

Examining Christian Doctrine

Lesson 14: The Words and Works of Jesus Part 2: – Miraculous Works

In this lesson we will explore the miraculous works that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry. The miracles of Jesus hold a central place in the narratives of the Gospels, serving as profound demonstrations of His divine authority, compassion, and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. These miracles are not mere acts of wonder; they are deeply theological and symbolic actions that reveal key aspects of Jesus' identity and mission.

In the Gospel of John, miracles are referred to as "signs," a term that underscores their symbolic and revelatory nature. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John explicitly frames these signs as revelations of Jesus' divine glory and as catalysts for faith. John's Gospel includes seven specific signs, each carefully chosen to convey deeper theological truths about Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the bringer of eternal life.

Categories of Jesus' Miracles

Healing and Deliverance Miracles

A. Physical Healings (Matthew 4:23)

- Examples: Healing of lepers (Mark 1:40-45), the blind (John 9:1-7), the paralyzed (Mark 2:1-12), and those with chronic illnesses (Mark 5:25-34).
- Physical healings demonstrate Jesus' compassion and authority over bodily ailments, underscoring His role as a restorer of creation. They fulfill messianic prophecies (Isaiah 35:5-6) and symbolize the in-breaking of God's kingdom where suffering and illness are eradicated.

B. Exorcisms

- Examples: Casting out demons in the synagogue (Mark 1:23-28), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), and the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30).
- Exorcisms highlight Jesus' authority over evil and spiritual forces. They illustrate the cosmic struggle between God's kingdom and demonic powers and demonstrate the liberating power of Jesus' ministry. These acts also align with Jewish expectations of a Messiah who would vanquish evil (Mark 3:27).

C. Resurrections

- Examples: Raising Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43), the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44).
- Resurrection miracles point to Jesus' authority over life and death, prefiguring His own resurrection. They serve as powerful signs of the eschatological hope and the coming resurrection of the dead in the new age (John 11:25-26).

Nature Miracles

A. Control Over Natural Elements

- Examples: Calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41), walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33), and turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).
- These miracles reveal Jesus' divine authority over creation, echoing Old Testament motifs of God's control over nature (e.g., Psalm 89:9). They serve to affirm Jesus' identity as the Creator and sustainer of the natural world (Colossians 1:16-17).

B. Provision Miracles

- Examples: Feeding the 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44) and the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-10), and the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11).
- Provision miracles illustrate God's providence and abundance, echoing Old Testament stories like manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). They symbolize the spiritual nourishment Jesus provides and prefigure the Messianic banquet (Isaiah 25:6).

Restorative Miracles

A. Social and Religious Restoration

- Examples: Cleansing of lepers (Luke 17:11-19), healing the woman with a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34), and healing the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6).

- These miracles not only heal physically but also restore individuals to their communities and religious life, reversing the social ostracism caused by impurity and illness. They emphasize Jesus' concern for holistic well-being and challenge social and religious boundaries.

Judgment and Symbolic Acts

A. Acts of Judgment

- Examples: Cursing the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21).
- Miracles of judgment serve as enacted parables, symbolizing divine judgment on unfruitfulness and hypocrisy. The fig tree incident is often interpreted as a critique of Israel's spiritual barrenness and a prophetic act foreshadowing the coming judgment (Matthew 21:43).

B. Symbolic Acts

- Examples: Healing on the Sabbath (John 5:1-18) and the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13-22).
- These acts carry significant symbolic weight, challenging existing religious norms and pointing to deeper theological truths. Healing on the Sabbath emphasizes the priority of mercy over ritual (Matthew 12:7), and the temple cleansing symbolizes the need for true worship and the coming of a new covenant.

The Purpose of Jesus' Miracles

To Authenticate Jesus' Divine Identity and Mission

A. Messianic Identity (Matthew 8:16-17)

- Fulfillment of Prophecy: Jesus' miracles fulfill Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, particularly those found in Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 35:5-6). These acts validate Jesus' messianic claims and align Him with expectations of the time. Notice Jesus' response to John the Baptists doubts (Matt 11:3-5)
- Divine Authority: Miracles demonstrate Jesus' unique authority over nature, illness, and evil spirits, thus confirming His divine identity and mission as the Son of God (Mark 2:10-11, John 20:30-31).

