



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Why the Miracles? (Mark 6:45-56)

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In our last study, we discussed one answer to the question “Why did Jesus do miracles?” He was moved with compassion when He saw the people. Thus, He fed around 15-20,000 people with five small loaves of bread and two fish for He saw them like “sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus desired to get away from the vast crowds to spend time with His close followers who had just returned from their first tour of preaching and performing signs (Mark 6:30-32). But as they made their get-a-way, the people saw the direction they were going and beat them to the other side of the lake. And as Jesus saw these people, He had compassion on them. They were people without a good leader who gave loving care, direction, protection, and hope. Instead, they were economically, politically and spiritually oppressed. Therefore, He began to teach them concerning the kingdom of God (for that is where true hope can be found). And as it was getting late in this remote place north and east of the Sea of Galilee, He miraculously fed all of them with only five pancake-like breads and two fish (6:33-44).

Today’s passage takes place right after the great events of the evening’s dinner.

Mark 6:45-56 *And immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. ⁴⁶And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷And when it was evening, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He was alone on the land. ⁴⁸And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. ⁴⁹But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” ⁵¹And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, ⁵²for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. ⁵³And when they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴And when they had come out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ⁵⁵and ran about that whole country and began to carry about on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. ⁵⁶And wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and entreating Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.*

ABOUT THE PASSAGE

Before we answer the question, a few notes concerning the passage.

John 6:15 informs the reader that Jesus perceived the people wanted to make Him king right then and there. It seems reasonable to think this was the reason He moved the disciples out of there (6:45). They did not fully understand His mission and could have easily been swept up in the moment. Thus, He dismissed the crowd, sent off the disciples and retreated into the mountains.

Mark wrote that Jesus got alone to pray (6:46). He spent much time being alone with His Father in prayer. Those who are followers of Christ today should learn from His example. If He needed time alone with God then, how much more does one need it today?

A storm arose on the sea during the “fourth watch” (6:48). According to Roman time, this would have been sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. The fear of the disciples seems quite understandable. In the midst of the storm, they saw a figure walking on the water; they had to think it was a ghost (6:49-50) for no living person walks on water.

But Jesus gives great words of comfort, “It is I” (6:50). Why are these comforting? They bring comfort for He is the One who has already...

- ...cast out demons
- ...heal the sick
- ...heal a crippled man
- ...forgive sins
- ...calm a violent storm
- ...heal someone who touched Him
- ...raised a dead girl back to life
- ...gave them authority to heal
- ...and feed 15,000 or so people with five loaves and two fish

And all this makes the next two verses so incredible. When Jesus entered the boat, the wind immediately stopped; which is the second miracle here (6:51). This resembled the earlier miracle of Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4:35-41 in which the disciples “said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’” (4:41b).

But Mark then added that they had not gained any understanding for their hearts were hardened (6:52). One would think after seeing this miracle on top of all the others, the disciples would recognize that the sovereign King

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of the Universe was among them. But their hearts were “hardened”; not like the calloused unbelieving, hateful hearts of the Pharisees. Rather, they were men of faith, of little faith, who needed to be awakened from their spiritual slumber--something that will be done later (Mark 8:27-31; Matthew 16:13-17).

As always, the crowds were never far behind. Jesus continued to exhibit His compassion by healing those who came to Him (Mark 6:54-56).

JOHN 5:36 *BUT THE WITNESS WHICH I HAVE IS GREATER THAN THAT OF JOHN; FOR THE WORKS WHICH THE FATHER HAS GIVEN ME TO ACCOMPLISH, THE VERY WORKS THAT I DO, BEAR WITNESS OF ME, THAT THE FATHER HAS SENT ME.*

Unbelieving scholars have tried to undermine this miracle in various ways. Some state that Jesus actually walked on the shore and the disciples could not tell. So they simply thought He was on the water. Others change the grammar to say Jesus walked ‘along’ or ‘by’ the sea. And some just dismiss it as something made up by the 2nd-century church to further enhance the “greatness” of Jesus.

None of these positions do justice to the passage. There is no indication to think the grammar should be changed (there is the similar expression that Jesus was “on land” in verse 47 and “on the sea” in verse 48; thus not an acceptable position) or this is just an enhanced story. The bigger problem with dismissing this miracle, especially for those who believe in the resurrection, is the removal of the truth and authority of Scripture. If the writers of the gospels wrote this event as truth (and they did) but they were wrong, how does one have any assurance that Jesus did anything else, including raising from the dead? And if one lacks assurance, how can he or she be confident in their faith and in their hope for the future? Once one starts the “cutting and pasting” process with Scripture, then it becomes whatever is “right in anyone’s eyes” and all truth is lost. Either Jesus walked on water and should be praised or He didn’t and everything else about Him should be questioned and considered untrustworthy.

