

# Miracles

MATTHEW COWLEY

Good morning, my brothers and sisters of the BYU. I'm sure that you're going to have a let down from the inspiration we have had and the beautiful singing. But I hope that I may be in tune with the heavenly powers, that I may say something to you that will be worthwhile.

I do feel very humble this morning, and sometimes when I'm introduced I get the idea that others might feel that I'm untouchable, but I want you to know that I'm neither untouchable nor unteachable. And since I've been in this position in the Church, I have learned some very fine things from some of the members of the Church, generally in anonymous letters. I don't know why they don't sign those letters, because almost invariably what they say is true, especially when I look it up in the books.

When I was invited to come here, President Wilkinson suggested that I talk a little bit about miracles. Well, it will be a miracle if I do. I had a particular instruction from President George Albert Smith when I was called to this position. He called me into his office one day and took hold of my hand, and while he was holding my hand and looking at me, he said, "I want to say something to you, Brother Cowley."

I said, "Well, I'm willing to listen."

"This is just a particular suggestion to you—not to all the Brethren, but to you." He said, "Never

write a sermon. Never write down what you are going to say."

I said, "What on earth will I do?"

He said, "You tell the people what the Lord wants you to tell them while you are standing on your feet."

I said, "That certainly is putting some responsibility on the Lord."

But I've tried to live up to that instruction, and I've had some great experiences. There have been times when the Lord has forsaken me, but when He hasn't, I've had some miraculous experiences. Well, I shouldn't say miraculous; it is the normal experience of the priesthood to have the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I can bear witness to you, my fellow students here this morning, that God can work through His priesthood and that He does work through it. I know that without any question of doubt. I've had too many experiences. I'm an expert witness about these things.

## **The Faith of a Child**

A few weeks ago I was called to the County Hospital in Salt Lake City by a mother. I didn't know her. She said her boy was dying from polio,

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and she asked if I would come down and give that boy a blessing. I picked up a young bishop whom I generally take with me, for I think his faith is greater than mine and I always like having him along. We went down there and found this young lad in an iron lung, unconscious, his face rather a blackish color, with a tube in his throat, and they said he had another tube lower down in his abdomen. He had been flown in from an outlying community.

The mother said to me, "This is an unusual boy, not because he's my child, but he is an unusual boy." I think he was eight or nine years of age.

After they put the usual coverings on us, we went in and we blessed that boy. It was one of those occasions when I knew as I laid my hands upon that lad that he was an unusual boy and that he had faith. Having faith in his faith, I blessed him to get well and promised him he would recover.

I never heard any more about him until last Saturday. I was on my way to Murray for a conference, and I dropped in at the County Hospital. I asked if I might see the lad.

The nurse said, "Certainly. Walk right down the hall."

As I walked down the hall, out came the boy running to meet me. He ran up and asked, "Are you Brother Cowley?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "I want to thank you for that prayer." He added, "I was unconscious then, wasn't I?"

I replied, "You certainly were."

He said, "That's the reason I don't recognize you."

Then he said, "Come on in my room; I want to talk to you." He was an unusual boy.

Well, we went in the room. He still had a tube in his throat.

I said, "How long are you going to have that tube there?"

He said, "Oh, two weeks. Two more weeks and then I'm all well. How about another blessing?"

I said, "Certainly."

I blessed him again, and then I was in a hurry. I wanted to get out to my conference.

But he stopped me and asked, "Hey, how about my partner in the next bed?" He was a young fellow of about sixteen or seventeen.

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Don't go out without blessing him. He's my partner."

I said, "Sure."

Then I asked the older boy, "Would you like a blessing?"

He said, "Yes, sir. I'm a teacher in the Aaronic priesthood in my ward."

I blessed him, and then my little friend left and brought another fellow in. Here was another partner. I blessed him too.

Now, except ye believe as a child, you cannot receive these great blessings. We have to have the faith of a child in order to believe in these things, especially when you reach college age and your minds are so full of skepticism and doubt. I guess there are some things that you should doubt, but you can become as little children in these things.

