

Some Said It Thundered: Why Some People Don't Believe Even After They See

On Aug. 27, 2010, I watched a miracle happen. There are all kinds of miracles, from the unforgettable birth of a child, to the eternal, grace-filled miracle of someone giving their heart to Jesus, which is the greatest miracle of all. I have seen both and I bow before God in thanks. But on this particular night, I saw another miracle, something I had heard about, but had never witnessed. I saw the lame walk. And so did hundreds of other people in the room. Since that night, more than 160,000 other people have also been witnesses to that same miracle through the Internet.

On Monday, August 23, I called my friend Bishop Levy Knox and asked if he had been to the meetings in downtown Mobile, Ala., that had now been named the Bay of the Holy Spirit Revival. Levy had just returned from a trip out of the country, and he had not yet attended, though he wanted to given a long relationship with Pastor John Kilpatrick, in whose church the meetings had begun. That same church, Church of His Presence, was now graciously hosting these citywide meetings every Thursday through Saturday evenings. Levy said that he would check with his wife, Delia, and possibly meet me there on Friday.

They did come, and what a meeting it was. Before the evening was over, Delia, paralyzed below the waist and wheelchair bound for more than 22 years, got out of her chair and walked.

Since that night, she has continued to gain strength, and as of this writing, barely six weeks later, she regularly ministers on her own two feet every Sunday with her husband at Living Word Christian Center in Mobile.

It just so happens that the church where I pastor, Deeper Life Fellowship, was the last church Delia sang before her miracle. I was finishing an eight-week sabbatical, and Levy was filling the pulpit for me that day, Aug. 8, 2010. Delia, as she had for years, sang powerfully from her wheelchair, and Levy preached a powerful message proclaiming the arrival of a new season of God's activity. He had no idea how right he would prove to be.

I could not wait to show the Knoxes the video of Delia's miracle that had been recorded the night she walked. It was as if a bomb exploded that Sunday morning. People began asking me to post the video on the website, so on Monday morning, I quickly edited and posted a 13-minute video that has now, to the best of my knowledge, been seen in every country. The video went viral immediately, spreading like wildfire in hours.

But not everyone has believed what they have seen.

Within the next few days, other sites began embedding and featuring the video, sites that allowed viewers to comment on it. I had disabled the ability to make comments on my YouTube channel because I knew that Bishop Knox and Lady Delia were still awed by the power of the miracle and, together, we wanted to protect the holiness of that moment. Besides, I was in no frame of mind to deal with the critics and the naysayers I knew would start commenting. And so, as the video spread, and as many people around the world gave great praise to God, those who just could not believe what they were watching began to make their presence known.

No matter how much we prepare ourselves for the criticisms that inevitably come against a move of God, it always takes some time and some adjustment to calm our frustrations and natural defensiveness. As I read some of the comments, one in particular struck me. "When these people cause an amputee's limbs to grow," the person said, "then I'll believe." And

immediately, something in my spirit responded, "No, you wouldn't. If you can't believe this, you would find some reason not to believe that." Over the next few days, the Lord began to speak to me about where to put those kinds of statements. I knew the miracle was real; I stood 10 feet away and watched as Delia got up out of her wheelchair. I have known her for years. I know personally what had happened. Why could they not see?

I believe the answer to this question can be found in John 12:27-30: "Now My soul is troubled. What should I say. "Father, save Me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!" Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again!" The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him!" Jesus responded, "This voice came, not for Me, but for you."

This passage doesn't say that it sounded like thunder. It doesn't say that the people didn't clearly hear what God said. I believe that they heard and understood the words, but because some standing there did not have the spiritual equipment necessary to identify the realm of heaven, they chose to rely on their own level of experience to explain it away. Since they were incapable of recognizing and admitting the reality of the supernatural activity of God on the earth, they had to assume it was something they already understood: thunder.

When some watch a paraplegic get out of a wheelchair, or hear of God opening the eyes of a boy blind in his right eye, or even when they see the evidence of brain tumors having disappeared, or closed lungs being becoming clear, they cannot even identify the activity of God because the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). If they are still dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), then how can they even

recognize life? In other words, if we who have eyes to see and ears to hear are amazed and rendered speechless by the power of God, how can we rightfully expect those who don't yet know Jesus to understand? Instead, for them, it must be a hoax. The ministers must all be charlatans who are trying to fleece people and line their own pockets. It must be mass hypnosis. The ones who are walking, seeing, breathing clearly, must either be simple-minded people or paid actors. For those who don't know God, the supernatural experience they are witnessing must have some natural explanation. And so, they ignore their own senses in order to make sense of what they see and hear.