TODAY’S QUESTION: WHY???

It has already been recorded in the gospel of Mark alone that Jesus healed the sick, restored the disabled, casted out demons, raised one from the dead, calmed a violent storm, fed a vast multitude of people with very little food and walked on water. He performed these miracles in a variety of methods: He spoke only a word for some, He touched some, and some

touched Him. He healed over a long distance, healed with spit and mud, and others were healed after they obeyed a command given by Jesus. And all Jesus’ miracles were immediate, complete and irrefutable.

So why did Jesus do these miracles recorded in the gospel? Several reasons can be found:

#1 MIRACLES CAME FROM JESUS’ COMPASSION

In the last study, it was noted that Jesus saw the people as “sheep without a shepherd” and He had compassion on them, so He taught them and took care of their needs. This same compassion can be seen as He responded to the urgent plea of a leper (Mark 1:34), came across the funeral procession for an only son of a widow woman (Luke 7:13), heard the cries of two blind men (Matthew 20:34) and saw people distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36) which caused Jesus to say, “The harvest is plentiful...”

#2 MIRACLES DREW A CROWD

This has been quite obvious throughout the gospel of Mark. In the previous passage, people followed Jesus half way around the lake. In this passage, they followed Him back to the other side. This may sound like a lame reason, but miracles drew a crowd and Jesus used the opportunity to teach and proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7) was preached to a crowd, which was drawn by Jesus’ works.

Matthew 4:24-25 *And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.*

#3 MIRACLES WERE EXPECTED IN THE COMING MESSIAH

The Jewish people had an understanding of what was to be expected in their Messiah. John 7:21 states: “But many of the multitude believed in Him; and they were saying, “When the Christ shall come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” And these expected signs were based on OT passages such as:

Isaiah 9:6 *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

Why the Miracles? (Mark 6:45-56)

Isaiah 61:1 *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners...*

Isaiah 35:4-6a *Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.*

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a question from John (who was in prison), "Are you the One or should we wait for another?" Jesus answered *Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me* (Matthew 11:4-6). Instead of simply saying "yes", Jesus referred to the great things that He was doing which were foretold by the prophets of old (cf. Luke 4:16-21).

How were the people to recognize the coming Messiah? How could they tell that this man was the promised one and that it wasn't another? The Messiah was to come as Mighty God, working great miracles and signs that point to His position and person. Some recognized it; and others, because of their unbelief (remember, unbelief blurs the obvious and blinds one to the truth) did not acknowledge the clear truth before them.

#4 MIRACLES ACCREDITED JESUS

Along this same line, the miracles of Jesus proved to people who He was. Peter proclaimed in the sermon on the day of Pentecost: *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know* (Acts 2:22). God proved Jesus was His Son by working the miracles through Him.

In the latter part of John 5, Jesus was in a discussion with the religious leaders who were upset with Him for healing on the Sabbath Day. In the course of the conversation, Jesus, like a defense attorney, lined up a list of witnesses that give testimony to His true identity. He called upon John the Baptist (John 5:33-35), God the Father (5:37-38), and the Scriptures, specifically noting Moses (5:39-47). In the middle of this defense, one witness Jesus brings forth to the witness stand is His works, the things that He has been doing in their midst: *But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me* (John 5:36).

As stated earlier, the miracles caused many people to believe in Him.

John 2:11 *This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*

John 2:23 *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing.*

John 20:30-31 *Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The testimony is quite clear; the truth has been presented. The miracles of Jesus, along with the other pieces of evidence show us that He was truly Immanuel "God with us." This truth was something He knew and demonstrated.¹

CONCLUSION

The Apostle Paul wrote these incredible statements about Jesus: "He is the image of the invisible God..." (Colossians 1:15a) and "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form..." (Colossians 2:9). How could Paul make such a claim about another human being? One reason was the miracles performed by Jesus; miracles that pointed to His divine nature. Even though Jesus was 100% man, He was also 100% God—all together in one person. If that is hard to comprehend, join the club—but it is the verdict that the Scriptures present to its readers.

And it is through this man who was "God in the flesh" that one can have forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

Romans 5:6-11 *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

He can forgive your sins--are you interested?

¹ See the Capitol Commission Missouri Bible Study, "Jesus Christ", at www.capitolcom.org/ministries/Missouri/Studies.aspx.