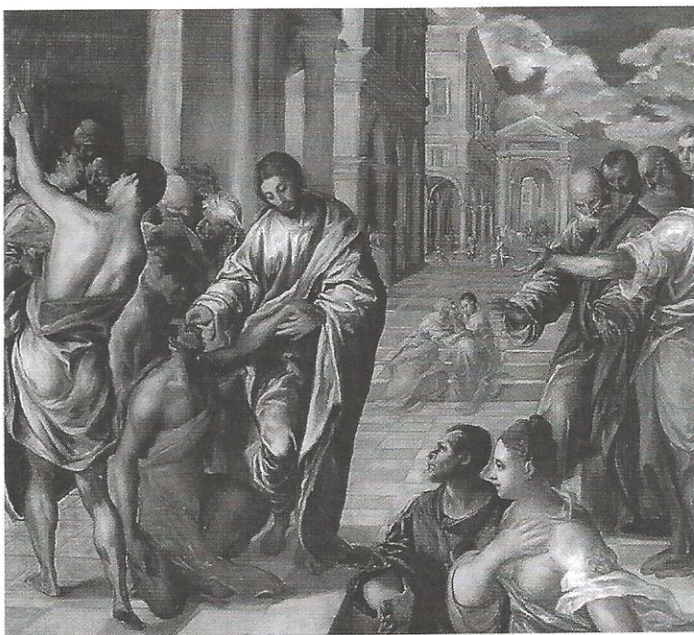


are not easily deemed psychosomatic. In my book, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2011), I note scores of other healing accounts as well as some eyewitness accounts of nature miracles. One case of the latter was among the eyewitness experiences I learned from my close friend Emmanuel Itapson, my colleague in Old Testament at my previous institution.

When Emmanuel was a child, his father Anana was planting churches in northern Nigeria. In one village where they settled, rainy season was beginning but it was going to take a few more days to get the roof on their house. Exasperated by the ridicule of some villagers, Anana announced that it would not rain in that village until he had the roof on his house. After his mockers departed, laughing, Anana fell on his face before God, wondering what he had just done.

For the next four days, until his roof was finished, although rain poured down around the village, not a drop fell within that village. At the end of those four days, there was only one person in the village who had not become a Christian. People in the village still identify that as the precipitating event that made it a Christian village.

**Why don't miracles always occur?** But miracles don't always occur. Before Chauncey Crandall prayed for Jeff Markin, Crandall's own son had died of leukemia. The only other person Leo Bawa prayed for to be raised was his best friend — who stayed dead. My wife and I suffered a series of miscarriages.



Miracles don't replace our responsibility to work for justice, peace, food and medical care in the world. In fact, they show us how much God cares about these things; the kind of miracles Jesus usually performed reveal his compassion for human need.

Concern for when miracles don't occur is not new. With no miracle in sight, John the Baptist awaited death in prison. He heard that Jesus was healing sick people but not baptizing in fire or, so far as John could see, bringing the kingdom. So John sent messengers to ask whether Jesus was the expected Messiah. Jesus responds: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matthew 11:5). His summary paraphrased two passages in Isaiah, the context of which addressed the restoration of God's people and of all creation.

Healings in this life are temporary; we will die again. Healings are not the completed kingdom; they are, however, a foretaste or sample of that kingdom, signs that point our attention toward the kingdom's coming consummation. Their purpose is not to solve all the world's problems today. Instead they are a first installment, a concrete reminder of God's promise that a time will come when there will be no more sickness, no more suffering, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

One sign runs deeper than miracles: in the Cross, God reminds us that even in the worst suffering, he is at work to bring about his purposes. Yet miracles themselves are a gift to all of us, not only those who are dramatically healed. Miracles on behalf of anyone show all of us that God's kingdom is coming, and that he has the power and compassion to fulfill that promise.

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