

Three Miracles

Matthew 8:1-17

As I preach to you from this text this afternoon, I know that I can take for granted that you believe in the historical reality of these miracles. You believe in Jesus' miraculous powers. So I will take for granted, as the very foundation of my message to you, that Jesus actually encountered a man with leprosy and that he actually healed him; that he actually encountered a centurion whose servant was healed from a distance; and he actually healed Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. That's where I will start in my preaching to you, but with this note, that in the world in which we live I can't take those things for granted.

That is to say, the very point at which people begin to express their disbelief is in this context of supernatural power. The starting point of the world, the presupposition of the worldview of the typical unbeliever or non-Christian, is that reality is confined to what I can observe and verify. Truth is confined and defined by what I can demonstrate through scientific observation. In other words, there is no such thing as supernatural power. And ironically, that is a statement of a profound religious conviction, based upon a presupposition that itself, cannot be proven. Unbelievers begin with the absolutely certainty that there is no supernatural power. But enough for the inconsistencies and inherent contradictions of the mind of an unbeliever. Let's look at these miracles for what they are, miracles of God. As such, they validate and vindicate Jesus' own claim to be the eternal son of God, for this power which he demonstrates is nothing less than the power of God.

So as we come to a study of a variety of miracles over the coming sermons, just a brief, broad mention of their purpose. Ultimately, most simply, the miracles display God's glory. They

are most often called "signs" in the Bible.

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

That verse, of course, gives further insight into the purpose of miracles, to lead people to believe in Jesus, to believe him to be the eternal son of God, the second person of the trinity. Most clearly, we read in,

John 20:0 "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Those miracles became the focus the apostolic preaching beginning at Pentecost as well.

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."

So the miracles are a demonstration of the validity of Jesus' claim to be God, they are the evidence of his divine power, and they become the foundation of the declaration of the gospel and are recorded for us in Scripture "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." That's where I begin today. And we come to,

I. A LEPER.

v.1-4

Note that the sermon on the mountain now officially ends, as Jesus comes down from the mountain. Note also his popularity, already, this early in his ministry. As we will see, that isn't always a good thing, and even at the conclusion of this first miracle, we read in verse 4 that,

v.4 "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

So a leper. It isn't hard to understand or recall his status. Totally and completely outcast from all society, an untouchable. Ceremonially unclean. One quick reference,

Lev. 13:11 "And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. 3 The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean."

The specific regulations continue for two whole chapters, followed by a chapter on how to be cleansed from that uncleanness. So this man whom Jesus encountered would have been totally and completely separated and isolated from the other Jewish people. And yet, look at his faith. It is,

A. The faith of submission and trust.

Simply, sincere, and humble. He claimed no rights for himself, no arrogance nor presumption. "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

He believed. He trusted. And he submitted. No demands.

Just the acknowledgement of God's sovereign authority and power. He recognized that God had both power and will, and both were necessary for his request to be granted.

How easy it is to miss either or even both of those things. First, God's power. This leper had no earthly expectation or hope of ever being cured. His whole life was framed by his disease, yet he believed God could cure him. God could make him clean. He believed God, and he believed God's word. There is nothing too difficult for God. As Paul writes in Ephesians 3, in the form of a doxology of praise, God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."

So there was no hope for this leper, in terms of earthly power. But still he believed that God had the power to cleanse. And he submitted himself to God's sovereign will, "Lord, if you are willing." And at that moment, he is being so very Christ-like, isn't he? For Jesus himself would pray in with that same sense of submission, as he contemplated the reality of his impending death.

Mat. 26:39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will... 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Or as Luke records it,

Luke 22:42 "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

That's the faith of submission and trust, and this leper becomes a man of great encouragement for us as well, for this is how we are to pray. This is how we are to look to God as well,

not as the all-encompassing nanny-state of political socialism, not merely as the solution to all your needs and the source for the fulfillment of all your wants, but as the sovereign Lord. “Not my will but yours be done.” That’s not a depressing fatalism, in which you really cherish no hope of receiving what you ask. Instead, it is the appropriate submission that is joined with trust. This leper came to Jesus and knelt before him. Shouldn’t you and I do the very same thing, with all of our needs as well. The faith of submission and trust. And that faith was rewarded, as Jesus demonstrated,

