

Aim of lesson

To consider the purpose of miracles and discuss our conviction that they really did happen.

Bible background

John 9; Acts 2:22

Preparation required

Decide how to approach this lesson. If you think the young people need a break from their notes you could follow the 'Other suggestions for activities' below.

If you have easy access to a copy, you may find C.S.Lewis's book 'Miracles' helpful, if at times rather academic.

Read through the notes bearing your own group in mind. Decide whether they need convincing themselves, or just encouragement to know how to talk to their friends. Pitch the discussion at their level.

Suggested outline of lesson

What are miracles for?

Begin by asking the class what they think is the reason for the miracles in the Bible, and get them to think of examples. If they get stuck, suggest some examples to them and ask them why those miracles happened. Suggestions might be:

- To show the power of God (either directly, or to demonstrate that God was working through his prophets - ultimately through the Lord Jesus). For example, to show God's power to all nations (Exodus 7:5), to show the authority of Jesus (Acts 2:22), and to show that the apostles were speaking for God (Hebrews 2:3,4).
- To show God's care and love for his people by helping them in seemingly impossible situations (crossing the Red Sea, raising Lazarus). God said "I have indeed ... I have heard, ... and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them" (Exodus 3:7-8)
- To teach a lesson (Moses lifting up the bronze serpent, the signs recorded in the gospel of John - see especially John 20:30-31).

Get the young people to summarise these points on their worksheets.

Why do some people find it hard to believe in miracles?

Now ask why people sometimes find it difficult to believe that miracles happened.

You will probably get answers like:

- Because we have no evidence of things happening against the laws of nature today so how can we believe they ever did? We have to accept that for an unbeliever this is a logical answer.
- People don't want to believe in miracles because if they did they would have to admit that there is a God, with all the implications of his power in the world.
- We have become increasingly cynical, and tend to disbelieve anything that can't be proved to us. Partly this is a result of our education - and it is not entirely bad; in New Testament times the people of Berea were praised because they did not gullibly accept what Paul said, but checked for themselves. Similarly John exhorted his readers to 'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world' (1 John 4:1). It is also, probably, because we hear so much inaccurate news.
- The Bible is not a fashionable thing to believe in. People are willing to believe in the supernatural when it comes to Tarot cards or horoscopes, but not in regard to the God of the Bible.

So why believe in miracles?

Try to help the young people, through discussion, to see that:

- Miracles do still happen. Not inexplicable events that clearly break the laws of nature, but clear witnesses to the power of God. The survival and return of the people of Israel is the clearest and most irrefutable example, but the dramatic problems facing the world - pollution, economic catastrophe, rising population, violence and immorality - are all witnesses to the truth of God's word and thus to his power in the world.
- A God who can create such a wonderful world (vastness of the universe, complexity of our bodies, minuteness of microbes, beauties of nature, characteristics of humour, love, etc) can surely do what he wants and control these things.
- There are still many things beyond our comprehension. We do not know, for example, what 'life' is. What makes the difference between a dead cell and a living foetus? 'As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.' (Ecclesiastes 11:5)
- The more we read the Bible the more we discover we can trust its truth. The fact that all other parts hold together perfectly, tells us that we must trust

the Bible when we are told God shut the mouth of the lions when Daniel was thrown to them.

No-one can prove that any of the miracles didn't happen, especially the resurrection of Jesus, which men have tried unsuccessfully to disprove on many occasions.

You might like to discuss the fact that God may have often used nature to work miracles (it could have been a land-slide at Adam that dried up the water of Jordan for the people to cross in the time of Joshua) but all the miracles cannot be explained in this way and it doesn't weaken God's power for us to know how he did it.

The quotation from Josephus shows that it is not only the Bible that records the Miracles of Jesus.

Use a pendulum - a weight swinging on a string, which you grab and stop - to show that the laws of nature work until someone with more power steps in and stops them. So, saying that the laws of nature can't be broken is correct, but they can be suspended for as long as the more powerful one wishes! During that suspension anything he wishes can happen. Then the laws of nature are reinstated.

The significance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

1 Corinthians 15 makes clear that this teaching is at the heart of the Christian faith. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then all the other miracles become easy to believe in, even if we do not understand exactly what happened (how did the water turn into wine?).

Relevance to our lives

Believing the resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to our faith. Seeing God's power in all things only increases our faith.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for your wonderful creation, your power and your care for your creation and us. Please increase our faith and our conviction that you can do anything to help us.

Other suggestions for activities

1. Produce a radio programme, or series of short newspaper articles, based on the events of Mark 5:1-20. Get the young people to read the story and make themselves familiar with it, then, depending on the size of the group, ask them to take the parts of:
 - Legion
 - Someone who had seen him before and after he was healed
 - A member of his family

- A pig farmer
 - A news reporter
2. You could lead into the next series of topics by discussing with the young people situations where we might wish for miracles today - if a loved friend or relative is seriously ill, for instance. Think about the sort of prayer that we might offer in that situation.