

Draw From The Well

Chapter One

Leave Room For the Miracle

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Leave Room For the Miracle

If your human nature is as independently minded as mine, you will understand only too well what I am about to relate.

Before I had the conviction to write them down, the thoughts that had filled my mind were those that form the basis for the chapters, “The Kingdom of God Comes Not With Observation” and “You Have Not Chosen Me”¹. The thoughts for both these chapters had been very real to me and, over time, became quite settled in my mind before I began to record them. As a result, the recording flowed easily and quickly and I felt I had a fairly accomplished result.

In fact, part of me thought they were ‘ready to go’. However, something made me aware of my inclination to accept my own work rather too readily. And then I was reminded that I wanted fervently to be the scribe and not the author. So, even though no one else knew about the ‘book’ at that stage, I was moved to ‘test’ what I had written with some others - someone who I felt would be led by the Spirit in reviewing what was written.

The two special friends that I asked readily agreed to help with reviewing the writings from every angle, and also with editing and proof reading. For the first review session we sat down together and went through what I had drafted.

One of the suggestions that emerged pointed out that the way I had recorded the thoughts assumed that the reader knew

their Bible fairly well. And that as an improvement, perhaps I should consider adding more of the context relating to the parts of scripture referred to in the chapters of this book. That is, give some background, so that those less familiar with the Bible could also easily benefit.

I thought it was a very good idea in that it would make the content more meaningful and accessible. In my mind, I then started to see other ways I could improve on the writings. But one day soon after, as I was walking, a clear ‘voice’ brought ‘my improvements’ to mind and said, “*Leave room for the miracle*”. In other words, I believe the Spirit was saying to me, “*Write it down as it has been given to you. Don’t think you have to keep on making ‘your improvements’ to make it useful and comprehensible to the reader. Don’t edit too much. Don’t assume you have to do all the explaining. **Leave room for the miracle***”.

So that’s the origin of the theme for this chapter - and also what has set the pattern for the remainder of the book - and how I purpose to live. That is, in recording these writings, and in daily living, to respond to the moving of the Spirit in a way that leaves room for the miracle.

¹ If you don’t have these chapters, they are expected to be published as Chapters 2 and 3.

Jesus Creates Room Feeding the Multitude

“And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. For they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.” Luke 9:10-17 (KJV)

This record in Luke 9 tells us that Jesus was preaching to a multitude numbering about 5000 - it seems that was the number of men - so maybe there were 15,000 or 20,000 in total when the women and children were counted.

As the day wore on, the apostles, concerned for the welfare of the people, thought the best thing to do was for Jesus to send the people into the nearby towns to obtain food and lodgings. In response, Jesus told them that they, the apostles, should provide the crowd with food to eat. But the twelve knew that all they had, five loaves and two small fishes, even when they put it all together, was hopelessly, ridiculously inadequate.

Nothing has changed, has it? When we put together everything we have to offer, it's still hopelessly, ridiculously inadequate for what Jesus asks us to do. Isn't that how we sometimes feel?

When the apostles recognised their complete inadequacy to feed the multitude by their own resources, they brought their lack to Jesus' attention. Jesus could have accepted their suggestion - that is, for him to send the people off to solve their own problem. Have you ever done that? I know I have. Thinking that I had little help to offer, I, in effect, sent people away to solve their own problems. Or perhaps worse, like the disciples, wanted Jesus to send them away. Forgetting, that if we put what we have in Jesus' hands, there **can** be a miracle.

Sending the people away might have gone some way towards dealing with the problem of the multitude obtaining food - but it would have left no room for the miracle.

What to do? Jesus could have created a mountain of food. That would have solved the problem. Everyone would see that there was more than enough to go around and everyone could have helped themselves to all they wanted. But that would not have left much room for the miracle either, because the miracle was not a miracle of creating a mountain of food. The miracle was in the feeding of so many with so little.

Jesus could have created a mountain of bread. Or he could have rained down manna just as God did in the wilderness. But he didn't. Neither, it seems, did he multiply the few loaves and fishes that the apostles could put together. What they ultimately had to distribute was the same as what they originally told Jesus was all they had between them. But after everyone was fully fed, they finished up with left-overs enough to fill 12 baskets - one each we could say. Jesus could have

started them out that way. But he didn't - that would also have left less room for the miracle that Jesus had in mind.

