

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

January 2018

“Messiah’s Miracles,” Part One

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“Messiah’s Miracles,” Part One

Monthly Summary

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we begin a new series entitled “Messiah’s Miracles,” as a complementary study to “Elisha’s Exploits.” This follow-up study will examine the various miracles in Jesus’ earthly ministry beginning with turning water into wine and concluding with the miraculous ascension of Christ.

Jesus earthly ministry was characterized by mighty signs and wonders. Why did Jesus perform miracles? What was the significance of his miracles? Elisha was a type of Christ under the Old Covenant. The Jewish people knew the prophetic ministries of men like Elisha who were mightily used of God to perform miraculous exploits. The Jews fully expected that Christ would come in the likeness of such great men of God (Mt. 16:13-14). Jesus’ countless miracles were thus a mighty confirmation that he was the Christ, the Messiah sent from God (Jn. 21:25). John 7:31 reads, “And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?” Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, saying, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (see also Jn. 3:1-2).

Are miracles still important in the church today? Do people need to see miracles in order to be persuaded to believe in Jesus? Miracles were important under the Old Covenant in order to confirm the Word of God, and miracles were important in the earthly ministry of Jesus to confirm his Messiahship. But do we actually still need them and should we expect to see them today? Before his ascension, Jesus taught that miraculous signs and wonders would follow believers (Mk. 16:17-18). Such signs served to confirm the Word of God (v. 20). Moreover, miracles did not cease with Jesus’ earthly ministry; indeed they marked the ministry of the New Testament church as described throughout the book of Acts. Furthermore, one of the nine gifts of the Spirit is “the working of miracles” (1 Co. 12:10). So yes, we should fully expect miracles to operate in the church today, both confirming the Word of God and encouraging people to believe in the Lord Jesus.

January 7, 2018

“Water into Wine”

Main Point

Jesus’ miracles confirmed his Messiahship and encouraged people to believe in him.

Introduction

If you were Jesus, what would have been your very first miracle? If you were the Son of God, how would you begin to manifest your divine power among the people? Miracles are not superficial and trivial, but they seemingly follow human necessity and flow out of impossible circumstances. In other words, when God works miracles, the Lord is supernaturally doing something for us that we simply cannot do for ourselves. In today’s lesson, we will study what is often considered the first miracle that Jesus worked: turning water into wine.

Key Verse

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (Jn. 2:11).

Lesson Summary

In John 2:1-11, the first miracle of Jesus took place at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Cana was about 10 miles directly north of Nazareth, Jesus’ home town. His mother Mary was at the wedding. Jesus and his disciples were also called to the feast. Such wedding celebrations lasted as long as seven days. The betrothed couple must have been close friends of Jesus. His attendance at the wedding demonstrated his congenial, social nature – he was never too busy to eat and fellowship with his friends (consider Mt. 11:18-19; Mk. 2:15-16). This festive occasion necessitated an opportunity for Jesus to manifest God’s power and glory among family and friends. At this particular time during the feast, Mary came to Jesus – not merely as her son but as her Lord – because they had run out of wine. In many parts of the world today, this may not seem like a huge problem with grocery stores at our fingertips; but in Biblical times, a wedding feast with nothing to drink more or less ruined the celebration for many guests. Her statement of the problem was actually a petition for divine help. Mary believed Jesus could supply the need. Of course, she already knew he was the Son of God (Lu. 1:30-38). Her petition proved that she believed Jesus could provide wine through some miraculous means. Her directions to the servants

further confirmed her faith in him: “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (Jn. 2:5). Mary believed in the power of God’s Word (Lu. 1:38). Although Jesus hesitated to intervene, he nevertheless was willing and proceeded to satisfy her petition (1 Jn. 3:21-22; 5:14-15). Her faith prompted what appears to have been a “premature” miracle (Jn. 2:4). After all, how could Jesus deny such great faith in him, especially from one so dear to his heart? No doubt, Jesus could have supplied their need for wine in a variety of ways. But he chose to meet the need by a physically miraculous and indisputable method. Jesus began with ordinary water. The Jews kept containers of water for washing because of their traditional purification rituals (Mk. 7:1-5). Six stone water-pots were sitting there for all of the necessary washing during the wedding feast. To accommodate the many guests for a one-week celebration, each stone pot must have held many gallons of water. First, Jesus had the servants to fill the water pots to capacity. Then he simply told them to draw from the pots and serve it to the governor or ruler of the feast (i.e. the host). Somewhere during this process, Jesus made water into wine. He miraculously condensed the lengthy process of growing, ripening, harvesting, and treading grapes into a moment of time. By the power of the Holy Ghost, he transformed ordinary wash water into tasty wine (almost certainly the preserved unfermented juice of the fruit, see Mt. 26:29). The servants knew what was done, but the host suspected nothing. He exclaimed, “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (Jn. 2:10).