### Modern-Day Miracles

Miracles are commonplace, brothers and sisters. In 1851–52, Parley P. Pratt wrote a book called *The Key to the Science of Theology*. In that book he said, in effect, that the days would come when man would not be satisfied with going along the surface of the earth at the rate of sixty, seventy, eighty, or ninety miles an hour, but he would use the air and go at the rate of a thousand miles an hour (see Pratt, *The Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction* [Liverpool: F. D. Richards; London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855], 152).

In 1852, when he wrote that, he was crazy, wasn't he? He was mad—but he was a prophet. Today it is commonplace. Since the first time I flew from San Francisco to Australia, the flying time has been decreased twelve hours. I see in the papers that they are going to have a jet plane from Vancouver, Canada, to Tokyo, Japan, that will require only eight hours to go between those distant points. Now are these miracles? No, they are commonplace—just commonplace.

The boy Prophet went into the grove and prayed—a young lad with simple faith. He opened

up his heart to God. He apparently reached out and by his prayer got under his control the proper channel, and God and the Son came down and appeared to him.

A few weeks ago I sat in my front room and had Dwight Eisenhower come right into my front room. I saw him sworn in as president of the United States. I saw the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue better than the people who were standing right there at the side of the avenue trying to see the parade over other people's shoulders. All right in my own front room, with the same thing happening in millions of homes across the country. There was no wire connecting me or my home with Washington, DC, just these channels—or whatever Brother Harvey Fletcher and others call them out here, air waves, or whatever they are. But through those channels I brought into my home the president of the United States and the inaugural ceremonies. If I would have told you twenty-five years ago that this would be done in this year 1953, I know what you would have told me.

Well, no man invented those elements out there. Man has invented instruments whereby he harnesses those elements, but he never invented the elements; they are eternal. They've been there all the time, and if I can turn a little gadget and bring the president of the United States into my front room, God can bring Himself within the vision of man. The Master can come within the range of man's vision because He has more control over those elements out there than man does.

The Prophet Joseph said that Moroni appeared to him in his bedroom. I've been back there to that house. I have stood there and wondered how he got through those walls, how he came in. I shouldn't wonder anymore.

I was on a freight ship going to the Society Islands a few years ago. I was up in the chart room with the captain, who was checking his charts, and I said, "Where are we about now?"

He showed me on the map and then said, "Would you like to see where we are going?"

I said, "Sure."

He walked over to some kind of a contraption, turned a couple of dials, and said, "That's where we're going."

I looked into a piece of glass, and I saw a beautiful island. I had never seen it before in my life. It was the island of Tahiti, and I was looking at it from that ship hundreds of miles away.

Now, he didn't have a Kodak with a large telescopic lens taking a picture of Tahiti and showing me the proof and the print. He had an instrument that could reach out and bring into his vision islands hundreds of miles away.

He turned another dial, and I saw several ships. He said, "Those ships are on their way to Australia."

Now I don't doubt anymore about the angel Moroni coming into the Prophet's home. Man hasn't yet harnessed all of these elements. He's working at it and meeting with great success. But if I could bring the island of Tahiti into the chart room of that freight ship by turning a dial, God can send a resurrected being through walls and roofs into the home of a young inquiring mind that is seeking the truth.

I was on an island down in French Oceania one Sunday afternoon. I started fooling with the radio. I don't know whether you're supposed to play radios on Sunday afternoon or not, but I started turning the dials. All of a sudden I heard the voice of Richard L. Evans from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. The strange thing about it was that I wasn't in contact with Salt Lake City; I was in tune with a station in Houston, Texas. That station was getting the program from Salt Lake City, and I was picking it up from Houston. I can't explain these things. Some of you fellows can. I can't explain them. But I had an instrument there that man had invented so that he could bring these elements out here under his control and direction.

I was over in Samoa. I couldn't sleep because I was worrying about the centipedes and so forth, so I got up. It was three o'clock in the morning. I went in the room where they had the radio. I started turning the dials, and all of a sudden I heard a voice say, "Station KSL, Salt Lake City. Songs of Harry Clark." I sat there and listened to Harry Clark sing for fifteen minutes. Then I had to get up the next morning at three o'clock because I'd sent him a wire and I wanted to see if he had gotten it. He had. He mentioned it over the air. So

I listened to him sing for another fifteen minutes. The strange thing about it was that I was hearing him sing four hours before he actually sang. And you talk about miracles.