So, for a start, Jesus told the apostles to sit the people in groups of about 50. Wouldn't the twelve be afraid? Wouldn't a basketful each have given them more confidence to start sharing with the first group of 50? We like to have reassurance, some security, to help us step forward, don't we? And we know from experiences like those of Gideon², that God willingly gives reassurances. But if Jesus gave them each a basketful, that would also have left less room for the miracle.

Luke then tells us that Jesus "*blessed and broke*" the five loaves and two fishes and "*gave them to the disciples to set before the people*". So, when did the miracle occur? It would seem the scene is something like this: Each of the 12 approaches a group of about 50 (probably 50 men plus women and children). What do they have in their hands to feed this large group of people? Less than half a loaf and one sixth of one fish - and they have to say, "Eat and be filled"!

Jesus made sure there was plenty of room for a multitude of miracles. There was a miracle in the faith of the apostles when they took what was apparently far too little to feed even the first person - and it fed so many. It's not clear if the apostles kept on handing out the food or if it was passed from one person to the other. My feeling is probably the latter, but we don't know, and it really doesn't matter.

If the apostles kept on handing out food, there was a multitude of miracles in that there was enough for the first person to eat their fill and then enough for each apostle to hand to the next person, and still enough to hand to the third person and more

than enough to hand to the fourth - and so on to 50, and then to 100, and then to 1000, and to however many were present. And as a preacher once pointed out, "there would have been enough even if the whole world was there".

Alternatively, if they passed it from one to another, there was a miracle in that the first person who accepted so little from an apostle, ate his fill, and then there was more than enough for him to pass on to the next person, and so on, and so on, and so on - not just in an endless supply, but an **increasing** supply.

If Jesus had created a mountain of bread and fish it would have been one miracle - an amazing miracle - but one miracle nevertheless. The way Jesus did it he created room for 5000 (or maybe 15000 or 20000) miracles. If he had created a mountain of food, the 12 would have been observers to the miracle. Awed observers they certainly would be, but observers none the less. And the multitude would just have been observers also - amazed no doubt - but participants only in the food and not in the miracle.

But the way Jesus created room for the miracle meant that there were 5012 participants (or however many there were in total) - each one experiencing the miracle - right there in their own hands.

And speaking of 'in their own hands', didn't the twelve end up passing out the same five loaves and two fishes that they previously thought hopelessly inadequate? Well, yes and no. To a casual observer it was the same loaves and fishes. But to those close to Jesus, something had changed. The loaves and fishes had been taken into Jesus' hands and blessed by him.

² We read about Gideon in Judges 6.

Now the hopelessly inadequate amount that men could offer was miraculously more than enough for a multitude.

So it is with us, isn't it? On our own, we know what we have is hopelessly inadequate. But when Jesus takes us into his hands and blesses the oh-so-little that we have, we can also be part of a miracle of his making.

Is the miracle of feeding the multitude still the kind of miracle we can participate in today? Or is this just a miracle that we read about and marvel at but associate only with those days when Jesus was here?

Consider this for a moment: Isn't this same miracle happening to all of us in relation to God's word? Isn't God's word still feeding the multitudes, no matter how large they are and no matter how large is their appetite? And the thoughts with which God fills our minds as we read and ponder his word - isn't that just like the loaves and fishes being multiplied as each person eats their fill? And then, we might ask, Is the Bible wearing out? Or is the supply of spiritual bread from the Bible continually increasing and feeding more and more as generation follows generation? And if there came some blessed day when the whole world wanted to feed on God's word, would every last one be fed and satisfied?

And as we 'pass' God's word from one to the other, doesn't it feed both the the giver and the receiver - and doesn't what has first been blessed by the Master grow a little more each time it's passed on? And isn't it true that there are always baskets of 'left-overs' to gather up that, if we meditate on them later, can feed us again?

We praise our Lord as we answer "Yes" to all those questions.

