

Modern-Day Resurrections: Are They Real?

After he lay below the surface of an ice-covered Missouri lake for 15 minutes in mid-January, doctors didn't give John Smith much chance to live, let alone be honing his summer league basketball skills.

Nor is his survival the only startling element of this miraculous story. After rescue workers pulled him from the icy lake about 40 miles west of St. Louis, the teenager spent another half hour without a pulse.

Soon after John's mother, Joyce, walked into his emergency room ward, Dr. Kent Sutterer told her she could approach John's bed. But the doctor didn't reveal he was about ready to pronounce the time of her son's death.

That announcement never came. After feeling the coldness of John's feet, his mother recognized that God represented her only hope. The member of First Assembly of God of St. Peters decided to put Bible teacher and author Beth Moore's teaching on the power of life and death residing in the tongue into action.

Less than a minute after praying, "Holy God, please send your Holy Spirit to save my son," she watched with joy as a voice rang out, "I've got a pulse!"

"It's hard to put into words," Joyce says of the impact of her prayer. "I've seen miracles happen my whole life. My parents were personal friends of Oral Roberts' family and I grew up in tent revivals. I know God is the God of the impossible, but to see Him answer you at your point of need is awesome."

Dr. Sutterer, who treated Smith before a rescue team airlifted him to a St. Louis children's hospital, says the event

resonates with a supernatural aura. When the emergency room physician placed his patient in the helicopter, the ER doctor expected Smith to suffer from unrecoverable brain damage before dying. A reasonable hypothesis, since brain cells can start to wither after five minutes without oxygen.

“I will never be the same again because of the experience,” says Dr. Sutterer, who has practiced direct patient care since 1998. “The medical expert in me still knows that this case is not something which I will ever expect someone to survive. Never in my wildest expectations did I expect that I would be having a normal conversation with this young man within two weeks.”

Smith, too, was shocked when he awoke in Cardinal Glennon Medical Center, his best friend holding his hand. Groggy from the powerful sedative used to keep him still, once he regained awareness his mother explained what had happened.

Every time the youth went for a breathing treatment or other procedure, Smith listened to music by Third Day, especially the tune, *I Need a Miracle*. He prayed often and thanked God for his life, keeping his friends safe, and bringing him through the ordeal.

“I think He’s doing a movement in me,” says John, a freshman at Living Word Christian School in St. Peters. “I think He wants me to use this as a way to show people that even when He doesn’t show up right away, He’s still there and not to lose faith in Him.”

Accounts of Raisings

Was John Smith resurrected from the dead?

His pastor, Jason Noble, thinks so, saying it sparked a wave of supernatural activity at First Assembly of St. Peters. The same week Smith nearly drowned, a long-time church member who had suffered a stroke regained consciousness three days after

a call for prayer went out on Facebook.

Soon after, two members were healed of cancer. A man who tore ligaments in his foot laid down his crutches the day after Noble received a word of wisdom on a Sunday morning that the man would be healed. A pastor in the Seattle area until relocating to Missouri last August, Noble compares the event that touched off this wave to the gospel accounts of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter.

"It's the first time I've ever seen someone raised from the dead and healed," Noble says. "We've prayed ever since we got here that the Lord would do miracles. It's bolstered the faith of the whole church.

"When a church is praying, God will show up. Never underestimate the power of a praying church and openness to the Holy Spirit and what God wants to do. We've called it a tapestry of miracles you cannot deny."

Smith's survival has stirred such excitement at the hospital that SSM Health showed a video of his story at this spring's annual professional development seminar for its 13,000 employees in the St. Louis area.

This remarkable story is only the latest in a string of reported modern-day resurrections that will soon receive renewed attention across the U.S. In addition to this fall's premiere of the movie, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, mid-September will bring the release of the *Touching Heaven* book by Palm Beach, Florida cardiologist Chauncey Crandall. Dr. Crandall's first book, *Raising the Dead*, describes him praying for a patient who returned to life after he had flat-lined.

"It's phenomenal, isn't it?" asks Don Piper, whose *90 Minutes* book has sold more than 7 million copies in 46 languages since 2004. "I think the accounts have always been there; we just haven't talked about them. I think God is doing some of His best stuff now. Because of the communication world we live in,

it's easier for these accounts to circulate."

Worldwide, they have surfaced for years, but are accelerating through online video posts and traveling evangelists who claim to specialize in resurrection.