I got on a plane one day in Tonga. It was Saturday morning, the Sabbath of the Seventh-day Adventists. The head of the Seventh-day Adventists' mission in the Pacific got on the plane with me. Down at the airport were his Sunday School children and ministers to give him a send-off, singing hymns and so on. Well, we got on that plane Saturday morning, and we went to Samoa. When we arrived at Samoa, it was Friday, the day before we had left Tonga.

I just wondered how he was going to straighten out that "seventh day" business. He'd already had one Saturday—one Sabbath—and here he was again in Samoa on a Friday, the day before he'd had the Sabbath. The next day he had another. I tried to find him to ask him from which Saturday he was going to start counting the seven days. Well, these things happen. This is going on all over the world.

The missionaries down in Samoa didn't have a president for a few months, so I became the president by remote control. I used to go to a Chinaman's home in Honolulu and tell him to tune in with one of our natives down in Samoa, then tell that native to round up all the missionaries so that I could give them some instruction. The Chinaman would tune in down there and get this young Samoan with his ham radio. I'd sit there in that Chinese home and talk to these missionaries down in Samoa and give whatever instructions I wanted to give them. But they being the usual missionaries, I don't think they paid any attention.

I telephoned one day from Honolulu to my home. I asked the engineer there at the radio-phone place, "How can I talk confidentially to my wife? If I send this message out into the air, anybody with a ham radio can reach out and pick it up."

He said, "Yeah, that's right, but they won't understand it."

I said, "Well, why not?"

He said, "Well, when your words go out of this transmitter, we jumble them up; there is

no meaning to them. But when they go into the receiver on the mainland, they are all straightened out again, and your wife will understand them just as you spoke them."

My, I'm glad of that. I'll tell you why. I get my prayers so jumbled up sometimes that I'm glad there's a receiving set over on the other side that will straighten out the things I'm trying to say. And I believe that; I'm just simple enough to believe that. I'm simple enough to believe that if man can talk to man across the ocean and across the world with these instruments, then man can talk to God. I believe that God has as much power as man, as much control over the elements.

And so, brothers and sisters of the Church, God has His priesthood here upon the earth—His power—and with that power we can be used by God for the accomplishment of His purposes. Don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget it. I've had these experiences. I know.

### **Incredible Faith**

I've learned a lot from these islanders whom I see scattered around here. I see Albert Whaanga down there from New Zealand. I wish he'd teach you people how to rub noses. That's what we do down in New Zealand, you know. We don't really rub, we just press our forehead and nose against the forehead and nose of the other person. It's a wonderful thing. You can always tell when they are keeping the Word of Wisdom down there. All you have to do is walk up and greet them and sniff a little bit, and you've got 'em—you've got 'em! It would be a good practice to have over here, maybe even with some of our BYU students. If I ever come up to one of you someday and say I'd like to rub noses with you, you'll know I suspect something.

Those natives live close to God. They have some kind of power. I guess it is just because they accept miracles as a matter of course. They never doubt anything. They used to scare me.

Someone would come up and say, "Brother Cowley, I've had a dream about you."

I'd say, "Don't tell me; I don't want to hear about it."

“Oh, it was a good one.”

“All right. Tell me, tell me.”

And they’d tell me something.

I remember when President Rufus K. Hardy of the First Council of the Seventy passed away. I was walking along the street of one of the cities in New Zealand, and one of our native members came up—a lady.

She said to me, “President Hardy is dead.”

I said, “Is that so? Have you received a wire?”

She said, “No. I know. I received a message, but I haven’t any wire.” She repeated, “He’s dead. I know.”

I always believed them when they told me those things. When I got back to headquarters, I wasn’t there long when I received a cablegram that said that President Hardy had passed away the night before. But she knew that without any cablegram. She had told me about it.

