

CAMEO 5

The Shield Report

Directly following miracle principle 24 (“Miracles are part of an interlocking chain of forgiveness which, when completed, is the Atonement”), Jesus gave a lengthy example of that principle. Such real-life examples of miracles—and there are many in the early dictation—are essential in understanding what a miracle really is, and this one is particularly telling.

A woman named Esther¹ had written a report for the Shield Institute for Retarded Children. This report was apparently needed to secure a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), but the report was poorly done. Helen therefore went above and beyond her professional responsibility and rewrote the report in Esther’s name. Helen’s act may strike us as any number of things other than helpful, including meddling, insulting to Esther, lacking in trust, or overly concerned with what happens in the world. Therefore, learning what Jesus thought about this is extremely clarifying.

Miracles are part of an interlocking chain of forgiveness which, when completed, is the atonement.

This process works all the time and in all dimensions of time. A very good example of how this is accomplished is the time you rewrote the entire report for Esther for the SOD [the Shield Institute].

Esther had hurt something you love, (The Shield) by writing a report you regarded as very bad. You atoned for her by writing [Urtext: in her name] one that was very good. Actually, it was not your responsibility

1. Probably the same Esther that is Amy’s mother—see Cameo 3.

professionally to do this, but because you *do* love the SOD you recognized in this case that you *are* your brother's keeper. While you did *not* cancel Esther's sin, you *did* cancel out its *effects*.²

By saying that Helen's rewriting of the report is a "very good example" of how miracle principle 24 is accomplished, Jesus is implying it was a miracle. He will go on to directly call it that no less than three times in this guidance. But how is it a miracle? Our first clue is given here. Through her carelessness, Esther had unwittingly let fly an arrow. Helen, realizing that she *is* her brother's keeper, had made sure that, by the time that arrow reached its target, it had turned into a flower. This is how Atonement works. It wipes away the effects of loveless deeds, so that it's as if they were never done.

Some day I want to tell Esther that not only is she forgiven, but that the effects of all her sins are canceled. This is what I have already told you.³ When I can tell her, she will be afraid for a long time, because she will remember many things, consciously or unconsciously, including the Shield report, a sin which you canceled out in advance by a miracle of devotion.

You would think it would be joyous news to be told that you are not only forgiven, but that all the effects of your sins have been canceled. So why would Esther respond to this by being "afraid for a long time"? The reason suggested here is that, before you can feel relief that "all your sins have been forgiven," you first have to accept that you *have* sins to be forgiven. Esther had clearly denied hers, hiding them away in the vaults of her memory. But Jesus' message about "all her sins" would open those vaults, causing her to "remember many things, consciously or unconsciously." She would have to face what she had done before she could be set free by learning it had all been *undone*. And then Helen's "miracle of devotion" with the Shield report would shine in her mind as a concrete example of this liberating truth.

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2. All quotations without page numbers in this cameo are from Helen's Notes. Throughout these cameo essays, we have corrected spelling errors in the Notes for ease in reading.
 3. See Cameo 3: "I told you I forgave you and that meant all hurt and hate you have ever expressed is canceled."

It turns out that what Helen did with Esther's sin (which will soon be redefined as merely an "absence of love") is precisely what Jesus does with ours. He is there to make sure that when we stumble, the Everlasting Arms will always be there to catch us:

I am in charge of the process of atonement, which I undertook to begin. My atonement [which, as will be clarified later, refers to the resurrection, not the crucifixion] was for the canceling out of all sins which human beings could not otherwise correct. That is what the Biblical statement "Underneath are the Everlasting Arms" means.

Jesus, however, ideally wants to carry out this Atonement through human channels, as Helen explains at this point in the Urtext: "This ['Underneath are the Everlasting Arms'] means that He will backstop whenever human miracles will not suffice for atonement purposes. However, it is perfectly clear that when a person can atone by miracles, both giver and receiver are atoning. It is better to atone this way because of the mutual benefits involved." Jesus now expands on this idea:

I would have undone Esther's sin to everyone who was affected by it myself, of course, but this would not have helped *you*.

The reason it was a miracle was because it not only atoned for Esther, but also for *you* because it kept the children from harm. I could have secured the new grant for the Shield anyway, being a Board Member of NIH. But this way I could cancel out some of *your* sins as well as Esther's, and I sit on *your* Boards, too.

Jesus explains that he could have done it all himself. He could have made sure that the Shield got its grant from the NIH anyway, in spite of Esther's report. After all, he sits on the Board of the NIH. But this way was better, because this way Helen could undo her own past lovelessness. We see in Cameo 3 that she had "hated and hurt" the children—apparently in past lives—with Amy being given as an example of one of these children. With the Shield report, however, she acted to *protect* the children—the children served by the Shield—and it looks like she succeeded. When Jesus says "I

could have secured the new grant for the Shield anyway,” he implies that in the actual scenario, *Helen* did that. Helen, then, had “kept the children from harm,” thus undoing her own past misdeeds. Her “miracle of devotion” had atoned for her, too.