Abraham and Sarah - A 'Helping Hand' for God

"And behold, the word of the Lord came to him (Abraham): "This man (Ishmael) shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." Genesis 15:4-6 (ESV)

Abraham is presented to us in the scriptures as a wonderful example of faith in God, and his example has often inspired me and probably you also. Faith leaves room for the miracle. But it seems that in some experiences, God had to teach Abraham to have faith, to leave room for the miracle, rather than thinking he had to help God out.

When we think we have to help God out to fulfill his plans, or we think we have to do things to earn salvation, maybe we are not leaving room for the miracle.

God had a plan for Abraham and Sarah to make them the progenitors of an innumerable multitude - like the stars of the sky - a whole nation that would be God's people. God had told Abraham several times about his plan. And, as we see in that quotation from Genesis 15:6, Abraham believed God and God valued his belief.

But after some years went by, something seemed to weaken Abraham and Sarah's belief. Maybe that has happened to you also - it certainly has happened to me. Earnest prayer, or maybe desperate need, or both, has drawn an assurance from God about a particular thing. But when nothing seems to happen for a while, doubt sets in, and you or I think we need to do something, where we had originally handed things over to

God. And maybe when we take things into our own hands, it leaves less room for the miracle.

And so it was with Abraham and Sarah, that after some years, and no fulfillment of God's plan to give them a son, they thought they needed to take things into their own hands because they could see that God's plan had a big hole in it. And so it did - if they ruled out the impossibility of a miracle!

Isn't it beautiful to read how faithful God was to his promise, even though Abraham's faith was not so great at that time: *"And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"* Genesis 17:15-17 (ESV)

We can scarcely believe it can be, that Abraham laughed at what God said he would accomplish? What would you and I have done? If a man with Abraham's measure of faith can react like that, how careful do we have to be when our belief in God's power is tested? And are not our hearts filled with gratitude that God is faithful in maintaining his promises, even when our faith is weak?

And isn't it wonderful to read of God reassuring both Abraham and Sarah that he has not forgotten his promise - even though Abraham and Sarah can't see, at least at that stage, how God's plan can possibly work:

They (God's messengers) said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." The Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a

son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" Genesis 18:9-12 (ESV)

It's hard to take in, isn't it? When God told them about his plan, they actually laughed at the idea. They understood what God wanted to do, that is, raise this innumerable family through them, but they also knew they were too old to have children. So they thought they had to take action to compensate for the lack in God's plan - needed to help God out, in other words, with a plan that didn't require a miracle.

What did Abraham and Sarah do? They came up with the idea that they could help God's plan to fruition if Abraham had a son by Sarah's maid, Hagar.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. Genesis 16:1-2 (ESV)

But if Abraham having a child by Hagar instead of Sarah was the answer, where was the need for faith, where was the room for a miracle?

Yes, it's true that God also promised a multitude of offspring would come from Hagar, as we read: *"And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."* Gen. 16:10 (KJV). And God, as in everything, has been true to that promise too. But the promise to Hagar was only to mother a natural family.

By Abraham and Sarah, God promised a multitude of those with like faith, a multitude of believers who are an eternal family, as we read: *“And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, ...”* Genesis 17:6-7 (KJV)

That’s the miracle God foreshadowed through the son he promised to Abraham and Sarah. An everlasting covenant, granting everlasting life, the gift of God by faith, to a spiritual family through the Son of Promise - God’s own Son.

And even though Abraham and Sarah couldn’t see at first how God’s plan would work, God always had a miracle in mind - it just had to happen in God’s time:

*“And the Lord visited Sarah **as he had said**, and the Lord did unto Sarah **as he had spoken**. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, **at the set time**³ of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.”* Genesis 21:1-3 (KJV)

Isn’t it a wonder of God’s grace that he was faithful to his promise even when their faith was so weak that they laughed at his plan, apparently forgetting God’s power to perform a miracle? And isn’t it wonderful that God didn’t allow the ‘helpful idea’ of Abraham and Sarah with Hagar to take away the room for the miracle?

And isn’t it a wonder of God’s grace that he has overlooked our often weak faith and contrary efforts in order to retain the room for us to have a part in the miracle of eternal life - the gift

of God’s grace through faith?