The Wagner Institute of Global Awakening offers an online course on raising the dead. It was also the topic of evangelist Reinhard Bonnke's 2014 book describing the 2001 raising of an African man.

The leader of a ministry in a nation whose government is hostile to Christianity says resurrections have helped plant or strengthen churches there, and save others from extinction. "The raising of the dead is one of the premiere signs," says the missionary, who asked to remain anonymous. "We checked and found five verifiable cases. There were several more, but there was no way to verify them."

Members of Shalom Christian Community in the southeastern Brazil city of Uberlandia, Minas Gerais, are still rejoicing over the 2012 recovery of teenager Mariana de Silova.

Robin Dias, a pastor at the church, says the girl was struck by a speeding motorcycle while crossing a busy street with her brother and mother, Gisele. The impact fractured Mariana's skull and a leg.

When they arrived, Dias says rescue workers couldn't find a pulse. That's when Gisele asked God to send an angel to help. Soon after, her cell group leader arrived and the two women rebuked the spirit of death, saying, "Resurrecting power of Jesus come!"

"At this moment Mariana began to breathe," says Dias, who attributes prayer to also healing the girl of double vision and problems walking. "The Lord's name has been greatly glorified for raising her from the dead and restoring her to perfect health."

In South Africa, Surprise Sithole—international director of pastors for IRIS Global—has observed eight raisings. The thousands of pastors he oversees in the region have reported several hundred.

Among them is a startling experience that occurred in 2005 as Sithole traveled to Zimbabwe with four other pastors to screen the *Jesus* movie. Sithole noticed a man walking ahead of their vehicle, yet they never overtook him.

When they arrived at the village and set up for the showing, a couple came with their 2-year-old child, weeping because the child had stopped breathing. Since the pastors with Sithole didn't believe in praying for the dead, he knelt with the couple.

Before he could say anything, Sithole sensed a presence approaching from behind. He turned around and looked, but saw nothing. It happened a second time, then a third.

"The third time I realized the shadow of the man behind me was the man who had been walking on the road," the pastor says. "As soon as I recognized that, the child was breathing. After the child raised, we said a prayer of thanks."

Searching for Evidence

While such accounts may seem far-fetched, Randy Clark says when witnesses tell stories of people who came to life after having no pulse, locked eyes and a rigid body, even skeptical Westerners would agree resurrections had occurred.

The founder of Global Awakening has videoed numerous accounts in Third World nations, where he says people are more open to the possibility of the supernatural.

"If you're not in a place where there are hospitals and few doctors are around, you have to know what death looks like," says Clark, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on miraculous

healings.

"I believe (these testimonies) are true because it explains the growth of the church in Muslim areas. I've been in villages where that is (the reason) so many of them have become Christians. But do I have medical evidence? I don't."

Chauncey Crandall insists he does. In *Raising the Dead*, the Palm Beach heart doctor relates the story of Jeff Markin, a patient whose vital signs stopped as he lay in the emergency room.

Although declared dead at 8:05 a.m. on Sept. 20, 2006, as the cardiologist wrote his report he sensed God telling him to pray for Markin. Doing so under his breath, Crandall concluded, "If he does not know You as his Lord and Savior, raise him from the dead now, in Jesus' name."

Shortly after, when the ER doctor walked back into the room, Crandall asked him to shock Markin with a defibrillator one more time. Not only did Markin come to life, the week after he said a prayer of conversion with his cardiologist. Today the 62-year-old man is active in his church's men's discipleship program and works with the youth group.

"Theoretically I'm supposed to be a vegetable, but God had a different plan for me," says Markin, who had an out-of-body experience during his four days of unconsciousness.

"As much as anything, it's the miracle of being reborn and moving through that," Markin says of the significance of this incident. "It's non-stop. The roots of my testimony are still growing and still spreading."

The year after Markin's bypass operation, Crandall presented evidence of this incident to a network of Christian doctors in Miami. The meeting received national attention after journalist Dan Wooding wrote a story about it.

Despite the interest it stirred, Crandall says most doctors are reluctant to verify such incidents in medical reports because of the fear of being labeled a “quack.” In Europe, he says it is illegal for doctors and nurses to even pray for the sick in Jesus’ name. So anyone there who documents the kind of miracle he observed risks losing their job.

Still, Crandall finds it worth risking ostracism and the possible loss of patient referrals.

