

#2 in “The Physics of Faith” series  
10:00 AM July 9, 2023  
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## “Believing the Impossible”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we tackle the **second** in a three-part series juxtaposing **PHYSICS** and **FAITH**. The **FIRST** Sunday we learned from Heisenberg’s “Principle of Uncertainty” that in spite of the absolute certainty of **GOD’S** promises to us, God’s people still need to be prepared to “*expect the unexpected*” while we walk this earth...but never let that stop us from boldly ploughing forward. This morning, we’ll also use quantum **physics** to reinforce our **FAITH** in the process of “*Believing the Impossible*.”

Back in 1964, one of the most revolutionary discoveries in the world of quantum physics was made by James Stuart **Bell**, an Irish physicist who essentially **disproved** the previously believed “**principle of local causes**” and postulated that everything in the universe is interconnected and **UNLIMITED**...even the perceived barrier of **the speed of light**! Thus, two particles that have separated will continue to interact and influence each other—**instantaneously**—regardless of the time and space between them. **SHAZAM!**

Let me try to explain those “**possibilities**”. As we communicate by **talking**, voices produce **sound** waves carrying information at about 700 miles per hour. So, the length of time it takes you to hear me “**wax eloquent**” from the **pulpit** depends on the distance **between** us, with those in the **front** row hearing me infinitesimally faster than those in the back rows (where **most** Lutherans prefer to **sit**.) But the **fastest** communication signals are **light** waves that carry information at approximately **186,000 miles per second**! Almost all of classical **PHYSICS** rests on the assumption that nothing in the universe can travel faster than **the speed of LIGHT**, once considered by physicists to be kind of “the universal **speed limit sign**” posted on **the road to anywhere** in the universe...until **NOW**.

Recent experiments have shown that if two subatomic particles shoot into space as the result of a subatomic **reaction**—then unlike what happens in **Vegas**, what happens to **one** particle **IS** communicated or **SHARED** with the **other** particle “**superluminally**”, meaning even **faster** than the speed of light! This seemingly **impossible** “**instantaneous nonlocality**” is an invisible link between **all** particles that defies both **space AND time**.

“Bell’s Theorem” uncovered that what once was thought to be **IMPOSSIBLE** actually **IS** possible...all because we live in a nonlocal universe with **instantaneous, superluminal** connections...and we **Christians** might add...**supernatural** ones! (But then, you “**prayer warriors**” among us knew that **all along!**) **NOTHING** is impossible to those who have **FAITH** in God’s power and promises!

A week ago, I spoke about Heisenberg’s “**Uncertainty Principle**” that said nothing is absolutely **CERTAIN**. There is always a range of uncertainty in the world of quantum mechanics, so we believers need to be prepared to **EXPECT** the **UNEXPECTED** to happen! **Bell’s Theorem** is kind of a **corollary** adding, “There is always a range of possibility.”

But again, why should that surprise **US**? After **ALL**, didn’t Jesus **Himself** redefine what **IS** and what is **NOT** possible! In **Mark 9**, the father of a demon-afflicted boy asks Jesus to heal his son...but with a **qualifier**: “*IF You can*”. “*What do you mean, IF I can?*” Jesus responds. “*Anything is possible if a person BELIEVES!*” When asked in Matt. 19 about how a person can be deemed truly “**righteous**”, Jesus responds, “*With man this is impossible, but with God ALL things are possible.*” In fact, we can say Jesus positively **trafficked** in making the **IMPOSSIBLY POSSIBLE!** He interrupted weather patterns on the Sea of Galilee. He changed the molecular structure of water into **wine**...really **GOOD** wine! He hardwired a blind man’s **brain**, installing synapses between the optical nerve and visual cortex without **surgery!** Jesus walked **ON** water and **THROUGH** walls! He turned energy into **MATTER**, made the deaf **hear**, the mute **talk**, and the lame **walk**. He raised people from the **dead** and then He **Himself** rose from the grave on Easter morning to prove the Father had accepted **HIS** sacrifice for **OUR** sins. That’s a pretty impressive resume of **miracles**... things many skeptical physicists had written off as being...well... just as **impossible** as exceeding the speed of **light!**

And so, you may respond, “*Yes, easy to SAY, but that’s JESUS! Not ME!*” Then what about **John 14:12** where Jesus says, “*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these.*” And so, “**miracles**” basically represent in Scripture a **reaffirmation** of divine **FAITH** and **redefinition** of what’s **POSSIBLE** in this world when God acts in the life of His people. Jesus said, “*Everything is possible to Him who believes.*”

In the **SPIRITUAL** realm, **FAITH** is the only difference between what is **impossible** and what is **possible**. Impossibilities **disappear** as we **develop** our faith—not in **ourselves**, of course—but in our **ALMIGHTY** God and His **PROMISES**. Emily Dickinson once said, “*I DWELL in possibility.*” Every follower of **Christ** ought **also** to “ **dwell in possibility**”. From the day of our **baptism**, when the Holy Spirit began to **dwell** within **US**, it became our **birthright** as believers to boldly claim with St.

