God Sightings: When God Shows Up
Week 3: Miracles of Deliverance

Good morning Connection Church Family! And thank you Paul for sharing your story with us, WOW! What God does when He shows up!

This whole series is all about miracles, the ones found in scripture, the ones in our church story and the ones that happen in our everyday lives. These God Sightings, as we we're calling them, are times when God shows up and does His work in our lives.

We started by celebrating 25 years of miracles and God's faithfulness through the generations on week 1 and last week we talked about miracles of provision, times in our lives when we struggle with enough and God shows up and provides.

Today, we are going to be talking about miracles of deliverance. These miracles are all throughout the scriptures, and we may even be fooled in thinking that's the only place they are. But there are certainly miracles of deliverance happening today.

Before we jump in, lets pray.

When you think of miracles of deliverance, what immediately comes to mind? Probably some extreme examples of what we read about in the bible, right? Even now, there's probably a few floating around in your mind. Honestly, it was hard to pick just 2 to focus on today!

When we think of this word- deliverance, we may find it hard to relate to. After all, it's difficult for many of us to understand spiritual oppression or supernatural bondage, and it may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

And I want to make this one point clear- there is a difference between relating to the need for a miracle and believing that God can perform the miracle. We all have different needs and are in different seasons, and I think we all can recognize this.

However, I actually think that there are many more of us here today that may need that miracle of deliverance in our lives more than we realize. Maybe we just haven't thought of it as that or named it as deliverance in that way, yet.

How many of us have felt stuck? Felt like no matter how much we try to get out of our circumstances, whether emotionally or spiritually, we just keep hitting the same wall over and over? The old, "one step forward, 2 steps back" feeling?

How many of us have ever felt powerless to stop some sort of uncontrollable habit? Some negative thought pattern, or a sin that we completely despise but feel helpless to be able quit?

Or what about moments of sudden heaviness, maybe feelings of overwhelming waves of anger, fear, or anxiety that appear to come out of nowhere? Feelings in your spirit of unexplained resistance or agitation?

These feelings may be invisible, but they are very, very real and many of us really struggle with them.

The word "deliverance" is defined as the act of being set free, rescued, or saved from a dangerous, harmful, or restrictive situation. It can mean a general kind of rescue or liberation, but it can also mean a spiritual or psychological freedom from sin and spiritual darkness.

Paul reminds us of this truth of rescue in Colossians 1:13-14 when he says:

> *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

So I actually want to challenge us today and get really honest in saying this:

We all need deliverance from something.

All of us struggle with some kind of hidden battle, burden, or limitation that we cannot overcome on our own. We all need to be delivered from it.

How about that for making deliverance relatable today?!

The need for deliverance in our human existence is not a new concept. And as we know, God has been delivering people from all sorts of burdens and battles since time began. He has listened to the cries for rescue from His people across generations.

The Psalms are full of cries of deliverance. In fact, there are 26 Psalms that are categorized as petitions asking for deliverance, and there are many more that mention or highlight themes of deliverance throughout.

Psalm 34 states:

> *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears…This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles…The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles…The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all…"* Psalm 34:4,6,17,19

The types of deliverance we face today are simply modern echoes of the physical and spiritual battles that have long been fought by people in scripture.

And it's the same God who's doing the delivering.

In Daniel 3, we see deliverance powerfully illustrated in the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three young men we mandated to bow down to this gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had constructed. If they did not, the consequence was being fed to the flames of the fiery furnace.

Many biblical scholars believe that this massive golden statue-about 90-99 feet tall by about 9ft. wide!- was an image of a human, either one of Babylon's gods, King Nebuchadnezzar himself or another symbol of political and religious authority.

We know that whatever it was, these men knew that it was a false God and not to bow down to it. And of course when King Nebuchadnezzar found out about their refusal, he was furious.

> *"Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Daniel 3:14-15*

Wow, this King is serious. And really, their response could have been simple. They could have apologized for the misunderstanding, publicly bowed, and privately continued to keep their personal beliefs. But check out their bold and dangerous reply-

> *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."* Daniel 3:16-18

Talk about a slap to the face. King Nebuchadnezzar is "hot" with anger and he orders the furnace to be heated 7 times hotter and has his strongest men tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them in. And check this out-

> *"So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach,*

Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace." Daniel 3:21-23

And this sets the scene for a miracle of deliverance to take place. And really, in this moment, nothing else would have worked. We know what happens next. The king looks in, and he's shocked to see that not only are these rebel guys alive in the furnace, but there is another man in there with them. He orders them come out and they find that not even the hair on their heads was singed.

