

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 8 – The Miracles of Jesus

Introduction

The four gospels record 37 miracles of Jesus; yet, John notes at the end of his gospel that Jesus did so many amazing things that the world would not hold the books that could be written about Him (John 20:30 and 21:25). Each gospel writer selected the miracles that helped them tell his story and to show readers the supernatural activity of Jesus. There are only 2 miracles common to all 4 gospels: the feeding of the 5,000 and the resurrection of Jesus.

The Purpose of Jesus' Miracles

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Such a claim was blasphemy to the Jews, unless He could support His claim to divinity with miracles. The primary purpose of His miracles, therefore, was to verify that *He was Who He said He was*.

“... do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (John 10:37,38).

Additionally, the miracles were designed to provide *sufficient evidence* for people to decide whether to *believe in Jesus* as the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah, or not. John is very specific on this point:

“Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30,31).

It is important to understand that the purpose of the miracles was to authenticate Jesus' claims. He did not come to heal everyone, everywhere, of everything (to completely reverse the heart-wrenching effects of mankind's fall into sin – which He *will do* in

the new heavens and new earth). He came *to give sufficient evidence* so that people might believe in Him as the God-sent Savior of the world. Once that evidence was given, He stopped performing vast numbers of signs and wonders. In the face of continued unbelief, He refused to continue performing signs at all.

Four Kinds of Miracles Jesus Performed

Jesus performed miracles in 4 broad categories. In this way, He displayed His divine authority over all realms of life.

1) Power over disease. The most common form of miracle was when Jesus healed someone from some form of sickness - as simple as Peter's mother-in-law suffering from a fever (Mark 1:29-31), or as difficult as a man suffering from an illness for 38 years (John 5:1-9). In some cases, Jesus healed multitudes in villages (Mark 1:32-34). In other cases, He healed a single person who came to Him (Mark 5:24-34). In every instance, His unique power was recognized by all. The debate was over the *source* of His power – was it from God, or from the devil?

The healing of a paralytic man, brought to Jesus by his 4 friends on a stretcher, shows Jesus using a miracle to display His divine authority.

Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this" (Mark 2:5-12).

Note that while the Pharisees were angered by Jesus, the multitudes were amazed and went away "glorifying God." Jesus used this opportunity to show His authority on earth to forgive sins. Only

God can heal someone paralyzed and have authority to forgive someone's sins. Jesus wanted the onlookers to know that He was sent to do both. He commended the paralytic and his friends for their **'faith'** in Him. This moved Him to not only heal but forgive. The issue of 'sin' was only brought up occasionally during Jesus' healings. If after a healing, the person declared their faith in Him, then He would follow by saying, 'your faith has made you well', which also indicated 'spiritually well' or 'forgiven'.

We were created to be without sickness, abnormality, sin and death. We long for that state of being. These conditions grieve us and touch us all. It is only human to yearn for healing and to live life free of any form of pain and suffering. Our God came as the God-man to experience pain and suffering with us, as One of us. Yet His greater purpose as our Savior, was to pay the penalty of a sinless death as a sacrifice for humanity's sins so that we could be forgiven and eternally healed. This was more important than being healed in this life. Jesus told His followers to ASK. So, ask we must. Yet, as many have asked for healing, like the Apostle Paul, the answer has been 'no.' God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, so that My power may be shown through your weakness" (2Corinthians 12:8-10). How has God been personal to you in the face of your pain and suffering?

2) Power over nature. Jesus performed numerous miracles showing His power over the natural world. He turned water to wine (John 2); multiplied loaves and fish (John 5); caused fish to swim into nets (Luke 5; John 21); walked on water (Mark 6). The stilling of a storm on the Sea of Galilee powerfully showed His power over nature. Several of the disciples were professional fishermen on this lake; yet this storm was too much even for them. They feared!

Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:38-41).

Jewish people knew from the Old Testament that *only* GOD could tame the forces of nature in such a manner:

“O Lord God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them” (Psalm 89:8,9).

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed” (Psalm 107:28,29).

Note that He “rebuked” the storm. This is the same word used when Jesus “rebuked” demons. This Greek word was never used for the rebuking of *impersonal* forces. It was always used when a person or persons were in view. It is likely that Jesus was rebuking the storm *and* the spiritual force behind the storm - Satan - who was trying to ‘sink His mission’ as they were on their way to heal the most notoriously demon-possessed man in that day. Even the disciples said to each other, *“Who then is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”*

Jesus did not ‘show off’ His power over nature, to bring attention to Himself. Rather, He was careful to perform these miracles often away from the crowds. In John 2, when His Mother mentioned the wine dilemma at the wedding, He responded by saying that ‘His time was not yet then’ to draw attention to Himself. Obviously, someone with these powers becomes a ‘hero.’ Jesus came in humility, yet He used His authority over the natural elements when He deemed necessary. We can entrust ourselves to a God like this. He knows when, where and how to exercise His power in the right way.