Paul in Philippians 4:13 that, *“I can do **all things** through Christ Who strengthens me.”*

From a **human** perspective, we tend to deal in terms of “**degrees of difficulty**”. We have **small** problems and **big** problems...and even rather **small miracles** (like occasionally hearing a **SHORT** sermon instead of a **long** one) and then **big** miracles like the tornado skipping **YOUR** house while it takes out the rest of the neighborhood. **However**, from an **omnipotent God’s** perspective, there are no “**degrees of difficulty**”! The Lord asks a question in **Jer. 32:27**, *“Is anything too hard for Me?”* That’s **retorical**, folks! The answer is the Hebrew word for “**Duh!**”

Pastor Matt recently preached a whole **series** of messages about **Powerful Pentecost PRAYERS**. **Daniel** prayed and **hungry lions** kept their **mouths** shut! **Hezekiah** prayed and God’s Angel of **Death** polished off **185,000** enemy soldiers in just one night! We tend to think of prayer requests as having “**degrees of difficulty**” and sometimes foolishly “**dumb down**” our celestially-bound petitions **accordingly**...but to an **all-powerful God???** Really? See the **problem** with that? To the **INFINITE**, all **finites** are equal. There’s no big or small, easy or difficult, possible or impossible comparisons or **LIMITS** to our omnipotent, Lord God **ALL-MIGHTY!**

Today’s Old Testament Lesson from **2 Kings 6:1-7** records one of those seemingly impossible miracles: Elisha’s popular “*School of the Prophets*” Training Center” was bursting at the seams, so his group of would-be prophets came to Elisha and told him, *“This place where we meet with you is too **small**. Let’s go down to the Jordan River where there’ll be plenty of logs and build a **new place** for us to meet.”* When they arrived at the Jordan, they began cutting down **trees**. But as one of them was **chopping**, his **ax head** fell into the **river!** He said, *“**Alas, master!** It was **borrowed!**”* Note the **PAST** tense. To him, that axe head was as good as **gone** with no expectation whatsoever for retrieval! He wasn’t expecting a **miracle**, because even back **THEN**, the physics of **metallurgy** dictated that any mineral with a density greater than **one gram** per cubic centimeter **does not float**, and the density of **cast iron** is approximately **7.2 grams** per cubic centimeter. **SO...iron axe heads just don’t FLOAT!**

Now if I’d been **Elisha**, I’d feel bad for my student prophet who lost the borrowed axe head and maybe loan him **mine**...or at least help him get a **new** one. And yet, it probably wouldn’t even cross my **mind** to pray that the original one would simply **float!** But you can tell the wheels are turning in Elisha’s brain, because he asks, *“Where did it **fall?**”* Now what **difference** does it make? It’s at the bottom of the **river!** But that doesn’t stop miracle-minded **Elisha!** So, when he showed him the **place**, Elisha cut a **stick**, threw it into the water where the axe head had hit the water, and the axe head **floated** to the surface. *“**Grab it!**”* Elisha said to him. And

the young man reached out and **grabbed** it! The apprentice was probably was so surprised to see what he was **seeing** that he **had** to have been just standing there in **shock**!

Miracles can't be **taught** or **planned**. They can only be **experienced** and **believed**. The **irony** is these **apprentice prophets** were building a bigger school so **more** prophets could take classes from **Elisha** who, of course, had been the great prophet **Elijah's** apprentice whom God had taken alive to heaven in a whirlwind and chariot of fire! And while they're building a place to **learn**, God gives them a "**hands-on demo**" of something that can't be learned in a classroom **course book** on miracles! Even in the **New Testament**, Jesus' circle of disciples discovered that the greatest lessons are rarely learned in a **classroom** but out in the **field**, because they can't be **taught** as much as **caught** or **experienced**.

**Admittedly**, this miracle doesn't exactly come out of a **life-and-death** situation! Some of you may not even have **remembered** this miracle recorded in Scripture! Hey, the guy lost a borrowed **AXE head**! If that's the worst thing that's ever happens to **you**, you've led a pretty blessed life! It's an **axe head**! And doesn't it seem like maybe Elisha might have saved a miracle for a little **bigger** tragedy? I'd put this in the category of Jesus' first recorded miracle of turning water into **wine** at a **wedding** reception. Why "**waste**" your first miracle on helping a bride and groom **save face** just because they didn't have enough sense to stock enough wine for the **reception**? And yet, it **does** say something about our **God**...that He also cares about "**the little things**" in the lives of His children. Nothing is "**too small**" for our "**great God**"! John Newton, the former **slave-trader** turned **hymnwriter**, who wrote "**Amazing Grace**", once penned these words: "*Not one concern of ours is **small**...If we belong to **Him**... To **teach** us this, the Lord of **all**...Once made some iron to **swim**."*