I got out of my car once in the city to do some window shopping and to get a little rest from driving. I walked around and finally went around a corner. There stood a native woman and her daughter.

The mother said to the daughter, “What did I tell you?”

I said, “What’s going on here?”

The daughter said, “Mother said if we’d stand here for fifteen minutes, you’d come around the corner.”

She didn’t have any radio set with her, just one down in her mind or heart where she got the impression.

After President Hardy died, we had a memorial service for him. I’ll never forget the native who was up speaking, saying what a calamity it was to the mission to lose this great New Zealand missionary who could do so much for them as one of the authorities of the Church.

He was talking along that line, and all of a sudden he stopped, and he looked around at me and said, “Wait a minute. There’s nothing to worry about—not a thing to worry about. When President Cowley gets home, he’ll fill the first vacancy in the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and we’ll still have a representative among the

authorities of the Church.” Then he went on talking about President Hardy again.

When I arrived home the following September, I filled the first vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve.

Did that just happen by chance? Oh, I might have thought so if it had been one of you white Gentiles who had prophesied that, but not from the blood of Israel. Oh no, I could not deny it; I could not doubt it.

### Prayer and Fasting

Remember, we have great opportunities to bless. Sometimes I wonder if we do enough in our administration of the sick. When the disciples tried to cast out a dumb spirit, they couldn’t do it—or they didn’t do it. The Master came along, and He immediately cast out the dumb spirit.

Then the disciples said, “Why could not we cast him out?” (Matthew 17:19).

And what did Christ say? “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

Sometimes we rush in, administer to a person, rush out, and say, “Well, he won’t make it. I know he won’t.” Of course we have to go immediately in case of an emergency, but sometimes I wonder, if we have a little time, if we shouldn’t do a little fasting. “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

A little over a year ago a couple came into my office carrying a little boy. The father said to me, “My wife and I have been fasting for two days, and we’ve brought our little boy up for a blessing. You are the one we’ve been sent to.”

I said, “What’s the matter with him?”

They said he was born blind, deaf, and dumb, with no coordination of his muscles, and he couldn’t even crawl at the age of five years.

I said to myself, “This is it. ‘This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.’” I had implicit faith in the fasting and the prayers of those parents.

I blessed that child, and a few weeks later I received a letter:

*Brother Cowley, we wish you could see our little boy now. He’s crawling. When we throw a ball across the*

*floor, he races after it on his hands and knees. He can see. When we clap our hands over his head, he jumps. He can hear.*

Medical science had laid the burden down. God had taken over. The little boy was rapidly recovering—or, really, getting what he'd never had.

I have a friend down in Honolulu. He was called one day to the hospital by one of our native sisters who had a child there with polio. She said, "Bishop, hurry up to the hospital and give my child a blessing."

That was one morning. He never showed up all day.

The next afternoon he went up, and she started giving him a tongue lashing. "You, my bishop, your own boss. I asked you to come and bless my child seriously ill, and you didn't show up."

He waited until she had finished, and then he said, "When I hung up the receiver yesterday, I started to fast. I've been fasting and praying. Now I'm ready."

That was early in the afternoon. He blessed the child. The child went home that evening, released from the hospital. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

### **More Than a Psychological Effect**

I went into a hospital in New Zealand one day to bless a woman who didn't belong to the Church. She was dying. We all knew she was dying. The doctors had even said so. She was having her farewell party.

That's one thing I like about the natives. When you go, they give you a farewell party. They all gather around. They send messages over to the other side: "When you get over there, tell my mother I'm trying to do my best; I'm not so good, but I'm trying. Tell her to have a good room fixed for me when I get over there and plenty of fish, good meal."

My, it's wonderful how they send you off. There they were, all gathered around this poor sister. She was about to be confined, and the doctor told her it would kill her. She was tubercular from head to foot.

I had with me an old native, almost ninety. She was his niece. He stood up at the head of the bed, and he said: "Vera, you're dead. You're dead because the doctor says you're dead. You're on your way out. I've been to you, your home, and your people—my relatives. I'm the only one that joined the Church. None of you has ever listened to me. You're dead now, but you're going to live."