3) Power over spirits. On many occasions, Jesus commanded demonic forces in ways that no human being could. As for the demons, they knew exactly *who* Jesus was and they feared Him:

“Whenever the evil spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ But He gave them strict orders not to tell who He was” (Mark 3:11,12).

The cure of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) is the longest and most descriptive of the miracle stories. It is regarded as the most intriguing case of demon possession known to the New Testament world. Recall that Jesus and His disciples had just made their way across the Sea of Galilee, passing safely through a massive storm that threatened to sink their boat. Once to the other side, the demon-possessed man met Him at the shore. He lived in the graveyards of

Gerasa. He had not worn clothing or lived in a house for a long time. He was so physically powerful that no man could contain him with chains. He was a dreaded menace to the region (the “Decapolis” was a region east of Galilee that consisted of 10 small cities). No one dared pass by the area where he lived.

The demon-possessed man met Jesus immediately when He arrived with His disciples at the shoreline. The “legion” of demons within the man sought to confront Jesus and keep Him from coming into their territory.

Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:6,7).

The demons pleaded with Jesus not to send them “out of the country.” These were territorial demons assigned by Satan to wreak havoc in the Decapolis. They asked that Jesus send them into a herd of swine nearby, which Jesus did. The herd then rushed down a steep bank and was drowned in the sea. Satan had tried to sink Jesus and His men in the sea. Now, Satan’s demons were sunk in the sea!

When the healing of the demoniac was reported to the people in the town of Gerasa (and the death of the herd of pigs), they feared Jesus’ power and begged Him to leave their region. The formerly demon-possessed man, was clothed and finally in his right mind. He asked that he might accompany Jesus as a grateful follower, but Jesus replied:

“Go home to your people and report to them what great things God has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed (Mk. 5:19,20).

Jesus knew exactly why His Father had sent Him to Gerasa: He had crossed the Sea of Galilee to confront the most powerful weapon of Satan in Gerasa, to release him from captivity to the Evil One, and to transform him into the most powerful witness for the kingdom of God in that area! Mission accomplished. Jesus and his men got back in the boat and went back to Galilee. (Had He intended to do more ministry in that region, He certainly would have stayed, in spite of people’s request that He leave.)

Some regions around the world still are strongholds for Satanic powers, and witch doctors control villages and regions. Miraculous deliverances are still happening, as Jesus' power is manifested. In America, we mostly see the Evil One spreading lies and stirring up human and relational chaos. In John 10:10 Jesus said: "The thief only comes to kill, steal and destroy. But I have come so that you may experience an abundant life". As Jesus sets us free from personal and relational pain and being held captive, He wants us to tell our world what He is doing in our lives, just like the man He freed from demons. This brings Him honor and us joy in sharing the goodness of God in our life. What experience of "freedom in Christ" can you share with someone?

4) Power over Death. Before His own resurrection from the dead, Jesus raised others from death. There are only 3 recorded: the widow of Nain's son; Jairus' daughter; and Lazarus who had bodily resurrections (Luke 7, 8 and John 11); but we note that when Jesus sent His disciples out to do ministry, He commanded them to "*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons*" (Matt.10:8). Evidently there were other bodily resurrections that were not recorded in the gospels. John highlights the resurrection of Lazarus as one of Jesus' greatest miracles, occurring just a week before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem for the passion week.

Lazarus had been entombed for 4 days when Jesus reached the village of his sisters Martha and Mary. Jesus had been summoned days earlier when Lazarus was very sick, but instead of going then, He waited until he had died and been buried in the tomb. He immediately announced the greater purpose behind Lazarus' passing:

When Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it" (John 11:4).

Because their village of Bethany was just 2 miles from Jerusalem, many Jews had come to mourn the death of Lazarus (11:18,19). Jesus Himself was deeply troubled over the problem of death and losing this dear friend. (The narrative has several notes about His deep emotions over the death of Lazarus.) Once at the tomb, Jesus commanded that the stone be removed from the entrance (to the dismay of the family since there would be a stench by this time).

Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that

You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go” (11:41-44).

This miracle was particularly forceful because of the timing (just before the Passover Week when many pilgrims were coming to Jerusalem), the location (2 miles from Jerusalem), and the setting (in the last 2 weeks of Jesus’ 3-years of public ministry.)

We often wonder why Jesus doesn’t answer our prayer for His attention of intervention. Martha and Mary were obviously disappointed that He had not come when they asked Him to, which they believed would have prevented their brother from dying. But Jesus had a higher purpose not understood to them. They never dreamed that Jesus would perform His greatest miracle- the resurrection of their brother! They were disappointed, yet they did not lose faith in their LORD. Like them we can express our disappointment when He does not answer our prayers as we have asked. However, it is our faith that must continue to believe that God is all wise and all good, even if we walk through deep pain and loss with our prayers answered, “NO”. God does always answer prayer. Like a teacher or a parent, we will either answer, “Yes, No, or not now”. Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying; but He had a much grander purpose and powerful miracle to perform: Victory over death via a resurrection, making a final statement of HIS DEITY. What are you currently trusting Him for when the answer is ‘no?’ ‘Keep asking, seeking and knocking’ He is God, and we are not.