Scripture Study

The social setting – Jn. 2:1-3; Mt. 11:18-19; Mk. 2:15-16

Mary’s faith – Jn. 2:3-5; Lu. 1:30-38; 1 Jn. 3:21-22; 5:14-15

The first miracle – Jn. 2:6-11; Mk. 7:1-5

Conclusion

Miracles are supernatural feats which evidence undeniable proof. We cannot explain it, but the facts stand true. When the servants filled the stone-pots with ordinary water and then served up wine, they were eye-witnesses of the power and glory of God in Christ. Moreover, “his [*Jesus*] disciples believed on him” (Jn. 2:11). Indeed, Jesus is not here in the flesh, but he has given us the power of his Spirit. We should therefore expect miracle-working power in the church today, so that many will turn to Jesus and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

January 14, 2018

“The Miraculous Catch”

Main Point

The miraculous catch of fish assures us that God is able to supply all of our needs and to give us a great increase of souls.

Introduction

Jesus did miracles that transformed people’s lives, changing the way they thought about God and themselves. In today’s lesson, we will see how Peter’s life was radically changed by a boatload of smelly fish. It sounds funny, but it’s true.

Key Verse

“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net” (Lu. 5:5).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 5:1-11, we read about the miraculous catch of fish. Simon and Andrew, his brother, operated a fishing business with their partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee (v. 10). Their fishing was not for hobby or sport, nor even for a meal, but it was their trade. They were professional fishermen; they knew how to catch fish. In the early part of the day, the men had returned to land and were cleaning up from their work after a long night of fishing with no results (vv. 2, 5). So they were finished for the day. At this same time, Jesus was at the lake of Gennesaret (i.e. the sea of Galilee) with a group of people who greatly desired to hear the word of God. Seeing the two ships at land, Jesus entered Simon’s and asked him to push out a little into the water so that he could teach the people from the ship (vv. 1, 3). We cannot be certain of all Jesus preached and taught that day, but we can be sure of his central message – “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mk. 1:15-16; Mt. 4:17-18). Whatever Jesus said, we can be sure that his teaching prepared Peter for what was about to happen. After he finished teaching the people, Jesus then asked Peter to go back into the deep waters and fish again. Jesus was not a fisherman; he was actually a carpenter by trade (Mk. 6:3). Peter was the professional; he owned a fishing boat; he was in fishing business with his partners; he knew the trade. They already worked hard all night but caught nothing. Now, a “master” teacher of the Scriptures – a rabbi – was asking him to “Launch out . . . for a draught” (Lu. 5:4). Why go back out? What does a rabbi know about fishing? Nevertheless,

Peter launched out again at his word – just because he said so (v. 5). Something in Jesus’ teaching must have gripped the heart of Peter. Although logically he saw no point in fishing again, his faith in Jesus moved him to take Jesus at his word and to obey him. What is the outcome when we believe and obey the Word of God? The results are miraculous. After fishing all night without results, Peter then had the biggest catch of his life. How do we know this was no ordinary catch? First, Luke described it as a “great multitude of fishes.” Second, it was such a huge catch that the net broke [or was breaking]. Their net could not contain it. Third, they had to appeal to their partners for help. Fourth, they caught so many fish, they filled up both ships. Fifth, the catch was so enormous that both ships began to sink from the massive weight of the fish. Finally, consider the reaction of Peter. When Jesus performed this miracle on Peter’s behalf, Peter humbled himself. He saw himself as unworthy of the Lord. He said, “Depart from me,” falling down before Jesus and confessing his sin. Clearly, Peter had never seen anything like this; he knew he was in the presence of God, for no man could do such wonders (vv. 6-9). Was Jesus looking for some other response from Peter? No. The Lord is pleased with a humble and contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18; 51:17; Is. 57:15; 66:2; Mt. 18:1-4). Other than Peter’s conversion, what was the greater significance of the miraculous catch of fish? In other words, why was this miracle necessary for Peter and his partners? A number of things may come to mind. But foremost, Jesus demonstrated God’s overwhelming ability to meet their needs. Peter and his partners could not catch any fish, even after “toiling all night,” but Jesus gave them the biggest catch of their lives. Trusting in the Lord’s ability, they answered the call of Christ, left everything behind, and followed Jesus. Therefore, they could believe in Jesus for even bigger and better things, like catching a multitude of souls for God (Lu. 5:10-11; Ac. 2:38-41).

