

Miracle of Miracles

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Straight

The ground was soft and warm. That meant Dad, Kevin, and I were out behind the house getting the garden plot ready for spring planting. Dad's a farmer, and before he ever plants the main fields, he, Kevin, and I prepare the family garden plot by hand so that it's ready for Mom.

"Got to keep our perspective," he always said, though I never really knew what he meant by that.

This year, the first weekend in March was pleasant enough. Dad pulled out the hoes and rakes, fertilizers, trowels, and whatnot. He then came in to help Mom cook a sizable breakfast before herding us out to the overgrown patch of ground and manning us with our weapons. I drew first blood with the cultivator, Kevin attacked with a hoe, and Dad took after the larger enemy camps with a shovel.

None of us said much at first. The air was cool enough that we could still see our breath, so we worked hard just to warm up. When the sun did finally begin working its warmth, Kevin rose from his task and looked over the eighth acre of land.

"Doesn't seem like we've made much headway," he said sadly, taking in the meager row of weeds he had laid to waste behind him. I glanced over my trail of battered bodies and could claim only about two more feet worth of victory.

"Never does," I said and went back to my task while Dad straightened up.

"Don't look at what lies ahead," he said, "nor what lays waste behind. Just focus on the task before you, and you'll be more than fine."

I had to grin. Put Dad in a field with dirt up to his armpits and he waxes philosophic and poetic every time. And usually his advice rings true. I bent my back deeper into my work and began to let my mind drift, but not Kevin. It may take him a while to wake up, but once he does, there's really no shutting him up.

"Hey, guess what?" he said and then didn't wait for any acknowledgment. "Darrel's mom was diagnosed with cancer almost two months ago, and when they went in last week for X rays, the doctors couldn't find a trace of the stuff. Pretty weird, huh?"

"Sounds to me like someone made a mistake the first time," I said, continuing my hacking and hoping Kevin would get the hint.

"Huh-uh," he retorted. "Darrel said his family asked for a copy of both X rays, and you can't deny it. On the first one there were all kinds of something in her lungs and in the second not a speck."

"Must have been faulty equipment then," I countered. "A person can't have lungs full of cancer one day and then nothing the next."

"Why not?"

The question came from my dad, not Kevin, and it caught us both off guard.

"Well, because it doesn't make sense," I said.

"Don't you believe God can heal people?" he probed.

“That’s it too,” Kevin added excitedly. “After the first X ray, Darrel and his family met with the elders of their church and they, what do you call it, laid hands on his mom and prayed. She said she felt this warm feeling all through her body and then—*voila*—the next time she was cured.”

Dad turned to look at me.

“Well, Ryan. Don’t you think that can happen?” he asked.

I felt put on the spot. I had only entered this conversation out of courtesy for Kevin so that he didn’t feel as if he were talking to the dirt, and now *I* was on trial.

“I don’t know. I mean, you hear about all these guys claiming to be able to heal people and then they turn out to be charlatans.”

“I didn’t ask about all these people. I asked if you thought *God* could heal people.”

“Sure. Jesus did it in the Bible.”

“Do you think He can still heal people?”

“Well . . . sure.”

“Do you think He can cure people through other people as He did with the disciples?”

I felt uncomfortable. Dad was using one of those argumentative techniques that backed you right into a very small corner.

“I guess so,” I said in my most non-committal voice.

“Then why don’t you think Darrel’s mother was cured?”

I was really squirming for a credible answer now.

“Because it just doesn’t make sense. Cancer is a deadly disease. People don’t just get over it.”

“So God only cures colds and flu and stuff like that?”

This really isn’t fair, I thought.

“Well, He doesn’t do it all the time,” I said.

“I see,” his father said and started in on his shoveling again. I wondered if that was the abrupt end of the conversation. It wasn’t.

“How many times did God part the Red Sea?” Dad asked.

Now where did that come from? I wondered. *Was it a trick question?*

“Once as far as I know.”

“So does that mean God didn’t do it because He didn’t do it more than once?” he asked.

“Of course not,” I said, feeling that Dad was being unnecessarily petty. Kevin saw his chance to rejoin the conversation and jumped in excitedly.

“Did you know that some scientists believe the parting of the Red Sea was caused by a strong wind that blew across the land, holding the sea back on one side? Then there was this kind of shelf on the other side that kept that water back, or something like that. Billy was telling me about it.”

I stared at him incredulously.

“So what does that mean? That God didn’t do it? That it was just some act of nature?” I asked. Now whose side was I on?

Kevin just shrugged. He figured the revelation was enough in itself.

“Well, that’s what some people would like us to believe,” his father said. “Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that that’s not how it happened. God is in charge of nature, and He can work His wonders in any fashion. But beware of men trying to explain away the unexplainable.”

“Why wouldn’t God just do something outright, so that there can’t be any questions raised?” I asked.

Dad’s eyebrows rose.

“There will always be questions,” he said. “Who’s to say that Darrel’s mother wasn’t healed outright? Yet you asked questions trying to explain it away, and you’re a Christian who claims to believe in miracles.”

I thought about that a moment. “I guess I find it easier to believe in miracles that happened in some other time than those that happen now.”

Dad nodded. “Exactly. Even as Jesus was performing His miracles, many did not believe. It is man’s basic nature to be skeptical and disbelieving. If he can’t understand it with his finite little mind, then he just doesn’t think it’s possible.”

Dad picked up his shovel and moved over to where Kevin and I stood.

“I know it’s hard to believe in miracles such as instantaneous healing and exorcising demons. We live, and man has always lived, in a world that lies, perverts, and distorts the truth then manipulates it for his own end. No wonder man is skeptical. No wonder it takes an act of faith to believe.”

He paused and pointed to a tiny shoot near the toe of my shoe. It had somehow survived the winter and was struggling to make a new life in the cold ground.

“But when I look at a new plant growing or a baby lamb just out of his mother’s womb, or the beauty of God’s earth in the morning light . . .” and he stretched his arm over the expanse of earth and sky and distant mountains. “When I see all that, well, that’s miracle enough for me to know that Jesus is indeed Lord of all.”