B. Signs of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:7-8)

- Inauguration of the Kingdom: Jesus' miracles are viewed as signs of the in-breaking of God's kingdom. They symbolize the restoration and healing that characterize the coming reign of God (Luke 11:20, Matthew 12:28).
- Reversal of the Fall: Miracles are seen as a foretaste of the eschatological restoration, reversing the effects of the Fall and pointing towards the ultimate redemption and renewal of creation (Romans 8:18-23).

To Demonstrate Compassion

A. Acts of Compassion:

- Healing and Compassion: Jesus' miracles often arise from His deep compassion for human suffering. The Gospel accounts frequently emphasize Jesus' empathy and willingness to heal those in distress (Mark 1:40-42, Matthew 14:14, 15:32, Luke 7:13).

B. Social and Religious Inclusion:

- Restoration to Community: Healing miracles often restore individuals to their communities, removing social and religious stigmas associated with illness and impurity (e.g., lepers, the hemorrhaging woman). This aspect of Jesus' miracles underscores His concern for holistic restoration, both physical and social (Luke 17:11-19, Mark 5:25-34).

For Symbolic Purposes

A. Teaching and Revelation:

- Revelatory Signs: Miracles serve as teaching tools that reveal deeper spiritual truths about Jesus and God's kingdom. They often accompany teachings and parables, reinforcing Jesus' messages about faith, forgiveness, and divine power (John 6:1-14, Mark 4:35-41).
- Invitation to Faith: Miracles invite a response of faith and trust in Jesus. They are not just demonstrations of power but call for a deeper understanding and acceptance of Jesus' message and identity (John 2:11, John 11:25-26).

B. Symbolic Acts:

- Symbolic Parables: Some suggest that miracles function as "symbolic parables," conveying spiritual lessons through tangible actions. For example, the feeding of the 5,000 symbolizes Jesus as the Bread of Life, providing spiritual nourishment (John 6:35).

Demonstration of Spiritual Authority and Denunciation of Religious Conflict

A. Authority over Evil:

- Exorcisms: Jesus' exorcisms demonstrate His authority over evil spirits, signaling the defeat of Satan's power and the establishment of God's rule. This aspect of His miracles underscores the cosmic battle between good and evil and Jesus' role in triumphing over demonic forces (Mark 3:22-27, Luke 10:17-20).

B. Conflict with Religious Authorities:

- Challenging Traditions: Miracles often bring Jesus into conflict with religious leaders, highlighting the tension between Jesus' new teaching and existing Jewish traditions. This conflict is evident in miracles performed on the Sabbath, which challenge the legalistic interpretation of the law (Mark 2:23-3:6, John 9:1-16).

Other Issues in Jesus' Miracles

There are several thoughts to share about the nature of Jesus' miraculous ministry.

1. The 'Messianic Secret'

Jesus often instructed recipients of miracles to keep their experiences private, a directive known as the "Messianic Secret." This phenomenon, particularly emphasized in the Gospel of Mark but present in other Gospels as well, occurs in several instances:

- Healing of the Leper (Mark 1:40-45)
- Healing of Jairus' Daughter (Mark 5:35-43)
- Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man (Mark 7:31-37)
- Healing of the Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

Many reasons are speculated as to why Jesus would instruct people to not tell anyone about their miracle. The reasons could include:

1. Control over Messianic expectations. This is so Jesus wouldn't be forced into a political role.
2. Strategic Timing. Jesus' ministry and mission were revealed progressively and could avoid premature confrontations.
3. Faith and Understanding. Jesus used the miracles to lead people to faith, the purpose wasn't the miracles but the belief in him.

2. Jesus did signs but would rebuke those seeking signs.

Jesus performed signs and miracles to reveal His divine identity, demonstrate the coming of God's kingdom, and show compassion for human suffering. However, He also rebuked those who demanded signs.