Way back in 1952, J. B. Phillips, the famous Bible translator, wrote the book, **Your God Is Too Small**! Most of us believers, as well as God's churches, live way **below** the level of our God-given potential, because we're thinking, living, and dreaming **SMALL**...while shrinking God down to fit into our tiny little **boxes**! Our attempts at reaching out to others with the Gospel remain relatively **tiny** and **tenuous**, shaped by the restricted parameters of our **OWN tiny box** rather than the powerful promises of our bold and Almighty **Miracle Maker**. So also, many a trained **physicist** refused to think "**outside the box**", arrogantly dismissing the possibility of exceeding the **speed of light**, because it threatened their more comfortable **limits**! But remember Jesus' answer to His disciples' question about the incident in **Matt. 17:20**? "*Jesus responded to them, "You could not drive out the demon" 'because of your **little faith**. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from **here to there**, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.*"

In the 1930's, a graduate student at UC Berkeley named George Danzig was **late to class** one day. His math prof had written **two problems** on the blackboard. Danzig assumed they were the **homework** assignment...in **fact**, the most **difficult** homework assignment he'd ever **encountered!** It took him nearly a **week** to finally figure them out, but he thought he'd still get a **bad grade** because it took so long to turn it **in!**

A few weeks later, George heard a **pounding** on his door early in the morning. He was surprised to see his **math prof** standing there. *"George! You solved the problem!"* George said, *"Of course! They were our homework assignment."* The professor said, *"They weren't your homework assignment. Those were two of the most famous unsolvable problems in mathematics! The world's leading mathematicians have been trying for years to solve the two problems you solved in a just few days!"* Danzig later became a professor at Stanford University. He said, *"If someone had told me that they were two famous unsolved problems, I probably wouldn't even have tried to solve them!"*

Danzig solved two unsolvable problems because he didn't know it **"couldn't"** be done. Elisha prayed for the axe head to **float** because his faith told him it **COULD** be done. You **do** realize, don't you, that God doesn't answer prayers we never actually get around to **praying**, don't you? Jesus said, *"You have not because you ask not."* Isn't it time we boldly offer up those prayers to see, **"What FLOATS?"** Isn't it time we allow **GOD**, rather than the **physicists**, to determine for us what's truly possible or **impossible?**

Too often, we parse and **dissect** Scripture instead of allowing Scripture to dissect **US!** Even in **Bible study**, we mistakenly think the purpose is to give us **knowledge**. That's certainly a needed **byproduct**, but St. Paul reminded his protégé, Timothy, in 2 Tim. 3:15 that the sacred writings are able to make you *"wise for salvation through FAITH in Christ Jesus"*. In other words, the **ultimate** purpose of Scripture is to give us saving **FAITH** in **God's promises** that allow us to lift our eyes toward **HEAVEN** and **"believe the impossible"**...to have **faith** in a God Who made this universe just by **speaking it** into existence!

Ever hear of the brilliant German Lutheran mathematician and astronomer, Johannes Kepler? He had the best definition of science **EVER!** He called it, *"Thinking God's thoughts after Him"*. But before Galileo provided him with a **telescope**, Kepler had scanned the stars with his naked eyes and confidently **declared** that he'd catalogued **all the stars God had put in the sky**...all **777** of them!

I had a friend and classmate in high school who was part of the **Astronomy Club**. He eventually matriculated on to a **doctorate** in astrophysics and to run a

planetarium in Southern California for many years. When Bob would point out things in the **sky** at night with his **homemade telescope**, he always could see far more than **I** could, because my “**astral acumen**” was woefully **limited** compared to **his**! But even back **then**, I couldn’t help but look up at the marvelous matrices of constellations and stand in **awe** of “*what God had wrought*”! No wonder St. Paul could write in Rom. 1:20, “*For ever since the world was created, people have **seen** the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can **clearly** see His invisible qualities—His eternal **power** and **divine nature**. So, they have no excuse for **NOT** knowing God.*”

Every time I step out of my house and gaze at that celestial **carpet** of twinkling stars on our clear foothill nights, I can almost hear the Creator ordering me to, “**Take your limitations off of what I can do for you!**” It reminds me of **Abraham** in Gen. 15. His faith in God had lagged. He thought he’d **NEVER** have an heir. And so, in a **vision** one **night**, God dragged him out from under the limitations of his tent’s ceiling to a hilltop field to gaze at the night sky filled with more stars than any human being could even **imagine**, **challenging** Abraham to believe God’s promise to give him numbers of **descendants** like **THAT!** St. Paul says in Romans 9 that Abraham got his **wish**, because the billions of believers throughout the years are **ALSO** called “*children of Abraham*” through their faith in Christ.

**FAITH** allows God’s people to get out of their **tents** (**AND** church doors) and to entertain **eternal possibilities**, even while some brilliant **physicists** **DON’T**...those **astrophysicists** who still **remain TONE DEAF** to “*the music of the spheres*” or **BLIND** to the full spectrum of “*the fearfully and wonderfully made world*” around them...a universe that’s **overflowing** with the miracles not only of God’s **unlimited POWER** but **especially** the miracle of God’s **unlimited GRACE** and **SALVATION** in our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In **His** Name, Amen!