Recently an eye surgeon approached him and told Crandall his book helped him appreciate taking authority and praying for patients, commenting, “You’re opening my eyes to the kingdom of God.”

“God uses miracles to show people He’s real,” Crandall says. “It’s powerful. When a doctor proclaims the Lord can heal them, deliver them from demons, and raise the dead back to life, it rattles people. Coming out of a doctor’s mouth, they believe it and give their life to Christ.”

A Documented Miracle?

Bonnke says countless salvations have resulted from Christ for the Nation’s video about Daniel Ekechukwu’s rising from the dead in 2001 in Nigeria. After one charismatic church showed it at a Sunday night service, the enthusiastic altar call prompted the church to order 9,000 copies.

Bonnke’s 2014 book, *Raised From the Dead*, renewed interest in the story. The book includes a photo of Ekechukwu in his coffin and another of him holding his death certificate.

“We have seen this video spread across the world and I’ve heard many testimonies of people who got saved as a result of it,” Bonnke says. “I think it is a wonderful tool in the salvation of souls. One can say this is a miracle that has stood the test of time.”

Indeed, it still sends chills down the spine of Robert Murphree. The filmmaker is currently working on a documentary in Norway about the Holocaust and Christians who helped rescue Jews during World War II.

In 2001, Murphree was en route to a crusade when Bonnke diverted him to the Nigerian town where Murphree interviewed witnesses about the incident. Murphree calls it one of the best-documented miracles he has ever observed.

Whether the man's wife, pastor, doctor, mortician or others, all the stories lined up. After talking to dozens of people, the producer thought, "If this is a hoax, there are so many people involved it would be a giant theatrical production to pull this off."

Ekechukwu's story especially impressed him. Murphree recalls Ekechukwu walking in looking weak and often needing water. Since the man's wife had such vivid memories, the filmmaker thought hers would prove more interesting.

"I said, 'I guess that's all you have to contribute,' and he said, 'No, there's more,'" Murphree says. "He started talking about what he had experienced. It shook me and all of us there.

"I had the fear of God on me for several days. I hardly slept for two days and two nights after this. This was a work of the Holy Spirit and the whole thing had a message. At the core it was a salvation message and a sign."

Yet, doubters soon appeared. They alleged such discrepancies as the lack of visible injuries to Ekechukwu's face despite reportedly striking the windshield during the accident that supposedly killed him.

Another critic cited the lack of an autopsy, coroner's report and police report, and conflicting accounts concerning the time the patient was dead.

In an online account posted in 2004, the leader of the Nigerian Humanist Movement labeled it a “fraud.” Among other things, Leo Igwe said medical experts told him that if the patient went three days without embalming fluid injected into Ekechukwu’s body, his abdomen would have been swollen.

Murphree understands the objections that continue to dog this story, saying he feels compassion for the critics.

“I understand why this would be a hard thing for them to accept,” the producer says. “But we were there. When you see things and sense the presence of the Lord meeting you at different stages ... sometimes you have to walk by faith. I can understand why this would be way too much to take in—but it happened.”

Biblical Contradictions

Eyewitness evidence doesn’t persuade doubters, though, who cite contradictions between testimonies of reported visits to heaven and the biblical record. Such concerns have resulted in a number of books and a resolution from the Southern Baptist Convention about the sufficiency of Scripture regarding the afterlife.

Although acknowledging the Bible includes accounts of such resurrections as Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus, it does not include any report of the afterlife, said the resolution. It was adopted at the 2014 annual meeting.

Matthew Hall, the Louisville, Kentucky seminary professor who helped draft it, says fascination with near-death (NDE) and post-mortem experiences have existed throughout American religious history.

Hall, an administrator and professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says the current wrinkle is the way such accounts have leaped into the publishing world alongside their “democratization” via online postings.

Hall says many heaven observers focus more attention on relatives they see than God; if Jesus is present, He's presented as someone there to put an arm around someone's shoulder than the Christ who holds the cosmos together.

"When you look at heaven accounts, there's very little of God and the biblical there," Hall says. "I'm not convinced these experiences are on the rise. I am convinced publishers discovered they sell."

"It says something about the books Americans want to buy and read. I'd want to particularly look at that phenomenon and say: What does it tell us about evangelicals? Are we holding fast to that biblical authority?"

In her book, *Testing the Spirits*, now-retired Wheaton professor Elizabeth Hillstrom writes: "It is possible that some NDE accounts are grossly exaggerated or even outright fabrications, concocted for profit, publicity or attention."