- Many times a demand for a sign was seen as a lack of faith. The Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign to test him, revealing their unbelief rather than a quest for truth.
- Jesus didn't do signs for the purpose of sensationalism or entertainment. Herod Antipas desired to see Jesus perform a sign out of curiosity, but Jesus refused to comply.
- Also, as with the above topic, Many sought signs with the expectation that Messiah would be a political leader and thus the signs Jesus did would make the people force Jesus into a role he never intended to play. This as well as Jesus wanted to focus to be on the message, not on the signs.

3. Other miracle workers and claimed messiahs in Jesus' day

There were others around the time of Jesus that claimed to be messianic figures and also those who worked miracles. We have documentation of a number of traveling healers and exorcists that lived around the time of Jesus, and the rise of 'apocalypticism' in Second Temple Judaism gave prominence to many who would try to lead insurrection and become a political messiah.

However, the claims of both the miracle workers and messianic figures would fall short of the authentication of the accounts of the life and workings of Jesus.

37 Miracles of Jesus in Chronological Order

37 Miracles of Jesus					
#	Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1	Jesus Turns Water into Wine at the Wedding in Cana				2:1-11
2	Jesus Heals an Official's Son at Capernaum in Galilee				4:43-54
3	Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit From a Man in Capernaum		1:21-27	4:31-36	
4	Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law Sick With Fever	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
5	Jesus Heals Many Sick and Oppressed at Evening	8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41	
6	First Miraculous Catch of Fish on the Lake of Gennesaret			5:1-11	
7	Jesus Cleanses a Man With Leprosy	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-14	
8	Jesus Heals a Centurion's Paralyzed Servant in Capernaum	8:5-13		7:1-10	
9	Jesus Heals a Paralytic Who Was Let Down From the Roof	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
10	Jesus Heals a Man's Withered Hand on the Sabbath	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
11	Jesus Raises a Widow's Son From the Dead in Nain			7:11-17	
12	Jesus Calms a Storm on the Sea	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
13	Jesus Casts Demons into a Herd of Pigs	8:28-33	5:1-20	8:26-39	
14	Jesus Heals a Woman in the Crowd With an Issue of Blood	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:42-48	
15	Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter Back to Life	9:18, 23-26	5:21-24, 35-43	8:40-42, 49-56	
16	Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	9:27-31			
17	Jesus Heals a Man Who Was Unable to Speak	9:32-34			
18	Jesus Heals an Invalid at Bethesda				5:1-15
19	Jesus Feeds 5,000 Plus Women and Children	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-15
20	Jesus Walks on Water	14:22-33	6:45-52		6:16-21
21	Jesus Heals Many Sick in Gennesaret as They Touch His Garment	14:34-36	6:53-56		
22	Jesus Heals a Gentile Woman's Demon-Possessed Daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30		
23	Jesus Heals a Deaf and Dumb Man		7:31-37		
24	Jesus Feeds 4,000 Plus Women and Children	15:32-39	8:1-13		
25	Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida		8:22-26		
26	Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind by Spitting in His Eyes				9:1-12
27	Jesus Heals a Boy With an Unclean Spirit	17:14-20	9:14-29	9:37-43	
28	Miraculous Temple Tax in a Fish's Mouth	17:24-27			
29	Jesus Heals a Blind, Mute Demoniac	12:22-23		11:14-23	
30	Jesus Heals a Woman Who Had Been Crippled for 18 Years			13:10-17	
31	Jesus Heals a Man With Dropsy on the Sabbath			14:1-6	
32	Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers on the Way to Jerusalem			17:11-19	
33	Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead in Bethany				11:1-45
34	Jesus Restores Sight to Bartimaeus in Jericho	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
35	Jesus Withers the Fig Tree on the Road From Bethany	21:18-22	11:12-14		
36	Jesus Heals a Servant's Severed Ear While He Is Being Arrested			22:50-51	
37	The Second Miraculous Catch of Fish at the Sea of Tiberias				21:4-11