

September 4, 2016

“The Significance of Jesus’ Miracles”

Matthew 8:1-4

FCF: Belief in but confusion about the miraculous

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The stories of Jesus’ miracles are true.

(magnet) And they are deeply significant.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Statistical studies and miracles may seem like an odd pairing. But recent surveys show that, even as more people appear to be turning away from organized religion, the number of Americans who definitely believe in miracles has risen 22% in the past two decades. Risen! And roughly 55% of Americans are sure of such supernatural phenomenon. That’s a lot of folks.

That said, there is much confusion on this topic once you get past the initial points of agreement. It reminds me of that line from Han Solo in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* when he has to clarify things to Finn, “*That’s not how the Force works.*” So what can we know for sure?

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 8:1-4

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Is this even plausible? Are miracles possible? Some would say, “*Miracles can’t happen. So obviously this is all a fabrication and can’t be trusted to be a reliable account.*” To which I would raise my objections to the objections. After all, who says? The fact of the matter is that, when you drill down into this, such objectors are often quite arrogant, looking down their noses at ancient peoples and those of other cultures. Such objectors are often quite narrow-minded, seeing all of life as taking place in a “closed system” with no intervention from the outside. But you can’t prove that. That’s a faith claim every bit as much as the Christian view. Think with me. If there is a God - and you can’t prove that there isn’t - then miracles are indeed possible.

And it does no good to protest and claim that such things would be “violations” of “the laws of nature” for, if there is a God, then “the laws of nature” are actually but observations of how God usually works. So, is this even plausible? Are miracles possible? Yes, absolutely.

In fact, let me press this a bit harder. The stories of Jesus’ miracles are true. These stories are true. And our text indicates that they are deeply significant as well. “*In what ways are they significant?*” you ask. First, as an authentication of the messenger - in this case, of Jesus. Second, as a demonstration of his character. And, third, as an indication of his intentions.

I. AN AUTHENTICATION OF THE MESSENGER

Can we believe Jesus? Yes, for the miracles serve as an authentication of the messenger.

A) *The Looming Question*

1. Astonished crowds

Note the context (**READ Matthew 8:1**). Down from what mountain? The site of the Sermon on the Mount. And what do we read at the conclusion of that teaching? (**READ Matthew 7:28-29**)

2. Valid concerns

We looked at this a few weeks ago. Tied up with everything Jesus taught on life in the kingdom was his claim to be the King, to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Which raised some questions and concerns. “*Where do you get the authority to speak this way and to make such claims?*”

B) *The Startling Answer*

That’s the looming question. And this miracle supplies a startling answer.

1. Implicit from the start

It’s implicit from the start. Notice how the leper approaches Jesus. He kneels. And then how he addresses Jesus. As Lord. Now the man likely did better than he knew. But it gives us a clue.

2. Explicit with the healing

And what’s implicit then becomes explicit with the healing. Jesus heals the man with a word. And the healing is instantaneous. Jesus speaks with divine authority. And he acts with it as well.

This is the authentication of the messenger. Which tells us that we can believe him.

Application:

That is to say, he really is God in the flesh. Our purpose and meaning in life really are found in following Him. All our longings, our deepest desires and aspirations are met in him. Forgiveness of sin and freedom from its tyranny are possible if we but turn to him. All of these astonishing claims Jesus makes of himself are backed up with these astonishing deeds.

Connect the dots. The stories of Jesus’ miracles are true. And they are deeply significant.

II. A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS CHARACTER

So we can believe him. But can we trust him? What will we find if we rely upon him? This takes us from the authentication of the messenger to a demonstration of his character.

A) *To Be a Leper*

1. The disease

Here it’s worth knowing what it meant for this man to be a leper. “Leprosy” was a reference to a variety of skin diseases, all highly contagious. In that culture, a leper was deemed cursed by God and ceremonially unclean. Others would be forbidden to touch him. He was then an outcast.

2. The suffering

So think of his suffering. Beyond the discomfort and deformity, he had been cut off from family and friends. His only company were others like him. So it’s not surprising he starts with, “*Lord, if you will*” since he has lived for some time without anyone wanting anything to do with him.