In Luke 16, Jesus tells the story of Lazarus (not the one who was raised from the dead) and the Rich Man. After they both enter eternity, and the Rich Man finds himself in hell, he asks Abraham, whom he sees in Heaven, for a favor: "'Father,' he said, 'then I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father's house because I have five brothers to warn them, so they won't also come to this place of torment.'" "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'" "'No, father Abraham,' he said. 'But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'" "But he told him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:27-31).

At one particular showdown with the Pharisees, we see Jesus' own exasperation with those who said that if He would just give them proof, they would believe: The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, demanding of Him a sign from heaven to test Him. But sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation demand a sign? I assure you: No sign will be given to this generation!" (Mark 8:11-12). This absolutely does not mean that we should not want to see signs and wonders. What it does mean is that if we *require* a sign in order to believe, we probably won't get one. And again, Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who

believe without seeing are blessed" (John 20:29).

In John 3:17-18, Jesus explains that even though He was not sent into the world to judge the world, that when He shows up, the world is judged already. This means that when Jesus steps onto the scene, people whose hearts are already soft toward God will recognize and follow Him, but those whose hearts have already rejected God and His kingdom, will automatically reject Jesus because He is God and represents Him. That's one of the reasons the Pharisees were in such opposition to Him and His ministry.

But is this problem only with people who are staunch unbelievers? Apparently not. In the book of 2 Kings, we have the story of Elisha witnessing, up close and personal, the miracle of Elijah's being taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire while the sons of the prophets (the seminary students of the day) watched from a distance (2 Kings 2:7).

Watch what happens next: "When the sons of the prophets from Jericho, who were facing him, saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' They came to meet him and bowed down to the ground in front of him. Then the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, 'Since there are 50 strong men here with your servants, please let them go and search for your master. Maybe the Spirit of the Lord has carried him away and put him on one of the mountains or into one of the valleys. He answered, Don't send [them]. However, they urged him to the point of embarrassment, so he said, Send [them]. They sent 50 men, who looked for three days but did not find him. When they returned to him in Jericho where he was staying, he said to them, Didn't I tell you not to go?" (2 Kings 2:15-18).

Did you get that? The ones who were at a distance refused to believe the one who was right there when it happened! Amazing! But that's not all. We see the same thing happen in the New Testament, after the resurrection, when Jesus appears to the disciples: Later, He appeared to the eleven themselves as they

were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw Him after He had been resurrected (Mark 16:14). And so, it requires a softness of our own hearts just to believe the testimony of those who have seen the activity of God. God forbid that He find a reason to rebuke us while in an atmosphere of His kingdom.

But what about the people in John 12 who thought it was an angel? Where are they today? Earlier, I mentioned a comment thread on the Internet where someone put out the challenge of growing an amputee's limbs. Further down in that same thread, someone else said something like this: Oh, no, I believe this woman walked, because we can do anything we want to when we set our minds to it and believe in ourselves! Really? Even the reconnection of severed nerves in the spinal cord, as in the case of Delia Knox? Those are the "must have been an angel" people. They know that something is happening that they can't explain with their own rationality and experience, but they still refuse to identify it as the one true and living God among us, known and revealed through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is what I refer to as the Oprah Winfrey School of Theology: I am spiritual enough to believe in a spiritual realm, but I refuse to tie it in exclusively to Jesus as the only way to know God.

So then, for those who have seen and heard, and have been witnesses to the love and goodness of God in miraculous ways, what is our response? First, we know that it is not profitable or loving to be angry, defensive and argumentative with those who do not believe. It is supremely frustrating to have unequivocal, and often medically documented, proof of a miracle and have someone flatly deny it, and you know that nothing you say will change their mind.

The classic Philip Yancey quote is ever true, that no one ever converted to Christianity because they lost the argument. So if we can't argue them into truth, what can we do? Well, the

Bible says that it is an eye problem. Even Jesus, in John 3, when He explains what it means to be born again, does so in the context of spiritual sight: "I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3, NIV, emphasis added). As we have already seen, people have already been blinded by the god of this age, and so the remedy is sight, and only the Holy Spirit can give it. And so we pray for them. We pray, not for their comeuppance, not for their humiliation, we pray for them to see. We pray that God opens their eyes to see and their ears to hear what He has prepared for them. However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him *"these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.* The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:9, emphasis added).

And so, whether we are praying for someone who does not know Jesus yet, or someone who is a Christian but is having difficulty accepting what they see and hear, we can join with the apostle Paul in praying one of the most beautiful and powerful prayers ever recorded: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength" (Eph. 1:17-19).

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