The Two Responses to Jesus’ Miracles

Jesus’ miracles left little room for neutrality. Either people believed He was the Son of God, or they believed He was an agent of the devil. A concise example of this divide over Jesus is recorded in Matthew 12. He healed a man who was deaf and mute. As a result:

“All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “Could this be the Son of David?” But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons” (Matt.12:23,24).

This same sharp divide is noted at the end of the story of Lazarus' resurrection.

Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done (John 11:45,46).

In fact, the final conspiracy to kill Jesus grew out of the religious leaders' refusal to accept the obvious conclusion that He was God. They admitted He was performing miracles, they just did not want to give up their own place of power.

Therefore, the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:47,48).

Does God do Miracles Today?

The miracles of Jesus always raise the question: Does He do *the same* today? The simple answer is – No. Never has the world seen anything even remotely comparable to what happened during Jesus' public ministry. Recall the original purpose of the miracles of Jesus: *to verify His identity as God (John 20:30,31)*. That purpose was fulfilled during His lifetime. A similar 'period of verification' took place with the early apostles after Jesus. There was a timeframe packed with miracles that served to authenticate their ministry and message as God's ambassadors (see Hebrews 2:3,4).

Yet, God is still doing miracles in many different ways, in stories of people's lives today. Often, we assume something is a 'coincidence' when we have unknowingly experienced a *supernatural move of God's Spirit* in our lives or circumstances. Faith and prayer matter, and James says that we "*have not because we ask not*" (James 4:2).

Miracles still authenticate the power of God in the human realm. Our part is to make sure we continue to keep a growing heart of faith, not a hard heart of unbelief. Be looking for ways to ask God to do His work in your life and in those around you.

When His answer to your persevering prayer is still 'no' or 'not yet', keep choosing to believe that He loves you and is working out His

will, to conform you into the beautiful image of His Son Jesus (Romans 8:28,29). He also wrestled with a 'no' in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He asked that the cup (of God's wrath) be taken from Him, yet He desired His Father's will more: the miracle of being the sacrifice for sin unto death, so that the greatest miracle of all - Christ's bodily resurrection - could be accomplished for us all (Matt. 26:29). Believers can hope in the resurrection of their own bodies. Martha's conversation with Jesus makes this clear:

Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:23-25).

Addendum: The Skeptic's View of Jesus' Miracles

Many today reject the reality of the miracles of Jesus. Worldviews such as *naturalism* and *rationalism* hold that only what is natural and/or rational is real; thus, the miracles of Jesus cannot be real. What, then, is the explanation for the miracle stories in the gospels? The "*Jesus of history*" was turned into the "*Christ of faith*" by His disciples after His death. The theory says that they were deeply disillusioned; their hopes and dreams had been shattered. Thus, they invented "Christ" out of their 'faith' – much like children invent stories in the imagination of their minds. They were hurting people trying to alleviate their pain by making Jesus look like the divine figure they wished he was.

Behind the modern rejection of the miracles of Jesus is the underlying anti-supernatural bias of atheism. There is no God > there has never been an appearance of God > the miracles of Jesus are man-made myths. (This view leads to some very interesting interpretations of the "miracle" stories. For example, the feeding of the 5,000 turns into a "miracle of sharing." When the multitudes saw a boy share his food with Jesus, they all brought out their hidden sacks of food and shared with one another.)

We will not attempt here to address the underlying atheistic presuppositions that lead people to reject the miracles of Jesus. We only note that IF it is possible that there IS a GOD, then there is something entirely logical about the God-like miracles of Jesus. If Tiger Woods showed up and people doubted his identity, he'd prove

himself by amazing people with golfing feats. If Usain Bolt showed up he'd prove he was the fastest man on earth by running 28.7 miles/hour. *We expect people to do things in keeping with their character to verify who they are.* Thus, if GOD showed up and people doubted His identity, *we would expect Him to do God-like wonders to prove Himself.* In short, He would do the very sorts of things that Jesus is said to have done.

One last note: Mythology is nothing new. The ancients were well-acquainted with mythological stories, and *they knew the difference between history and mythology.* Thus, when Peter wrote the following, he was clearly disavowing the notion that *any* of the gospel stories were myths invented by men:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales (Greek: “myths”) when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2Peter 1:16-18).

The Jesus of history and the Christ of faith were one and the same for the gospel writers. Which is why they all died martyr's deaths – not for a fictional character they had created to alleviate their pain; but for a real person who had proven to them that He *was the divine Son of God and Savior of the world.*

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the 4 areas over which Jesus demonstrated His power and authority: Disease, Nature, Demons, Death. Why do you think He chose these 4 areas?
2. There was 1 area over which Jesus did NOT exercise His control: Human decision-making. He allowed people to exercise their own wills in deciding whether to believe in Him or not. Why did He not control human wills?
3. If you could have been present to witness one of Jesus' miracles, which one would you choose? Why?
4. Have you experienced the miraculous hand of God in special ways? Explain.