

## Mission: Miraculous – Jesus Saves the World!

A sermon based on John 3:16: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do you remember what you wanted to be when you were growing up? For me, growing up, I wanted to be an astronaut and a pastor. Could you imagine it, the first pastor in space (although, I'll take being the furthest north WELS pastor in the world as the consolation prize...it's not so bad)?

So, what happened? Well, for one, I'm not the biggest fan of heights, so there's that. But the real reason...I saw the movie *Apollo 13*. Any of you remember that...with Tom Hanks? Do you remember the premise? The Apollo 13, the rocket set to make the historic third lunar landing, had to abort that mission after a defective oxygen tank exploded. A couple hundred thousand miles away from Earth, a spacecraft crippled with limited power, loss of cabin heat, shortage of drinking water...life-threatening conditions. The crew had to attempt – and succeeded – in completing makeshift repairs to the carbon dioxide removal system...so, yeah, being an astronaut suddenly wasn't so appealing anymore.

But they did it. Perhaps you recall how they made it safely back to earth. They used the gravity of the moon to, in a sense, slingshot themselves around the moon back to Earth, burning just the right amount of fuel at just the right time for just the right amount of time and at just the right trajectory. You watched the movie, or maybe, if you're old enough, you remember seeing it or reading about it in the news – the crew getting rescued in the South Pacific from their return module (whose damaged heat shield fortunately held up and protected them upon re-entry into Earth's atmosphere). You think about all of that, and you can't help but think, “This was nothing short of a miracle.”

How many of you have ever witnessed a miracle? You know, at Vacation Bible School, we spent this whole past week witnessing miracles, like holding a full cup of water upside-down and none of the water spilling out, fitting grown children through a piece of paper about this size, Pastor correctly guessing the number of stars flashing up on the screen for a few seconds (and I did not cheat!!!), getting a cheap bendy straw to go straight through a regular potato.

Ok, maybe they were more successful science experiments than miracles, but we still did witness miracles...as we explored God's Word. Do any of you kids remember the miracles? Our Take Home points remind us. Can you help me share them with everyone here? Awesome, thanks! Here we go...“Miraculous Mission...God made me.” *God made me. That's true! That's God!* God miraculously made you and me. He even made the whole universe in just 6 days using the power of his Word.

“Miraculous Mission...God keeps his Word.” *God keeps his Word. That's true! That's God!* Not only did God miraculously keep his promise to Abraham to give him a son in his and Sarah's old age; God miraculously kept all of his promises to Abraham, including the promise to send a Savior.

“Miraculous Mission...Jesus came for me.” *Jesus came for me. That's true! That's God!* Jesus came into this world, miraculously born of a virgin. The Wise Men were able to come and worship Jesus, miraculously guided by a shining star in the East.

And finally, “Miraculous Mission...Jesus saves me.” *Jesus saves me. That's true! That's God!*

Thank you again for your assistance. Now, I want to go back to this last one...Jesus saves me. Let's talk about that a little bit more today, but instead of it being "Miraculous Mission: Jesus saves me," today, I'm slightly altering it to "Mission: Miraculous - Jesus Saves Me!"

Mission: Miraculous...because, while we spent the week learning about God's mission, you should also understand that God has given every one of us a mission as well. It's a three-parter. Do you know what his mission for you is?

Well, our week of VBS was focused on going back to God's Word again and again. Let's do that now. Jesus tells us the first part of his mission in John 6:40, **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."** That's simple enough to understand. God wants us to believe in him...he wants all people to have faith in him.

So, then, the second part? The book of 1 Thessalonians (4:3-7), **"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister...For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."** Or, I guess Jesus put it a little more simply when he said, **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).**

There you have it...1) Believe in Jesus; 2) Be perfect. That's Mission: Miraculous, because, as you can probably guess, it would be miraculous if any of us were able to complete any of that mission on our own. Maybe we'd be better off calling it "Mission: Impossible" (but I didn't know if there'd be copyright infringements to worry about, although, it really should have been more like "Mission: Improbable," because Ethan Hunt always manages – somehow – to accomplish all of his missions...but I digress).

But that's what it is. The mission God has given us in our lives, it's impossible for us to accomplish by ourselves. You believe me? Let's take a closer look.

1) Believe in Jesus. Kind of like in the Mission: Impossible movies, "if you choose to accept" Jesus, it should be as simple as saying it, right? That's my choice.

But again, what does God say? **"The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7).** He says, **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).**

Think about it. The sinful mind is hostile to God. Do you understand that? You tell your 4-year-old daughter it's time to go take a nap. Sometimes, she'll be like, "Ok." More often, she'll defiantly respond, "No!, I don't want to take a nap!" That's hostile, yes, being argumentative. You could go a little further and say it's being aggressive towards someone. But I think the meaning here takes it a step further. Those of you in the military, a hostile is what? The enemy.

That's what sinners are. Hostiles...enemies of God. We are diametrically opposed to God and what he wants (aka his mission). So God says, "Believe in me," and we say, "No way! We hate you!" We do not submit to God.

