

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 6

Jesus: Worker of Miracles

Introduction

- Jesus quickly became recognised not only as a Proclaimer of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God but also as a great Worker of miracles.
- Understandable this part of Jesus' ministry drew the attention of many people. Many brought their sick to Jesus to be healed by Jesus. However, this early provoked jealousy among the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus' popularity was perceived as a serious threat to their spiritual authority over the ordinary people. However, the ordinary people had never witnessed anything like the miracles that Jesus was performing. Most did not realise that Jesus' miraculous powers were manifestations that He had come to earth as God's chosen Messiah. They were focused on their own physical, material needs and burdens.
- The significance of Jesus' miracles can be seen by the amount of space given to miracles in the Gospels, eg Mark – 47% of the first ten chapters and 31% of the entire book has to do with miracles directly or indirectly.
- Luke's record of Jesus' miracles: Luke 5:12-16,17-26; 7:1-17; 8:22-56; 9:12-17,37-43a; 18:35-43; Acts 2:22; 10:38

1) Miracles, God and Scripture

- a) Miracles and God go hand in hand throughout the Scriptures – when God acts, He acts with great power – His acts are sometimes “miraculous” when He shows His Lordship over all the forces of His creation including the forces of nature.
- b) Jesus' miracles are never like “magical tricks” to draw people's attention but always to reveal His glory and power and so draw people to know, love and

worship God. Throughout the Gospels including the book of Luke, when people witness Jesus' miraculous power at work, they respond by praising God the Father, not Jesus – Luke 5:25,26; 7:12-17; 13:13 (cf. response of the Pharisees – see v.14); 17:15,16; 18:35-43; 19:37-40 (cf. (cf. Luke 2:20,28; 23:47)

- c) Therefore, with the coming of the Son of God into the world, it is fully to be expected that God's miraculous power would be displayed through His life and deeds.
- d) Definition of a miracle: *“A miracle in the Bible consists of a direct act of God (as distinct from something grounded in natural causation) whereby he causes his power over nature and human history to become overtly manifest so that man through grace and by faith might know of God's holiness and love as they find expression in his redemptive purpose.”* (New Testament Speaks, Glenn Barker, William Lane & J. Ramsey Michaels; Harper & Row, 1969, page 86)
- e) Divine miracles are redemptive in purpose – always directed towards saving, delivering or helping someone, cf. OT miracle of God's delivering His people from their Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea. The Exodus is not a great miracle because of the size of the operation but because of the amazing results of God's drawing near to man in this way, for the purpose of their rescue and freedom, with extraordinary results. However, this one miracle cannot be isolated from the other miracles that led up to it, eg the appearance of God to Moses in the burning bush, the ten plagues against Egypt, and also that followed it, God's awesome leading of His people through the wilderness providing for their daily sustenance throughout 40 years.
- f) The purpose of God behind His great miraculous deeds: that His people might know God and put their trust in Him, and that the enemies of God would be brought face to face with God's holiness and greatness – see Ex.6:6-7 – in all such events, whether or not the people saw God's greatness and power revealed depended upon whether or not they believed – those who believed “saw”, i.e. their spiritual eyes were opened to see what others could not see because of their unbelief – *“Belief remains always the choice and obligation of those who experience the mighty works. Miracles in themselves cannot create knowledge of God' only for those*

who are willing to see and hear can they become occasions for genuine faith....” (NT Speaks: 86-87)

2) Miracles and Jesus’ ministry

- a) It is then against this background of God’s divine activity in the OT that we must view Jesus’ miracles.
- b) The Exodus event leading to the entry into and taking of the promised land was to be followed by a far greater exodus event of a spiritual nature:
- c) Deliverance from the captivity of sin and sin’s power (with the breaking of the neck of the old slave-master) followed by the entry into and the taking of the promised land with Jesus as the greater than Moses (cf. Moses) – *“If the Exodus of the past was accompanied by marvellous works, how much more would this be true of the greater Exodus in the future.”* (NT Speaks: 87)
- d) As in the former Exodus that was accompanied with a demonstration of divine power, so in the greater Exodus would God manifest His power for the glory of His name and for the salvation of His people.

3) Jesus’ miracles: God’s purpose

- a) **Jesus’ declarations concerning His miracles make clear that the miracles reveal the coming of God’s kingdom:**
 - i) Jesus connects the exorcism of demons with the breaking in of God’s rule (Luke 11:20)
 - ii) Jesus links the miraculous healings with Isaiah’s picture of the messianic age (Matt. 11:5; Isaiah 35)
 - iii) Jesus’ “mighty works” (Greek: *dynameis*) were literally the extensions of God’s power into the world – like His “strong right arm” that led Israel out of her Egyptian house of bondage, through these miraculous acts and through the One who performs them, God is effecting His reign among men. In the fullness of time, this will extend also to His complete authority over the whole earth (see Hab.2:14).
 - iv) This truth makes clear to us that Jesus’ miracles were not mere humanitarian acts related to human needs though they certainly helped meet the needs of people and bring joy to their hearts – see Luke 4:38-39 – nor were they just

personal triumphs of Jesus for His own sake and reputation. Rather all of them were genuine messianic acts that point to the presence and the coming (present and future) of God's rule as King among men.

v) Never once did Jesus perform a punitive miracle, i.e. to punish or judge someone for their sin (cf. the ten plagues were miracles of judgment)¹ – “*Jesus always acts for man, never against him.*” (NT Speaks: 87) For example, Jesus doesn't perform a miracle to harm/punish:

(1) The soldiers who come to arrest Jesus

(2) The people who mock Him

(3) The man who betrays Him ...