B. The power to cleanse.

v.3

Two specific answers. I am willing. Then, he actually accomplishes the work. He performed the miracle. He cleansed the man of leprosy, and in so doing, demonstrated his power to perform and even greater cleansing, the cleansing of the soul. If God can removed uncleanness from the skin of a man, surely he can removed the uncleanness from his soul. And that is why this miracle is so encouraging, because that is the very focal point of the promise of the gospel.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Or how about this reference from,

Heb. 9:11 “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal

Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

That’s the gospel! That’s the power of God in the gospel, the power to cleanse. And never is that promise to cleanse our soul made clearer than in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

Ezek 36:25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

Beloved, it is that power of God which is so well demonstrated in this first miracle. Then the second. We read about,

II. A CENTURION.

A centurion was a Roman military officer. An infantry officer who command 100 men, hence the title of Centurion. Perhaps the closest equivalent today would be a sergeant. The idea is clear, that he is a military man accustomed to governing others with authority. When he spoke a command, it would be obeyed. That is is still the case in the context of our military. That exercise of authority is absolutely essential to the success and stability of any army. The officer commands, the soldiers obey. Period.

This centurion comes to Jesus knowing that he is the one under authority, that Jesus is the higher ranking officer. And he demonstrates to us the virtue of,

A. Honoring the exercise of authority.

It is a God-honoring position to assume.

v.5-9

You see, this centurion’s submission to authority was deeply

grounded in his own humility, his own sense of being of lesser importance than Jesus. So there are no impetuous demands, no impertinent obligations placed on Jesus. And no magical or superstitious sense that he has to do perform some trick or incantation in person. It is enough for Jesus to give a command, for he is the one who exercises all authority over all things. “Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.” Just say the word, and the exercise of authority will be carried out. Again, that’s faith, faith to believe that Jesus’ power is in his word. His power is in his authority. And this centurion fully submits to that exercise of authority.

v.10

That faith is rewarded.

B. The great reward of faith.

It is the reward of eternal life. Jesus not only heals the paralyzed servant of the centurion, he grants the entrance into eternal life. Again, the meaning and purpose of the miracles is clear, to give testimony and attestation to the promise of the gospel. So the most important message is not,

v.13

Instead, the point is really to be found in,

v.11

With the appropriate warning of,

v.12

So faith is shown forth here, faith in Jesus, and that faith is all about submission, honor, trust.

Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

A third miracle for our focus, then, this afternoon.

III. PETER’S MOTHER-IN-LAW.

v.14-17

Perhaps there is nothing more profound and significant that I could say beyond a recognition of,

A. The work of a compassionate high priest.

“He touched her hand.” He didn’t have to do that! Remember the Centurion. He could have just given the word, but no, he went and entered Peter’s house. He went to the sick-bed. This was personal. This was compassionate.

And why is that important? Consider,

Heb. 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Heb. 2:17 “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

Such a direction application, and such a great encouragement. Beloved, look at Jesus. Look at what he did, and how he did it. Look at his power, but look as well at his compassion. Then, “come boldly to the throne of grace, that [you] may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Matthew's gospel directs our attention to,

Isaiah 53:1 "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."

What a glorious scope to this little miracle! The focus is transferred from our physical afflictions to the sickness of our souls. Our diseases, in the flesh, only represent the great disease of the soul, namely sin. And "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Again, the actual quote from Isaiah, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

Ultimately, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law did not refer to the fever in her body, but to the sinfulness of her soul. And Jesus performs his miracles to show that he has the power to forgive sins. And he does so as a compassionate high priest.

One final thought. Look at verse 15, the response from Peter's mother-in-law. It is to be your response this afternoon, to the promise of the gospel as it is proclaimed by the words of my preaching and as it is demonstrated in the sacrament that lies before us. Look at the response of faith to the mercy of Jesus.

v.15 "So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them."

So the application of this sermon is,

B. The call of service.

The application of this declaration of the power of God to perform miracles is the call of service. So you who call upon Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, you who look to him in faith to cleanse you of your uncleanness, you who proclaim the Lord's death as you partake of the Lord's Supper, rise up in service to Jesus.

Let that service begin with the sacrifice of your praise as your worship this afternoon. Perhaps that praise could best be summarized with these words from,

Ps. 103:1 "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

Bless the Lord, O my soul, who heals all your diseases!
Today, even as you leave this afternoon, rise up and serve him.