He turned to me and said, "Is it all right if we kneel down and pray?"

I said, "Yes."

We knelt down. Everybody around there knelt down, and after the prayer we blessed her. The last time I was in New Zealand, she was physically well from head to foot and had had her fifth child. She has not joined the Church yet. That's the next miracle I'm waiting for there.

Well, now, this is just psychological effect, isn't it? There's nothing to this priesthood business. It's only psychological effect. But where was the psychological effect on that little boy in the County Hospital who was so unconscious that he didn't even know we were praying over him? He wasn't even conscious of what we were doing.

I was called to a home in a little village in New Zealand one day. There the Relief Society sisters were preparing the body of one of our Saints. They had placed his body out in front of the big house, as they call it—the house where the people come to wail and weep and mourn over the dead—when in rushed the dead man's brother.

He said, "Administer to him."

The young natives said, "Why, you shouldn't do that; he's dead."

"You do it!"

This same old man that I had had with me when his niece was ill was there. The younger native got down on his knees and anointed the dead man. Then this great old sage got down and blessed him and commanded him to arise. You should have seen the Relief Society sisters scatter.

He sat up and said, "Send for the elders; I don't feel very well."

Of course, all of that was just psychological effect on that dead man. Wonderful, isn't it—this psychological effect business?

We told him he had just been administered to, and he said, "Oh, that was it."

He said, "I was dead. I could feel life coming back into me just like a blanket unrolling."

He outlived the brother who had come in and told us to administer to him.

I've told the story about the little baby, nine months old, who was born blind. The father came up to me one Sunday and said, "Brother Cowley, our baby hasn't been blessed yet. We'd like you to bless him."

I said, "Why have you waited so long?"

"Oh, we just didn't get around to it."

That's the native way; I like that. They just don't get around to doing things. Why not live and enjoy it?

I said, "All right. What's the name?"

He told me the name, and I was just going to start when he said, "By the way, give him his vision when you give him a name. He was born blind."

It shocked me, but then I said to myself, "Why not?" Christ said to His disciples when He left them, "Greater works than these shall [ye] do" (John 14:12). I had faith in that father's faith.

After I gave that child his name, I finally got around to giving him his vision.

That boy is about twelve years old now. The last time I was back there, I was afraid to inquire about him. I was sure he had gone blind again. That's the way my faith works sometimes. I asked the branch president about him.

He said, "Brother Cowley, the worst thing you ever did was to bless that child to receive his vision. He's the meanest kid in this neighborhood, always getting into mischief."

Boy, I was thrilled about that kid getting into mischief!

I was down on the Indian reservation when I met a sister who had just joined the Church, a beautiful Navajo woman. My, they dress beautifully down there. I have never seen an immodestly dressed Indian woman, never seen an

Indian indecently exposed. Those beautiful velvet dresses—they leave everything to the imagination. My, it's wonderful to be modest. They get on these beautiful dresses and go out and buy their groceries at the trading post.

Anyway, after I had met this sister, one of the missionaries called me off to the side and said: "A few months ago my companion and I went into a hogan and that lady, that Indian sister, was lying on the ground on a sheepskin. She had been lying there for six long years. We called on her, and when we were leaving she called us back and said in broken English, 'Isn't there something you do for sick people?' And we said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Please do it for me.'"

They got down on their knees and administered to her by the authority of the priesthood and in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they left. They weren't fifty yards away when she came out of the hogan after them and said, "Come back and see what you have done for me." She walked.

God does have control of all of these elements. You and I can reach out, and if it's His will, we can bring those elements under our control for His purposes. I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. If there ever was a miracle in the history of mankind, that miracle is this Church, which has grown to its present greatness on the earth.

Your institution here stems from the prayer of a boy who was persecuted, who was driven from pillar to post, whose life was taken, who has been branded as the greatest fraud who ever lived on the American continent. This Church from that kind of a fraud is the greatest miracle of modern history. It's a miracle of God our Father.

May you all have an inward witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet and that God used him to bring about His purposes in this dispensation of the fulness of times. May we always be loyal, devoted, and simple in our faith, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.