Scripture Study

Believing and obeying the Word – Lu. 5:1-5

The miraculous catch – Lu. 5:6-7

Humbling himself – Lu. 5:8-9

Following Jesus – Lu. 5:10-11

Conclusion

Jesus has already commissioned us to launch out into deep waters and catch souls for the kingdom (Mk. 16:15). He has already promised to provide us with power and authority as we go (Mt. 28:18-20; Ac. 1:8). Let’s take Jesus at his word. Let’s go fishing!

January 21, 2018

“Calming the Storm”

Main Point

The Lord is powerful and able to care for us in every situation.

Introduction

In Mark 4:2, the writer explained that Jesus taught the multitudes by parables, and “when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (vv. 33-34). Jesus used parables (symbolic stories) to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God, but he also used miracles as a practical, experiential method of teaching them. In today’s lesson, we will learn lessons from Jesus’ calming the storm.

Key Verse

“And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk. 4:39).

Lesson Summary

In Mark 4:1, Jesus was teaching by the Sea of Galilee, and a great multitude gathered to hear him, “so that he entered into a ship” in order to teach the people. One of the reasons Jesus taught from a ship was to create distance between the people and him, because of the large crowds and the complications this posed. For example, Mark 3:8-10 notes: “. . . a great multitude, when they heard what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.” Therefore, when Jesus desired to teach the really large crowds, a little distance served a great purpose. After a long day of teaching the parables of the kingdom, Jesus and his disciples set sail at evening. Jesus said, “Let us pass over unto the other side” (4:35). Not knowing they were headed for danger, the disciples made the voyage. As they crossed the sea, a violent storm came up and battered the vessel filling it with water. Their lives were clearly in jeopardy. Nevertheless, Jesus was fast asleep in the back of the ship. He was perfectly at peace and rest in the midst of the storm while his disciples were in a panic. At last, they came to Jesus and awakened him, saying, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (v. 38). Jesus then rebuked the wind and waves, speaking to the sea, “Peace, be still” (v. 39). The storm obeyed his voice, and all was calm. What should we learn from this miraculous

experience? No doubt, Jesus fully intended to cross over to the other side of the sea. After all, he said so – “Let **us** pass over unto the other side” (v. 35). Consider: “us” means Jesus and his disciples. Although his presence did not stop the storm from coming, his presence on the ship was the guarantee of their peace and safety, even when their circumstances placed their lives in jeopardy. In other words, we should always remember that Jesus is our peace in every situation we face. All they had to do was go to him, and cry out to him. All he had to do was speak the Word – “Peace, be still” (v. 39). From this miracle, we should therefore believe God’s Word and rest in the Lord. Because he is always with us, living in our hearts and guiding our lives, we can be sure to reach our final destination in him. Being scared and overwhelmed, the disciples asked a rather foolish question, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (v. 38). Of course, he cared! He just wasn’t terrified like them. The changing circumstances of life, even the storms, do not diminish God’s care and concern for us. After he calmed the storm, Jesus’ response said it all: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith” (v. 40)? The disciples questioned his care for them; but Jesus questioned their faith in him. The fact that he immediately calmed the storm with the power of his Word proves his point. The disciples exclaimed, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him” (v. 41)? To be sure, Jesus cared; they just needed to believe in his ability to care for them.

Scripture Study

The storm – Mk. 4:35-37; Mt. 8:18, 24; Lu. 8:22-23

Calming the sea – Mk. 4:38-39; Mt. 8:25-26; Lu. 8:24

Faith in Jesus – Mk. 4:40-41; Mt. 8:26-27; Lu. 8:25

Conclusion

Have you ever asked, “Lord, why must I go through this storm?” The hard times (i.e. temptations, trials, suffering, sickness, and so on) in our lives are actually times of spiritual growth. Through these hardships, God is forming us into the kind of Christian who can stand and persevere in the faith to the finish (Ja. 1:2-4). We do not know what tomorrow holds, no more than the disciples knew the storm was coming. But we should take courage in knowing that God uses such storms to establish us in the faith for even greater challenges ahead. For as soon as they reached the other side of the sea and came off the ship, they were met by a violent man tormented by a multitude of demons. Nevertheless, they knew Jesus could calm his storm (Mk. 5:8).

