

Strange Things Surrounding The Miracles of Jesus

Introduction

- A. Back in January our daily Bible reading took us through the gospel of Mark. This gave us the opportunity to rehearse once more the life of Jesus.
 - 1. As we made our way through Mark, one part of the story that seemed to generate a lot of discussion was the miracles performed by Jesus.
 - 2. This is one of the most fascinating elements of the gospel accounts. One of my favorites is found in Luke's gospel (7:11-17). Can you imagine witnessing this? What an amazing scene!
 - 3. And yet, the miracles of Jesus were not simply designed to amaze people. These signs were inseparably linked to His claims and His message. Nicodemus was able to put it all together (John 3:2). Jesus did things only God could do to demonstrate that He was God, and that His words carried divine authority.
- B. But we discovered something else as we examined these miracles again. We discovered that at times there were some strange things that surrounded these miracles.
 - 1. Sometimes Jesus did some strange things. Sometimes the witnesses responded in some strange ways to the amazing things they observed.
 - 2. It left many with questions that would pop up in our Facebook discussions about the reading.
 - 3. Let's take a few minutes to look at these more closely and see if we can better understand these strange things that surrounded the miracles of Jesus. What do we mean when we say there were some strange things that surrounded the miracles of Jesus.

Sometimes Jesus did strange things.

- A. It was this aspect of His miracles that seemed to generate the most discussion back in January. At times Jesus did some strange things when He performed miracles.
 - 1. A couple of cases come to mind. When we read Mark 8 several were intrigued by the method Jesus used to heal a blind man (Mark 8:22-26). Several of you thought this was kind of gross and wondered why Jesus spat into the man's eyes. We see a similar incident in John's gospel (John 9:1-7). We are left wondering why Jesus used this mixture of spit and clay to heal the man. Why did He heal in this way?
 - 2. These actions were certainly not necessary. In Luke 18 Jesus restores sight to a blind man simply by saying the words, "receive your sight" (v. 42). He certainly could have done that in these cases. Nor was He playing to the Jewish myth that there was some medicinal value in human spit. This was a miracle after all.
 - 3. So why did Jesus heal in this way? The simple answer is, we do not know. I don't mean to raise a question only to leave you hanging. But we must understand that the text never identifies a purpose for the procedure Jesus uses here. Any answer we give is speculating.
 - 4. Keeping that in mind, let me offer this thought.
 - a. Jesus says something interesting as He prays to God before raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42). Jesus did not have to say this prayer aloud in order to raise Lazarus. He did this so the crowd would see something – that He and the Father work together, that He is the Messiah. He did this so that the crowd would know exactly what was happening and would be led to believe in Him.
 - b. Perhaps we have something similar in the healings of these blind men. In each case Jesus did something so that the crowd would know He had worked the miracle and would come to believe in Him. This was the goal of the miracles, after all, to produce faith.
- B. But we're not done with this miracle in Mark 8. There is another element of this miracle that is interesting (Mark 8:23-25).
 - 1. The odd thing here is that the miracle happens in stages. Part of his vision is restored after Jesus spits on his eyes and lays his hands on the man, then all of it after Jesus lays his hands on him again. This is certainly not what we typically see with Jesus' miracles (Luke 18:42, "receive your sight...immediately he regained his sight.."). So what's up here?
 - 2. Lots of people jump to conclusions that are clearly wrong.
 - a. Critics would say Jesus failed in this case. But this seems like an odd conclusion when the man's sight is completely restored in the next moment.
 - b. Pentecostals claim that the problem was this man's faith. At first, he only had enough faith to get part of his eyesight, then his faith grew so that he could be completely cured. First, the text does not say this. Second, this entire line of reasoning is based on the false idea that a person had to have faith (and sufficient faith) to be healed. This simply is not so. How much faith did the widow's son have in Luke 7? This is a trick used by modern faith-healers to cover their failures. You never find Jesus or His followers failing to heal someone and then blaming that failure on the person's faith.
 - 3. But this still leaves us wondering what's up in this case. Why do we have two stages of healing in the case of this blind man?
 - a. Once again the simple answer is that we do not know. The text does not explain why Jesus used a different procedure. Any answer we might offer is simply speculation.
 - b. For example, some have suggested that the man had two different ailments. Healing the first restored part of his eyesight; healing the second restored all of it.
 - c. Perhaps a partial restoration of his sight would give the man a sense of Jesus' presence and to know that He was the one healing him.
 - 4. The bottom line is this:
 - a. This man came to Jesus blind and received at that moment the complete restoration of his sight.
 - b. It demonstrated divine power that no faith healer can duplicate today.
 - c. With these facts we must be content.

