

Aug 4th 2013 The Jesus The World Sees #8 'Jesus The Miracle Worker' Mark 1:21-34

The other day I came across the story of a traveler who was found by a US Customs official to be carrying a half-gallon bottle in from Mexico. The official asked the man what it contained. The traveler replied, "It's just holy water. I took it from the shrine I visited." The inspector was suspicious and opened the bottle and took a sniff. He shouted, "This isn't holy water, it's tequila!" The traveler lifted his eyes to the sky and cried out, "Good heavens! Yet another miracle."

Humourous? Yes....but also a reminder of the fascination the world still has about the miracles of Jesus—Particularly His first miracle where He did indeed turn water into wine.

Yet amongst secular historians the miracles of Jesus are more than just a fascination, they are a problem that they have a hard time dealing with.

John Dickson in his book "Jesus A Short Life" (p75) writes:-

The historian faces a real dilemma in the study of Jesus. Everything appears to be going along just fine. The sources are analyzed, the methods applied and, slowly but surely, a plausible picture of the man from Nazareth begins to emerge.

Then suddenly they are confronted by an aspect of the story that threatens to call the whole enterprise into question. The 'miracles' of Jesus, his healings, exorcisms and mastery over nature, leave them wondering whether they have been using the historical method to study a fairytale.

You see the historian deals with facts and the truth, and if they come across something that sounds too impossible to be true then they are not prepared to accept it as factual. And seeing that a miracle is defined as "***An event that appears to be contrary to the laws of nature and is regarded as an act of God.***", we can appreciate a secular historians having a good deal of difficulty with it.

So in their research concerning Jesus they come to the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, and they are happy to discover that it was written within 20 or 30 years of the death of Jesus. They note that Mark depended a lot upon eye witness testimony and that is good, and in the first chapter there are historical mentions of John the Baptist and the geographical regions that Jesus ministered in, and everything adds up as correct.

Then they arrive at the passage we read together being chapter 1 from verse 21 and the red flag goes up, for there are stories about Jesus casting out demons, healing Peter's mother in law, and the whole town bringing the sick and possessed to Him and Him

healing them. And it doesn't stop there. Mark continues with miracle story after miracle story.

So the historian working from the assumption that miracles don't happen, checks out the other Gospels, sure that the others would contradict Mark because each Gospel was written independently of the others, but they don't. Indeed the Jesus each separate Gospel presents is a prolific miracle worker.

Then to add to their confusion, a historian from that period who was not a Christian, by the name of Josephus writes:-

Now, there was about this time Jesus, for he was a doer of surprising works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure (men who welcome strange things). He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. And the tribe of Christians, so named for him are not extinct to this day.

The term surprising works or baffling deeds, is the Greek expression ***paradoxa erga..*** from the wonderful...the glorious

Consequently the historian is not able to argue against Jesus being seen as a Miracle Worker, and Dickson states: (p78)

"Even scholars who reject the possibility of the supernatural, such as Boston University's Professor Paula Fredriksen and DePaul University's Professor John Dominic Crossan, still affirm that 'Jesus did things that were widely interpreted from the beginning as miracles'. In other words, his reputation at the time as a healer and exorcist may be regarded as beyond reasonable doubt."

The issue for us however, is not so much what the historians think about His miracles, but what they should mean to us. And the way to discover that is to ascertain why Jesus performed miracles.

And at first the answer may seem very simple. He did so because He was kind and compassionate and wanted to help people. He did so to show forth the power and glory of God at work in Him. He did so to prove that He was the Messiah. He did so to fulfill the OT prophecies. He did so because He could. And of course all those reasons are correct, but Jesus Himself gave us a reason that is so much deeper. Look with me at Matthew 12:22-24

Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

We are then told that Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees and He responded against them, and in doing He made this powerful statement in v28

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

The corresponding passage in Luke 11:20(CEV) says:-

But if I use God's power to force out demons, it proves that God's kingdom has already come to you.

Every miracle that Jesus performed was a successful attack against the powers of darkness that flourish in this world because of sin and evil. They were a powerful sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God which was manifested in the works of Christ then, and on the Day of His second coming will be established in power in heaven and on earth, as the Kingdom of Darkness will then be thrust out forever.

When that happens there will be no further need for miracles, for evil, sin, sickness, death and sorrow will be no more.

The miracles that Jesus did when He walked on this earth and those that His followers by the power of God the HS did. And the miracles that God still performs today by His Spirit are a preview of the time still to come when the power and glory of God's Kingdom will fill the earth and the heavens as the waters cover the seas.

Miracles are an explosion of God's power on earth and they happen in many shapes and forms. Indeed, there are more miracles happening every day than what we would ever think, and there are signs of God's power at work that we at times fail to notice and give thanks to God for.

But then there are the times when miracles do not seem to happen. When our prayers seem to bounce back to us and evil seems to triumph. Yet then the greatest expression of God's power is how he keeps and sustains His people. How so often He causes them to realize that He was working a greater miracle all the time. A miracle too deep for us to comprehend now, but one day we who know Him shall see it in glory.

But by far the greatest and most extraordinary miracle of all is the rescuing of a soul from eternal darkness into that Kingdom of eternal joy and fulfillment. And it is this miracle that we need to focus on most of all. For whatever other miracle you may be privileged to experience or hear about, this miracle of salvation through Jesus is way beyond any other in it's worth and glory. It's the one awesome miracle that is available freely to all.

*Someone once defined a miracle as: "**Something extraordinary that happens without any strings attached**".*

Jesus performed miracles without any strings attached. God the HS still performs miracles with no strings attached. No one has ever be told, I will do a miracle if you will do this first. Sometimes the Lord asked the question, Do you believe I can do this

miracle? But that was to increase their faith in Him. It was never a pre-requisite for Him to work. Neither does God demand a following after Him by those who benefit from His miracle. He leaves that choice to them. The miracle remains whatever they decide

And this no strings attached business is most true when it comes to the miracle of the resurrection and the cleansing of all sin that is now available because of it.

The miracle has taken place. All that sin that cries out against God; that burdens the hearts of all people can now be removed. A oneness with God is there for all to receive because of the miracle of the death and resurrection of the Son of God

But rather than demand that all benefit from it, God leaves it to the individual to make their own choice. He puts pressure, I believe, on each soul to choose the narrow way that leads to life. His Holy Spirit draws people into situations where they are challenged by the Gospel. He convicts of sin and warns of eternal punishment. He seeks them out for Himself and leads them to the place of decision.

And then He clearly says

So you will be saved, if you honestly say, "Jesus is Lord," and if you believe with all your heart that God raised him from death. ¹⁰ God will accept you and save you, if you truly believe this and tell it to others. Romans 10:9-10

Today can you say with certainty that you have accepted personally, the benefit from the greatest miracle ever. The miracle of eternal life and an eternal relationship with God who loves you so much. Because if you have not accepted that precious miracles then all the other miracles gain you nothing.

Or do you right now need to say to Jesus, I want you as Lord of my life. I believe you died to cover my wrongs, and I want that covering from you. I believe God raised you from the dead to give me life, and Want that life. And this morning I'm prepared right here and now to surrender my life totally to you and use it to tell others of your love for them.