January 28, 2018

“Casting out Devils”

Main Point

Jesus Christ has all authority to set people free from spiritual bondage.

Introduction

After the disciples weathered the tempest on the Sea of Galilee, and after Jesus calmed the raging storm, they were truly amazed by the power and authority of Jesus. Matthew explained, “But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Mt. 8:27). The fear of the storm had passed. Now they feared the one who could rebuke the winds and command the sea to be still. Truly, the fear of the Lord and the wonder of his miraculous power should far exceed any fear regarding our circumstances. In today’s lesson, we will see that the one who has authority over the powers of nature also has authority over spiritual powers.

Key Verse

“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid” (Lu. 8:35).

Lesson Summary

Luke 8:26-35 tells the miraculous story of spiritual deliverance. After the storm ceased, Jesus and his disciples safely arrived on the other side of the sea near Gergesa in the country of the Gadarenes (Lu. 8:26; Mt. 8:28). When Jesus came out of the ship, immediately a demon-possessed man (c.f. “two possessed with devils,” Mt. 8:28) came to him. This demonic control over his life had a number of devastating effects. First of all, the man was mentally insane and incapable of having normal, social relationships. Instead of living in a house within the community, he actually dwelled as a social outcast living among the graves. He acted like a wild animal, roaming unclothed in the mountains and in the tombs. Being mentally tormented, he incurred self-inflicted wounds. People heard him, day and night, crying out and cutting himself. Needless to say, he was dangerous. No one could go near him for fear of being attacked. Moreover, all attempts to bind him were unsuccessful; he was so powerful that he even broke chains and shackles. Being bound by Satan, his condition was hopeless until Jesus came on the scene. When he saw Jesus in the distance, he came running to the Lord, fell down

before him, and worshiped him (Lu. 8:26-29; Mt. 8:28-29; Mk. 5:1-7). In fact, the demons within him were pleading for mercy because Jesus had rebuked the unclean spirit and commanded it to come out of him. The man cried out: “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not” (Lu. 8:28). Clearly, demonic spirits know and respect the authority and power of Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:34; 3:11-12; Ac. 19:15; Ja. 2:19). In this case, the man did not have one demon, but he was possessed by many unclean spirits as indicated by the name Legion, a military term referring to a large troop of soldiers. How many demons did he have? We do not know for sure. Nevertheless, the unclean spirits entered into a herd of about 2000 swine when Jesus cast them out of the man (Mark 5:11-13). Thus, Jesus exercised divine authority over the demonic spirits – regardless of their number – proving he has all power to deliver those who are bound by Satan (Lu. 8:29-35; Mt. 8:29-34; Mk. 5:7-15). When Jesus commissioned the church to go forth into the world with the gospel, he assured us of his authority, saying, “All power (i.e. authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). Jesus further assured us: “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (v. 20). Why is the assurance of his presence and authority so important in our mission? As believers, we have the promise of power and authority in Jesus’ name in order to set captives free from Satan’s control. A key feature of Jesus’ ministry was delivering the bound and oppressed; and this continues to be a key component of the church’s ministry in the world today (Mk. 1:39; Lu. 4:18; Mk. 16:17, 20; Ac. 1:8).

Scripture Study

Bound by Satan – Lu. 8:26-29; Mt. 8:28-29; Mk. 5:1-7

Set free by Jesus – Lu. 8:29-35; Mt. 8:29-34; Mk. 5:7-15

Deliverance ministry – Mk. 1:34; 3:11-12; Ac. 19:15; Ja. 2:19; Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 1:39; Lu. 4:18; Mt. 10:1; Mk. 16:17, 20; Ac. 1:8

Conclusion

It’s true – we have no authority or power of our own enabling us to deliver those who are bound by Satan. However, Jesus is more than able to bind the strong man and to cast him out (Mt. 12:28-29). As the head of God’s church, Jesus desires to work through the members of his body. For this reason, we must be wholly sanctified, consecrated to God, and filled with the Holy Ghost. In other words, we must be spiritually prepared for the Lord’s use – instruments of the Holy Ghost – in order to bring deliverance to the captives.