These men were delivered and in their deliverance, an entire empire got a glimpse of the one true God. King Nebuchadnezzar praised their god for this rescue and not only promoted them in the province of Babylon, but also decreed that anyone who spoke out against their god would be "cut into pieces", saying that "no other god can save in this way." (Daniel 3:28-30)

This miracle of deliverance is one that is far beyond human capability or natural law.

We see this same supernatural power at work again, in Acts 12. But instead of three Hebrew men facing a blazing furnace, we find Peter facing a prison cell.

And just as we know that fire cannot limit God, neither can prison walls, chains or armed guards.

This account of deliverance takes place in Acts 12, where we find that another tyrannical king, King Herod has seized Peter and thrown him in jail with not just one guard, but the bible says with "4 guards of 4 soldiers each"- so 16 men to watch over him.

And just before the miracle happens, we read this in verse 5-

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him."

Whether the church was praying for a miracle or not, we don't know. But we do know that God intervenes and that is exactly what Peter received.

"The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists." Acts 12:6-7

Can you imagine that kind of a wakeup call? To be sleeping in a jail cel, the night before your fate is decided, between 2 soldiers, and you get struck on the side and awake to see an angel? Peter thought he was dreaming. But the angel continued-

> *"Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him."* Acts 12:8-10

Poof, that's it. All of the sudden, Peter finds himself freed from prison, standing alone in the middle of the night, with a faint recollection of an angel coming to save him and then disappearing. When he comes fully out of his seemingly fever-like dream, he realizes the truth-

> *"Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."* Acts 12:11

Peter goes on to continue his ministry, bringing many more people to know Jesus and even writing 2 New Testament epistles- 1 and 2 Peter to churches that are scattered and living as foreigners in another land.

This act of deliverance reminds us of this truth. Neither human security of chains and prison walls nor human strength and can stand in the way of God. True power doesn't belong to the rulers of this world; it belongs to the all-powerful God who created this world.

There are many other great stories of miracles in the bible and in our world today. We can find many of them in children's bibles and Sunday school lessons, yet they are often watered down, not truly showing the miraculous power of God. When we look at these stories through the lens of deliverance, we can see something pretty reassuring-

God is NEVER intimidated by our biggest problems.

Whether it's fire and death, or persecution and prison walls, or debt, or addiction, or loneliness or sickness or worry or fear, or ANYTHING. Nothing is ever too big or too impossible for Him to overcome.

As the prophet Jeremiah reminds us,

> "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." Jeremiah 32:17

So church, what is it that you need to be delivered from today?

I came across this insightful and powerful quote from Christian author and pastor, A.W. Tozer this week. He said-

> "Deliverance can come to us only by the defeat of our old life. Safety and peace come only after we have been forced to our knees. God rescues us by breaking us, by shattering our strength and wiping out our resistance."

What you resisting? What do you need to be broken of and defeated of so that you can have the new life that God as for you?

What is that one thing that when you think about being freed from it, you breathe a sigh of relief? Your body relaxes, maybe even a smile comes to your face as you allow yourself to think for the first time about the joy and the peace that you would have if you could just be delivered from that burden?

I talk to a lot of people who struggle with and ask the question of why-Why did I even get stuck with this trial, this burden, this setback in the first place? Why God, why?

And I don't think that is actually the question we should be asking when we find ourselves in need of deliverance. Asking *why* keeps us stuck. It keeps us in a defensive stance. It lacks solutions and just causes us to complain all the more.

Instead of asking, we should be seeking. We should be seeking Him. Remember what we read earlier, Psalm 34:4 says-

> *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."*

Remember- God didn't prevent Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego FROM going into the fire. He delivered them IN it.

God didn't prevent Peter from going to prison, He delivered him IN it.

God didn't prevent Jesus from dying on the cross and being laid in that tomb, He delivered Him IN it, and by doing so delivered us through it!

Sometimes, we are never closer to God than when we are IN the thick of it. God never abandons us in our greatest times of need.

What are you IN right now? That may just be the exact place where God wants to reach out and deliver you IN the midst of that trial.

And that, is a miracle.