Though Hillstrom wrote those words 20 years ago, they are still relevant following young author Alex Malarkey's admission that his story of visiting heaven after a serious car crash was a hoax. Malarkey was 6 years old at the time of the accident, which left him in a coma for two months.

In an open letter to "marketers of heaven tourism," Malarkey—whose father co-authored *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*—said he made up the account because he thought it would attract attention.

"When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible," Malarkey wrote. "People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible."

In January, Tyndale issued the following statement: "(In January) Tyndale learned that Alex Malarkey, co-author of *The*

Boy Who Came Back From Heaven, was retracting the story he had told his father and that he recounted in the book they co-authored for publication in 2010. It is because of this new information that we are taking the book out of print. For the past couple of years we have known that Beth Malarkey, Kevin's wife and Alex's mother, was unhappy with the book and believed it contained inaccuracies. On more than one occasion we asked for a meeting with Kevin, Beth, Alex and their agent to discuss and correct any inaccuracies, but Beth would not agree to such a meeting."

The incident shows why no one should put any stock in resurrection accounts, says St. Louis-area apologist Kurt Goedelman. The founder of Personal Freedom Outreach says many resurrectionists are "frauds" and questions placing any faith in their grandiose stories.

Medical Recoveries

The other moderating influence to reported resurrections is they may not be as miraculous as they initially appear. Restarting a person's heart via defibrillators or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is a regular occurrence.

Such realities stir skepticism like a report last year in the *BBC News Magazine*. While not naming Dr. Crandall, the story referenced an American heart surgeon who "allegedly" brought a heart attack patient back from the dead with prayer.

"But he was also using a defibrillator, and other doctors find the story entirely unremarkable," the *BBC* wrote.

After West Virginia college student Zach Sandy got struck by lightning at a youth camp softball camp in the summer of 2012, the ER doctor who tended to him before the teen's transfer to a burn center in Pittsburgh credited CPR as a primary factor in his survival.

"The key is if CPR is started at the scene," says Dr. Anthony Kitchen, a staff member at Camden-Clark Medical Center in Parkersburg. "I resuscitated someone (recently). I shocked him, but his girlfriend had administered CPR and he was close to the hospital."

However, even the restarting of someone's heart doesn't guarantee a positive neurological outcome—which is where the circumstances surrounding the cases of Zach Sandy and John Smith assume such a miraculous tinge.

Given the nature of Sandy's injuries, Kitchen was pessimistic about the then-18-year-old's chances of survival. When Kitchen learned earlier this year that Sandy had been released after a short time in the burn center and was doing fine, the physician was amazed.

"From a medical standpoint, it's pretty astounding," says Kitchen, who says so many circumstances had to line up properly that it challenges conventional theories. "So many things had to go right. For the kid not suffering damage from that and having neurological function—it would be rough for medical science to explain."

After observers raised the question of whether the frigid water might have played an element in Smith's survival, the doctor at Cardinal Glennon who treated Smith pointed out the outcome of such cases is usually negative.

Dr. Jeremy Garrett says although a study in the Netherlands reported that 60 percent of 160 childhood drowning victims were resuscitated after 30 minutes, many suffered brain, neurological or other damage.

Another in the Pacific Northwest noted that with cold water drowning patients, none with prolonged restriction of blood supply to tissues survived deprivation longer than 10 minutes.

While medically there are several factors that gave Smith a

hope of survival, to survive fully neurologically intact is beyond rational explanations, Garrett says.

“Results like this are not what knowledgeable physicians specializing in pediatric emergency care, pediatric critical care or pediatric neurology would expect, even with the best of care,” the doctor says. “If I had not been part of John’s care from presentation to recovery, I’m not sure I would have believed it myself.”

Joyce Smith believes, citing the blind man Jesus healed. When the Pharisees demanded proof, he replied, “One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

“All I know is my son didn’t have a heartbeat for 45 minutes and he’s alive and flourishing,” she says. “He’s an A and B student and doing well. The naysayers can say what they want, but the proof is on my side.”

Ken Walker is a freelance writer and book editor from Huntington, West Virginia. A longtime contributor, Walker wrote about prophetic evangelism in the May issue of Charisma.

Learn more about Dr. Crandall’s miraculous resurrection prayer in this in-depth TV news story at .