The reason why you found rewriting that so taxing was because you resented Esther’s sin, and thought she put you in a very unfair position. But no one can really do this to anybody. If you had known that you were really performing a miracle for the Shield, for Esther, for yourself, and for Me, you would have done it with real joy. “In as much as you do it unto the least of these my children” really ends with “you do it unto yourself and Me.”

Tell Bill the reason why *you* come before me (as you did with Wally) is because I do not need miracles for my own atonement, but I stand at the end in case *you* fail temporarily.

We probably assume that, if this really was a miracle, then Helen must have been in an elevated and even transported state of mind while doing it. Here, however, we find out that in fact she felt resentful and drained, feeling that Esther had put her “in a very unfair position.” If Helen had only realized that “no one can really do this to anybody,” she could have been free of this ill feeling. And if she had realized all who would be blessed by what she was doing—the Shield, Esther, Helen herself, and even Jesus—she would have done it with joy.

I am always here to protect against Assumption failure. (That’s a special pun for Bill. He is still under the impression that he needs special signs of love).

Note also that the special language here is a combination of both yours *and* his. You two came together in My Name.

“Assumption failure” is most likely a takeoff on “expectation failure,” a psychological term for when our current mental model of reality leads to faulty expectations. Given that it follows the statement “I stand at the end

in case *you* fail temporarily,” “Assumption failure” is probably a case where our judgmental assumptions about others prevent us from offering them miracles, causing us to fail temporarily on the journey to God. Jesus says that his role is to make up for this, to cancel out the errors “which human beings could not otherwise correct.”

This pun is yet another special sign of love for Bill, who was a gifted punster. As Jesus makes clear in a number of comments, he sees Bill as feeling chronically unworthy and on the outside. He therefore constantly takes care to give Bill “special signs of love” (as he does here with the pun) and to make sure he knows he is included (as he does here by using Bill’s language and not just Helen’s).

Q— Are there any corrections you want me to make in this?

A— Yes—change the word “sin” to “absence of love.” Sin is a man-made word with threat connotations he made up himself. No *real* threat is involved anywhere.

Just because “Nature abhors a vacuum,” which is true enough, it does *not* follow that a vacuum is filled with hell-fire. Nothing is gained by frightening yourself, and it’s very destructive.

Miracles need freedom from fear. Part of their atonement value involves just that.

(The word “atone” really means “undo.”)

Jesus has been using the word “sin” without correcting its usual connotations. Now he introduces what will be a major theme in the Course, that what we call “sin” is not at all what it seems. Rather than being a positive presence of evil, it is actually just an “absence of love,” just a vacuum. The response to it should therefore be love, for a vacuum of love naturally calls for being filled with love. To fill it with hellfire makes no sense.⁴

Jesus began by calling the Shield report a “very good example” of miracle principle 24. Now we are in a position to fully understand what he meant,

4. For further comments on this passage, see Appendix II (1909-1913).

and thus more fully understand the principle itself. The principle reads “Miracles are part of an interlocking chain of forgiveness,” and there was just such a chain involved in this event.

Jesus implies that Helen rewriting the report did in fact secure the funding for the Shield, and in the process protected the children it serves. That was the first link in the chain. This canceled out the effects of Esther’s act of not writing the report with sufficient care, thus undoing the pain this would have caused her. That was the second link. This also undid Helen’s own past misdeeds, in which she had “hated and hurt” the children. That was the third link. And finally, it blessed Jesus himself, as he feels deeply identified with all the parties involved. That was the fourth link. Here, then, is exactly what the miracle principle was talking about—“an interlocking chain of forgiveness”—in which the miracle rolled through person after person, setting free everyone it touched.

This not only clarifies miracle principle 24, it also clarifies miracles themselves. We often assume that a miracle in the Course’s sense is found entirely in the mental state of an individual person. We believe that elevated state is what blesses this person, and any effect on others is strictly secondary, or even irrelevant. This concrete example of a miracle, however, shows us a very different picture.

In this example, the crucial thing is the effect the miracle has on the people in that interlocking chain. What matters is that *they* are blessed. Helen’s state of mind as she did the blessing was actually surprisingly negative, but it still contained the essential ingredient: the realization that she is her brother’s keeper. And it was by *acting* as her brother’s keeper that she herself became blessed. By keeping “the children from harm,” she wiped away her own dark past in which she had harmed them. By canceling out Esther’s “sin,” she canceled out her own past “sins.”

Therefore, even though she rewrote the Shield report with resentment, it was *still* a miracle. And if she had just appreciated that fact, the resentment would have evaporated. Indeed, according to Jesus, if she had only been aware of the interlocking chain that would go forth from her act, if she had only known that, as he put it, she was “really performing a miracle for the Shield, for Esther, for yourself, and for Me,” she “would have done it with real joy.”