It doesn’t depend on me taking some of God’s plan into my own hands, just me putting myself in his hands and waiting for God’s time - and keeping faith in the God of miracles.

Peter - Walking on Water

When Jesus walked on the water, Peter, with Jesus’ help, created the room for a miracle. Peter was a fisherman. He well knew that people could not walk on water. But when he saw Jesus walking on the water, he wanted to go to him. First though, he checked if it was indeed the Lord - *“Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.”* Matthew 14:28 (KJV)

Wasn’t that wise? We wouldn’t want to be part of some ‘miracle’ if Jesus wasn’t in it. Then, when he was sure it was Jesus, he said, “Bid me....”. As though he was saying, “Give me the call, move me, inspire me to do in a measure what you have done” - asking for the call from Jesus to create the room for the miracle.

I don’t know about you, but it seems to me that in thinking about this incident I have tended to focus more on Peter getting his eyes on the boisterous sea and beginning to sink and having to cry out to Jesus to save him - and Jesus reaching out to do so. And sure, there are lessons in all those aspects of Peter’s experience. But in focusing on those aspects, am I missing the point - that Peter, as someone pointed out recently, when Jesus said “come”, stepped out and **did** walk on the water?

³ Emphases (bold type) are mine

Peter, with Jesus' reassurance, had the faith, took the risk, and created the room for the miracle. And with Jesus' help, the miracle of walking on the water happened for Peter. It didn't happen for those who stayed in the ship. They saw it. They could watch in awe (and perhaps fear) as Jesus walked on the water. They could watch in awe (and probably in greater fear) as Peter stepped out - and watch as Peter, at least for a time, experienced the miracle.

But the others were never more than observers of the miracle at that time. And if I want to be more than an observer of miracles, I know I have to trust Jesus when he says, "Come" - and put my faith to the test - and take the risk - and step out.

Room for a Miracle at a Wedding

Remember how early on in his ministry Jesus and his disciples went to a wedding feast (John 2) and how during the feast they ran out of wine? And remember how Mary, the mother of Jesus, said to the servants, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" John 2:5 (ESV)

It was safe advice, but there's a bit more to the story isn't there? When they ran out of wine, Mary brought it to Jesus' attention. She obviously believed he could solve the problem and, it would seem, was asking, even expecting him to do so. Jesus actually rebuked his mother for bringing it up at that time. Does what Mary appeared to do resonate with you like it does with me? We sometimes want to tell God and Jesus what needs to be done and when it needs to happen.

It seems that could have been how it was with Mary. And maybe why it appears that Jesus rebuked her. But anyway, Mary appears not to have taken offence at Jesus' rebuke but proffered, what I'm sure we would all feel, will always be safe advice - "*Do whatever he tells you.*" And in so saying, and in the servants doing what Jesus told them to do, Mary and the servants created the room for the miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine.

If I could always live by that - "Whatever he says to me I'll do it" - I know I would be creating room for miracles.

Gideon's Army - Less Men Gives God More Room

When God plucked Gideon from obscurity to be the commander in chief of his army, it wasn't long before Gideon got together an army of 32,000 men⁴. We would think that raising such a large army so quickly would in itself seem like a miracle to God's people. They were being destroyed and starved at the hands of the Midianites, and here God has found a new leader who can almost instantaneously muster this mighty fighting force.

But when it came time to engage in the battle, God had other ideas about what sort of a miracle he would perform for his people. First of all, he told Gideon to send home anyone who was fearful. That reduced the army by 22,000 men. Then God told Gideon to take them to a stream and observe how they drank from it. By that means the army was reduced to an amazingly small number - just 300.

⁴ We read about this in Judges 7

That left an army of just 300 men to take on this Midianite nation that Judges 6 tells us were like grasshoppers for multitude and whose people and camels were without number. They were a nation who left God's people with no crops and no food for the people or their animals, and had reduced God's people to fugitives, cringing in fear and hiding in caves and dens in the mountains. And now, God wants Gideon, the new leader, to take them on with just 300 men. That's how much room God created for the miracle he performed for his people in Gideon's day - completely routing the tyrannical enemies of God's people.

