicit example of this "reciprocal relationship" in miracles is the parting of the Red Sea. The background of that miracle is that Pharaoh and his army were pursuing the Israelites - so that they were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. Needless to say, the Israelites were extremely frightened when they saw this. The account continues as follows:

Exodus 14:13-16,21-22 (NIV):

¹³ Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²²

and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

This account is very explicit - God gave Moses the power to part the Red Sea; but then Moses, himself, needed to **use** that power, in order for the miracle to take effect. In other words, God *initiated* the miracle - but then Moses needed to *reciprocate*, in order for the miracle to take effect.

Of course, not *all* miracles use this reciprocal relationship - i.e., in some cases, God performs miracles *without* any cooperation from people. For example, God caused the flood to occur, without any human cooperation. Similarly, God will send Jesus back to the earth in the future, no matter what any human does.

Nevertheless, in a remarkable number of cases, it appears that miracles *do* use this reciprocal relationship. In particular, quite a few miracles evidently require people to *have faith*, in order for a miracle to take effect.

Conclusion

Overall, this “reciprocal relationship” of miracles can be expressed by the following “formula”:

God *initiates* a miracle + We have *faith* in God = The miracle takes effect

Note: in some cases, the *order* of the operands is *reversed* - i.e., in some cases, we have faith in God *first*, and *then* God initiates the miracle. (The woman with the flow of blood appears to be in that category.)

Either way, though, *both* God initiating the miracle, *and* us having faith in God, are required, in order for a miracle to take effect.

If the above understanding is true, then that may provide an explanation for some rather cryptic verses. For example, the following verses make sense to me, if the above assertion is true:

Luke 17:6 (NIV):

⁶He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

John 14:12 (NIV):

¹²I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

With this “reciprocal relationship” understanding, Luke 17:6 could be expressed this way:

“**If** God gives you the power to uproot a mulberry tree, **and if** you have faith in God, **then** you will be able to perform the miracle of uprooting the mulberry tree.”

Of course, that is just my understanding!