(4) None are burned up or fall down dead or are attacked and mauled by a wild animal.

vi) The coming of God's kingdom through Jesus means “blessing,” *not* “cursing”, mercy and grace, *not* wrath. All the miracles of Jesus are tokens of His love. They are never directed against man but against man's enemies:

(1) Satan is defeated

(2) Physical illness is overcome

(3) The storms in man's environment are subdued (“Peace, be still!”)

vii) The miracles of Jesus show us that the coming of God's kingdom rule is GOOD NEWS. Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and validated its presence through the signs, miracles and wonders that He performed (cf. Acts 2:22; Matt. 10:7-8).

viii) The miracles of God depend not on man's righteousness but on God's mercy, eg all the multitude are fed, all the sick who are brought to Him are healed; no one is turned away (see Luke 4:40) because his is “unworthy” and no one is healed because he is “good.” However weak their faith, God's mercy is made available to all who reach out to Jesus in their need.

¹ “The cursing of the fig tree (see Mark 11:13 f., 20 ff.) – is a symbolic act directed not against man but for man. Though its symbolism may have to do with impending judgment upon Israel, its purpose for Jesus' disciples is to inculcate faith in God and confident prayer (11:22-25).” (NT Speaks: 121)

ix) Jesus' miracles were also performed sometimes on the most unlikely people (i.e. unworthy from a human standpoint). Jesus consciously brought the "shalom" of God for those who were rejected such as those inflicted with leprosy (Luke 17:11-19), or the lame (Luke 5:17-26), or the blind beggars (Luke 7:21,22; 18:35-43). Regardless of their condition, Jesus brought the Good News of the Kingdom to all.

b) Jesus' miracles also reveal the true nature of Jesus²

- i) Who He is – only Jesus can accomplish these miraculous deeds of the Kingdom – they point people to Jesus and attest to His being God's Messiah and Saviour – Jesus' words and displays of His power bring people face to face with the very presence of God Himself – His miracles call forth a decision not only concerning the awesome realities of the miracles themselves but concerning the Person of the One through whom the miracle was done.
- ii) Jesus is not like any ordinary worker of miracles – His miracle-working powers and activities set Him apart exclusively from everyone else past or present who may have performed miracles:
- iii) On the one hand, Jesus' miracles are some of the visible results of God's power resting upon Jesus – it is never said that Jesus' miracles are in response to His "great faith" or to His deeper spirituality or because He was a very special and good Person. Jesus' miracles are manifestations of God's divine rule among men.
- iv) On the other hand, Jesus' miracles are activities which Jesus initiates – this can be seen from the use of the emphatic pronoun "I" in Mark 9:25 – Jesus often makes the will of God come to pass by His word (Matt.8:8,16) – thus the crowds respond as in Mark 2:12 "We have never seen anything like this!"
- v) The miracles of Jesus meant that no one including Jesus' enemies were able to ignore Him – He wasn't just some local itinerant healer or travelling exorcist.

² Jesus did not work miracles to prove His deity or His Messiahship. In fact, He clearly refused to work miracles as proofs (Matt. 12:38–42; Luke 11:29–32). His death was the proof to Israel. However, Jesus' miracles do give evidence that He was divine, that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. (Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1995. *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index. T. Nelson: Nashville)

vi) Note also that all of Jesus' miracles were for others, on the behalf of others – He never used His miraculous powers to meet His own needs or to defend Himself against His opposition – consequently though He worked great miracles, yet He appeared as “weak” and helpless before the eyes of others – when some who had been following Him saw His “weakness” in response to what others said or did towards Him, they left Him (John 6:15,30,66). Consider the scenes of Jesus' capture in the Garden (Matt.26:53) or when He is hanging on the cross (Mark 15:29-32). Cf. 2 Cor.13:4.

vii) There are times when Jesus refuses to work a miracle (i.e. to do something spectacular) – where there is faith, each miracle *becomes* “*an event of revelation*” (NT Speaks: 89).

“This underlines the most important fact about Jesus' miracles: They do not compel belief or violate the free decision of man either for or against Jesus. They are for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to believe what the miracles reveal.” (NT Speaks 89).

viii) In John's Gospel, the miracles are the “signs” (*sēmeia*) by which the various aspects of God's work are revealed – but even in John, people do not believe automatically upon witnessing a miracle – even Jesus' closest friends, His disciples, were slow to believe and therefore to see the great deeds of God – it is only through the great miracle of the Cross and the Resurrection that the NT Christians come to understand the meaning of the “signs” that Jesus performed.

Conclusion

- As the Sovereign LORD, the Creator of all things, it is His prerogative to use His power in whatever way He chooses, to further His holy purposes. His miraculous power will never be in conflict with His holy character. It is evident that the very same truth applies to God's Son, Jesus, as He lived and worked among men. All that God is, is manifest in and through the life and ministries of Jesus. And through us as Christ's body on earth today, Jesus continues to display His miraculous power through us as we trust in Him.

- Our responses to these truths should be twofold:

- Faith and expectancy: God wills that we live and serve Him with expectancy, ready to be the channels through whom God works miracles in the lives of others.
- Worship: God wills that we fall down before Him in worship whenever we experience His mighty deeds in our lives, never focusing our thoughts on the miracle or the one whom God uses to perform the miracle.

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