And it appeals to me like this: The less there were of Gideon's soldiers in the battle, the more God was in the battle. And the more God was in the battle, the more likely it was that there would be a miraculous victory.

What does that teach me - or you? Isn't it this? Less of me in the battle and more of God in the battle, makes miraculous victory more likely in my life also.

Paul and Silas - 'Free' in Prison

I don't know how many of us would know people in our day who have ever been beaten with the lash, or put in prison, or held in the stocks. Not many I suspect. I certainly have no experience, actual or vicarious, of any of those things. At the same time, I do know some in our day or our parents' day have been imprisoned and badly treated in wartime.

Anyway, we know Paul and Silas were imprisoned for doing the Lord's work in Thyatira. *"The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to*

beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them..." Acts 16:22-25 (ESV)

So that's where they were found - beaten, put in prison, then, for the night, put in the inner prison and their feet held in the stocks. What could they do to make room for a miracle? Just exactly what they did do - sang praises and prayed - out loud - at midnight. It says the other prisoners listened to them.

It was possibly the first and maybe the only time the other prisoners had ever heard prayers to God and the singing of his praises - especially in a prison. They would be used to the cursing of inmates - the screaming of demented prisoners - the abusive language of the guards. All those, yes, but would they be used to hearing singing and praying to God? Not likely.

And it wasn't just the other prisoners that were listening, God was also listening. Their praises and prayers reached God and created room for a miracle. Well, more than one miracle.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:25-30 (ESV)

That's what happened. God sent an earthquake. It shook the prison foundations, opened all the doors and broke all the prisoners' shackles - including those of Paul and Silas. That was one miracle. Paul and Silas were delivered from jail.

When the keeper realised that all the prisoners were freed, he was about to kill himself. I guess he knew certain death awaited him, if not at the hands of the prisoners then at the hands of his superiors. But Paul reassured him that no one had left, and that was another miracle. We don't know if they all remained in custody or not - but that's how it was at least for the time being.

Then the jailer threw himself down at the feet of Paul and Silas asking what he needed to do to be saved. How did he know anything about 'being saved'? Through what he heard in their prayers and singing I guess. Is that why they were praying and singing - to bring salvation to the jailer and his household? We don't know. We could imagine that they had their own situation more in mind, but it doesn't matter really. It's hardly likely that they had such a 'plan' when they were thrown into prison. But we do know this, that although they were in jail, their spirits were not imprisoned, and their prayers and praise were not locked away.

None of us know who is observing us and how God can use us if we're acting as Jesus taught on the mountain: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* Matt 5:14-16 (ESV)

God was able to use the situation of Paul and Silas and their spirit of praise and prayerfulness. And we could say the

salvation of the jailer and his household was the greatest miracle of them all that night. Salvation came to the jailer and his family. Not just a miracle of the moment - like the freeing of Paul and Silas - or the prisoners remaining in the jail - but a miracle happened that night that reaches out into eternity - a miracle in which Paul and Silas by prayer and praise created the room for God to act - and bring the miracle of salvation to the Jailer and his family.

Is that beyond any one of us - to offer praise and prayer that can create the room for God to work a miracle? Prayer and praise in secret can be effective, we know that, but Paul and Silas did it in public in the most unlikely and inhospitable of places. Is there a lesson in that for us?

The Parable of the Talents

This parable spoken by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 25: 14-30 is one that has spoken loudly to me in recent years. It has had a special message for me that I will try to explain shortly. But now, in addition, it strikes me that this parable is also about making room for the miracle - or not.

We probably know the story. A man who is going to be away for some time entrusts, in his absence, some of his wealth to his servants. Then, on his return, he will ask each of them to give account. One servant, to whom his master gave five talents, invested it and doubled his master's money. Another man, to whom his master gave two talents, also invested it and also doubled his master's money. The third man, entrusted with one talent, feared that he might lose his master's money and hid it away safely until he could give it back just as he received it.

At the time of reckoning, the master was pleased with and rewarded the first two servants, and was angry with and punished the third. He said to that servant, “...you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” Matt 25:27 (ESV) The first two made room for the miracle - obtaining an increase in what the owner gave them. The third man made no room for a miracle to occur.