Sometimes strange things happened with the people being healed.

- A. Consider a case of demon possession (**Mark 9:17-27**).
 1. Some read this account and conclude that this was not a case of demon possession at all.
 2. In fact, they would argue that we all know what was wrong with this boy. He had epilepsy.
 3. They only called it demon possession because they had no other way to explain it. In fact, some would dismiss demon possession altogether as just a tool of the ignorant to explain ailments that they did not understand.

- B. There are several problems with this conclusion.
 1. First, demon possession was clearly not a default explanation for diseases they did not understand. For example: The demon made this man mute – unable to speak (**Luke 9:17**). But the inability to speak was not always explained as demon possession (Mark 7:31-37). In fact, sometimes epilepsy was attributed to demons as it is in Mark 9, and sometimes it's not (Matthew 4:24). This claim is false.
 2. But second, the larger problem is that Jesus clearly identifies this as demon-possession (**Luke 9:25**). Some say Jesus merely did this to accommodate the misconceptions of the people at that time. Let's be plain: if this was not a case of demon-possession, then Jesus was confused or He was deceiving. Either way, if this is true, He would not be our Lord.
 3. There is no reason not to accept these cases for what Jesus says they are: demons who were cast out.

Sometimes people responded in strange ways.

- A. Sometimes people responded to the miracles of Jesus in expected and even bizarre ways.
 1. I think about the accusation of the Pharisees (**Matthew 12:22-24**). The crowds were amazed by this miracle and beginning to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. His enemies had to do something to discredit Him. So, they accuse Him of casting out this demon by Satan's power.
 2. Jesus lays out the absurdity of this comment (**Matthew 12:25-26**). If Jesus is working against Satan, how can He also be in league with Satan? It was a ridiculous charge.
 3. But if they were going to be critical, I'm glad they said this. Their charge actually proves something important. It proves that they could not dispute that a miracle had actually taken place. All they were able to do is question the source of the power, which they didn't very well. This serves as some of the most powerful testimony proving the miracles of Jesus were true. Even His enemies could not question that they had witnessed a miracle.

- B. But perhaps the strangest response of all to the miracle of Jesus was the persistent unbelief of His enemies.
 1. Surely the best example of this is found in the aftermath of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Think about it:
 - a. This man had been dead four days.
 - b. His body had already begun to decay.
 - c. In front of many witnesses, Jesus had raised Him from the dead.
 - d. If anyone ever doubted His claims, surely this would forever erase them.
 2. But notice how His enemies responded (**John 11:48, 53**). Later they would even plot to kill Lazarus (**John 12:9-11**).
 3. We marvel at their unbelief. It is a strange response to such an amazing miracle. But it teaches us something. When people harden their hearts and decide NOT to believe, no amount of evidence – even the raising of the dead – will change their minds. We need to be careful about that – that we do not close our minds to some truth that we do not want to see. Whether it's what the Lord says about loving our spouse, disciplining our kids, keeping our mind pure, sharing the gospel with our neighbor, or what the Lord says about salvation, I need to have an open and receptive heart that is eager to do what He says.

Conclusion: Are you open to what Jesus says about salvation (Acts 2:38)?

- David A. Banning