B) *To Touch a Leper*

That’s what it meant to be a leper. So what did it mean for Jesus to touch a leper?

1. The plan of God

In the overarching plan of God unfolding over the course of centuries, we see here that all the ceremonial laws that forbid this touch are now fulfilled in Jesus. He cannot be ceremonially defiled. But all that he touches is then undefiled. The unclean is cleansed. The broken is healed.

2. The heart of God

So we see the plan of God unfolding. But also the heart of God for this man. He had tried to keep his distance. But Jesus closed it. The crowd had to have been shocked as they saw the Teacher's hand touch this man. And how long had it been since he felt that? Jesus could have done this with a word alone. But he did it in a way that communicated healing with a touch.

This is the demonstration of his character. Which tells us that, yes, we can trust him.

Application:

This moves us beyond the head to the heart, beyond weighing facts to the call to faith. It tells us that even while things may look and feel their worst, Jesus truly can and surely will bring about the best. It tells us that, no matter how hard the path, there is never a question of his love.

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III. AN INDICATION OF HIS INTENTIONS

Which takes us to the last point, an indication of his intentions. What does all this mean?

A) To Fulfill the Law

At least two things. First, Jesus' coming to fulfill the law (**READ Matthew 8:3-4**).

1. The command to silence

There are two commands here. First, we hear the command to silence. Jesus tells the man to tell no one what has happened. The reason being that he will likely be misunderstood, especially given the popular desire for a wonder-worker and the expectation of a political messiah.

2. The command to obedience

So Jesus commands him to be silent. But he also commands obedience, to show himself to the priest and to offer a sacrifice as a proof. Of what? That what Jesus had said of his mission was true. That, despite whatever he would be accused of, he has come not as the abolishment of the law but its fulfillment. And that the Old Testament was meant to prepare for and point to him.

B) To Reverse the Curse

This miracle shows he has come to fulfill the law. And, in so doing, to reverse the curse.

1. The kingdom is advancing

Jesus is the true king. For all Satan's supposed sway, he is but a usurper. With the coming of the true king, the kingdom is advancing and the borders of Satan's influence are being driven back.

2. The signs of its coming

The kingdom has come. And in this miracle, we see signs of its coming. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, and the outcasts are restored. All that is sad is coming untrue.

So we see an indication of Jesus' intentions, of what is coming, of what all this means.

Application:

That's why we can sing "Joy to the World" all the year through. And should. And why we can say that what some call "violations" of the natural order are really the "restoration" of the natural order. Which can give us hope - a sense of anticipation and a summons to endurance.

And it can give us focus as we hope. Notice that Jesus' concern is not just with the man's soul but with his body, not just his spirit but his flesh, his physical and his social needs as well. Which should tell us something. Jesus is concerned about the whole person. So too should we.

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CONCLUSION:

I mentioned *The Force Awakens* a bit ago. In an earlier scene in the film, Finn and Rey are with Han Solo on the *Millennium Falcon* talking about Luke Skywalker ([READ quote](#)):

Finn: Do you know what happened to him?

Han: There were a lot of rumors. Stories. People who knew him best, think he went looking for the first Jedi temple.

Rey: [in awe] The Jedi were real?

Han: I used to wonder about that myself. Thought it was a bunch of mumbo jumbo. A magical power holding together good and evil, the Dark Side and the Light. Crazy thing is...it's true. The Force, the Jedi. All of it. It's all true.

And since it's all true, because it's all real, they press forward. Just as we would expect them to.

That's how the story works. Well, here's the thing. We too are living in a story - not in a Hollywood sequel but in a plot line that includes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, David, and Isaiah; Peter, John, and Paul; Augustine, Luther, and Calvin; Wilberforce, Spurgeon, Bonhoeffer, Lewis, and Schaeffer. And with Jesus at the center of it all, the One who has come to live and to die in our place. Jesus, whose mission from the start was to serve as a ransom for many, for all who would put the whole of their faith, their hope and trust, in Him and in His finished work.

The stories of Jesus' miracles are true. And are deeply significant. They authenticate the messenger. They demonstrate his character. And give us an indication of his intentions.

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