It has also spoken to me in another way in recent years. We understand that all investments involve some risk. We can lose money in what appears to be the safest of investments - even in a bank (as recent world events have made only too clear). But what the owner expected was that even if the third man was afraid of the risk of investing his master's money, he should have at least put it in the least risky place, the bank, and presented the master with at least the minimum of gains on his return. So this parable makes it clear to me that this is what Jesus wants me to do and expects me to do - to take some risk.

Not a risk of trusting in myself, my abilities, my understanding of scripture, my resources - how many loaves and fishes I can contribute. No, to take a risk on putting what he has given me to work in his will and according to his prompting - like Paul and Silas. God had given them, like he has given us, the privilege of prayer. And God had given them, like us, the cause to sing his praises, even in the darkest moments. That's what they put to work in the jail that night. They took the risk, and look how God gave the increase.

⁵ Recorded in 1 Samuel 17

David and Goliath

This is a story⁵ we have known since we were small children. It's a story that's known and loved by many and from which many have often drawn inspiration. It has appealed again in the context of this chapter - and it appealed like this: When David faced Goliath he left room for the miracle - and God delivered the miracle.

There wasn't really anything miraculous in what David himself did. He just threw a stone out of his slingshot, something he no doubt did often and no doubt did with skill. The miracle was in the aim and the effect.

Does a miracle mean we ourselves have to do something miraculous? Is God expecting us to do something beyond our capability? I feel that this experience of David's tells us "No". God can do the miracle as we just do what we are capable of doing - but in God's will and with God's guidance and with courage from him.

King Saul and David's older brothers saw one picture. They saw a great warrior who was bigger, stronger, more experienced, better armed and better protected than they were. They knew they could not match Goliath - that it needed a miracle. But they failed to do what was needed to create room for a miracle.

David had experienced how God had helped him to protect his natural father's sheep. So he had faith to believe how God would help him to protect God's sheep. Some thought David should not even be there. It seems that ostensibly David was sent by his father, Jesse, to take provisions to his older

brothers in the battlefield. But David knew something different - he knew God had sent him to be used by God to deliver his people from the Philistine army.

Could we have a victory in our day like David had? Perhaps we feel we couldn't. But why? Is God less able, less powerful? We say an emphatic "No" to that. So what then? Is it that we have less faith than David? I would have to confess to that being so in my case.

Be that as it may, maybe we can encourage ourselves by considering the question, "Was David's faith perfect?" Perhaps not. After all, when David went to face Goliath, why did he choose five stones from the brook? It appears that he thought he might need five stones. And maybe if it was just David facing Goliath he might have needed five stones - and a whole lot more. But it wasn't just David facing Goliath, it was David and God facing Goliath. And God only needed one stone.

How did David create the room for such a wonderful miracle? In lots of ways. Goliath had a suit of chain mail armour. David could have borrowed Saul's armour but he declined it. Goliath had a giant spear. David took none. Goliath had a huge sword. David took no sword. Goliath had a shield bearer to stand in front of him to protect him and leave him both hands free to wield his weapons. David had nothing and no one - well, no one visible to Goliath - just God.

Goliath had a huge ego and with his false gods said he was defying the armies of Israel. But David knew what Goliath didn't know - that Goliath wasn't just defying the armies of Israel, he was really defying the God of the armies of Israel, the Lord of hosts - as David put it. And David went in quiet confidence in that living God.

To human eyes, each of the things that David didn't have - armour, spear, sword, shield bearer, size, strength and military experience - made him look more vulnerable. But to God, each apparent lack in David made more and more and more room for the miracle. Showing us, we could say, a practical example of what the apostle Paul said God told him: *"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:9 (KJV)

They All Made Room for the Miracle

Mary took a risk in putting Jesus 'on the spot' about the lack of wine. She received what seems like a rebuke - but she also, in taking that risk, made room for the miracle.

Paul and Silas took a risk praying and singing out loud at midnight in the prison. It could have easily backfired on them. They risked ridicule, beating and worse. But they took the risk, and made room for God to perform the miracles.