We couldn't even do that if we wanted to, which is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he said, **"You were dead in your...sins."** You know, what power does a dead person have to do anything, other than being dead? None. So, again, God says, "Believe in me," and in our sin, we're dead...we're

powerless. Or, if you want it even more succinctly, Jesus said, ***“You did not choose me” (John 15:16).*** So, part one of Mission: Miraculous...failed.

What about part 2) Be perfect? Not quite so hard to see another failure on our part, is it? The Bible tells us what we already know so well, ***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).*** From the moment of conception til the day we die, we are all sinners who fall short of the perfection...glory of God. We fail that mission. Whether it’s the white lie you told so you could avoid getting in trouble or the small shove you gave so you could get ahead of someone else...whether it’s the anger and hatred you’ve allowed to stew in your heart for so long that won’t allow you to forgive someone as Jesus calls for you to do...whether it’s the unloving words that come out of your mouth that ruin someone else’s reputation or would cause your grandma to roll over in her grave or have hurt someone you love and have made them walk away from the situation with tears in their eyes...whatever sin it is, we have failed to be perfect.

Again, Mission: Impossible, isn’t it? Except here, the mission failed doesn’t just result in death. It ends in a lifetime without Jesus...an eternity of hell.

You know, the men of Apollo 13, they failed their mission...they couldn’t land on the moon. And it took nothing short of a miracle for them both to survive the deadly conditions in space and to make it back to Earth safely.

We, too, have failed God’s mission. We aren’t perfect. We couldn’t believe in Jesus on our own. We fall way too short of heaven with our lives here. By ourselves, we’re lost. And, so, too, for us, it would a miracle to accomplish it.

Now, we can’t work any miracles, but God can. And for us, God did. And the Bible verse that served as the theme for our VBS – and for our message this morning – reveals God’s mission to save us, ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

It’s Mission: Miraculous – Jesus Saves the World!

Now, what about saving the world was a miracle? Well, you know what the Bible says? ***“No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly” (Psalm 49:7,8).*** There should be no way that we’ll get to be with God in heaven. The cost is just too great. The expectations of perfection are just too high. And we have failed too many times.

But God loved the world...a phrase, which I’ll admit, shouldn’t make sense, should it? “God abandoned the world.” “God condemned the world.” Those would seem to make more sense, with our hostility towards God and our sinfulness.

But, again, God loved the world. And, with us being part of this world, that means God loves you and me, too...so much that he gave his one and only Son. God didn’t just show His Son to the world, as in, “here’s what you’re missing.” God didn’t just send His Son into the world to put us by shame, as he lived a life of perfection...that life we can’t. No, God *gave* His Son for the world. The Father gave His Son – perfect Jesus - into death on the cross so that this world might have life.

And, while the cost to ransom our lives was too great for us to pay, listen to what Jesus said, ***“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew***

**20:28).** By his death, Jesus did what wasn't supposed to be possible. He ransomed your life from sin. He died in your place. With his perfect life, his innocent death, his glorious resurrection, he defeated sin, Satan, death...for good. He defeated sin, death, and the devil for good. It's not like the Avengers (don't worry, no Endgame spoilers!), who would defeat the enemy, save the world...but then you notice, new enemies would keep popping up. No, because Jesus lived, died, and rose, he defeated all our enemies for good. He ransomed our lives. He saved the world. He saved you. He saved me! He's saved us for eternity. Mission accomplished! Mission: Miraculous!

Now, of course, that doesn't get us off the hook for God's mission. He still calls for us to live holy lives. He still calls for us to believe in him...which, again, is impossible on our own. We're not on our own, though! The miracle is that God accomplishes his mission for us. He saved us – all credit to him. He's given us saving faith in him (right, Jesus said, ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you"*** John 15:16) – all credit to him. He's working God-pleasing words and actions through us – all credit to him.

And now, there's one more part. Right, I said God's mission is a three-parter. God so loved the world, but not all the world knows that good news, so part 3) We take his name out to the nations.

I'm guessing you've noticed I've been wearing my nametag from VBS this whole time. I'm sure by now, you know I'm Pastor. But it's what's up here in the corner of the tag that's an important reminder. It says, "Sharing God's miraculous mission." But it also has this rocket ship taking off. Not a coincidence.

Jesus' miraculous mission is done. He's saved the world once and for all. But ours is just beginning. It's time for us to lift off for the mission of sharing the message of Jesus' love with the world...with your neighbor...with your friend...with your co-worker...with whoever needs to hear it. Because through that message – and only through that message – God works real, lasting, eternal miracles in people's hearts.

I may never get to be the first pastor astronaut in space. I'm definitely ok with that. I still have a mission here on Earth. You do, too. Share the miraculous message of how God so loved the world he gave his one and only. "If you choose to accept..." That's kind of deceptive, isn't it? There's no if because there's nothing we'd rather do than share God's love with others. So, let's lift off for Mission: Miraculous – Jesus Saves the World. He's already saved you and me. Now he calls on us to help him complete his mission of saving the world. And we're ready and excited to go!

That's true! That's God. Amen.