Gideon needed God to reassure him over and over and over that God would be with him in leading his army against the Midianites. And God was patient with Gideon and did reassure him over and over and over before Gideon was willing to take the risk. I feel it would not be presumptuous to say God knew his investment in Gideon would be well worth it.

And so it was. Gideon cooperated with God in reducing the army to just 300 - and the most wonderful victory was achieved. And I feel it would not be presumptuous to think that God would, and indeed does, invest in us in the same way, reassuring and reassuring us to trust him, so that with less of

ourselves and more of him in the battle, he will give us the victory also.

To Peter, and the other disciples, it must have seemed like Peter was taking a big risk in stepping out of the ship to go to Jesus. But Peter asked Jesus to bid him come, and Jesus called him to come, and he went - taking the risk, stepping out of the boat and walking on the water.

We don't know what the others in the boat thought about what Peter did. But perceptions about Peter's actions might have been similar to perceptions about young David. To experienced army commanders like King Saul, what David did in facing Goliath looked like a foolish, out-of-his depth, rash and risky act. To his oldest brother he shouldn't even have been there. They knew they needed a miracle to defeat Goliath, but they didn't seem to have the faith to create room for a miracle. David did everything to leave room for the miracle - and God made the miracle happen.

Finally, How Jesus Created Room - and Time

The illness of Lazarus, his death, and his being raised to life by Jesus, is recorded in John 11:

“Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days

longer in the place where he was.” John 11:1-6 (ESV)

Jesus had a 'miracle perspective'. Lazarus' sisters were worried about their brother's illness and thought Jesus would be vexed also, because he loved them all. But where they saw Lazarus' illness as something going wrong, Jesus saw it as an opportunity for a miracle that would glorify God and glorify the Son of God. Wouldn't we long to have the 'miracle perspective' Jesus had?

The record tells us: *“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”* Does it not seem strange when those two statements are put together? Firstly, we're told that Jesus loved these three. So, what did he do when he heard that Lazarus was ill? How did he appear to show that love? *“...he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”*

In one way, it seems a strange response to not go to ill Lazarus. We would think that his sisters and the disciples would find it hard to understand - and probably we too would have found it hard to understand in the circumstances. But Jesus had a 'miracle perspective' - he was creating room, and creating time, for a greater miracle than just making Lazarus well. He took the time and made the room for the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

And then he went further, as the record shows: *“So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”* John 11:6-8 (ESV) The disciples, obviously with good reason, were concerned about Jesus' safety. But what would happen if

Jesus heeded their concern? It would leave no room for the miracle. I don't know about you, but I know of more than a few times when I have hesitated to respond to the Spirit's prompting because I saw the potential for problems on the path ahead.

Jesus wasn't diverted. He had in mind to include not just Lazarus himself and Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, in the miracle, but the disciples also. So after Jesus had spoken to them about walking in the light (a message I understand in general but for which I haven't yet grasped the meaning in this context) it tells us: *"After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake **I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.**"⁶ But let us go to him."* John 11:11-15 (ESV)

Isn't that a wonderful insight into the heart of our Saviour? We see how he planned the whole experience in love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus. They sought the miracle of healing for Lazarus. Jesus waited his time - and they were part of the miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead.

And he had a 'miracle perspective for his disciples as well. By choosing not to be there when Lazarus died, not for his own benefit, but as he said, *"for your sake"*, Jesus had a blessing planned for them also. As he told them, it was *"so that you may believe"*. And isn't that how we have experienced the same loving Saviour? He has done so many things 'for our sake' - 'so that we may believe'. And I think we can also be assured,

in the same way that he told the disciples, that he is glad that he did those things for us. And doesn't that inspire us to want to make him glad also?

We notice how Jesus explained God's purpose for Lazarus illness, *"It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* And wouldn't that be God's purpose for the experiences he wants to take us through - that *"It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* ?

I want to learn how to make room for the miracle. I want to be willing to take the risk of making room for the miracle. I want to learn how to move in God's time to make time for the miracle, so that God can be glorified. And so that Jesus can be glorified.

⁶ The emphases (bold type) are mine