

## Miracles

OED: a remarkable and welcome event that seems impossible to explain by means of the known laws of nature and is therefore attributed to supernatural agency.

NB: NT doesn't use Greek word for miracle (thauma) to describe what Jesus does. Rather δύναις- power, same word used to describe God's power. Dynamite, dynamic.

1. Mk 6: What deeds of power are done by his hands.
2. Col 1:11 May you be strong with all strength that comes from his glorious power.
3. Acts 10:13 How God anointed Jesus with the holy spirit and with power.

Constitute about 1/5 of synoptic material.

Integral part of Gospel message.

4 categories: healings, exorcism, raising, nature.

Synoptics: miracles as inbreaking of kingdom

John: signs of the Messiah.

Jesus' miracles symbolized the defeat of Satan and evil.

- sickness and disability was associated with demons or evil.
- Many Israelites so afflicted at the time of Jesus felt hopeless in the face of demonic powers. Healings and exorcisms signify defeat of evil.
- Rabbis saw Jesus as a sorcerer - anyone who had power of those forces of evil had to be associated with it or in a league with it. (Matt 12:24 - by Beelzebul he casts out demons.)

Other miracle workers:

- Roman historian Tacitus says emperor Vespasian could cure the blind and crippled.
- Asclepius could heal illness.
- Miracle workers and magicians who could create rain, heal certain illnesses with potions or incantations.
- Difference: unlike magicians, Jesus doesn't charge a fee, work in secret, use spells, or base his mission on healing.

### Meaning of the miracles?

- miracles were to meet human needs.
- To show that all, especially outcasts, had access to the power of God.
- Were a proclamation that the Kingdom was at hand, reveal the presence of the kingdom.
- Symbolize that God is imminent and present, not in the glorious past, or far away in a heavenly realm.
- God doesn't send sickness and death and punishment, but rather those conditions are overcome by the power of God.
- Show continuity with God's saving power in the past.
- Jesus links his healing work with the saving power of God described by Isaiah.
- Sign of inbreaking of kingdom; Jesus doesn't heal everyone.
- Restores physical wholeness but also spiritual; heals part of the person damaged by human prejudice by restoring people to community.

NB: miracles provoke variety of responses

- gratitude, out of his mind, presumptuous, in a league with Satan.
- Or a fierce negative reaction.
  - o Matt 12 - after healing man with shriveled hand Pharisees plot to kill him.
  - o Raising of Lazarus: John 11. Unambiguously states that this is the reason they move to arrest Jesus.

Miracles are not a "proof" of Jesus' divinity; not a proof that he is Messiah. Jesus doesn't "do" proofs.

- won't do them for Herod, the devil, or the Pharisees.
- "No such proof will be given these people." Mk 8
- No one else mentions them in that sense, not apologetic, not proofs. Paul doesn't mention it.

What role does faith play in miracles?

- Mk 5 women with the hemorrhage, faith makes her well.
- Lk 5: paralytic. Faith of friends who carry him.
- Mt. 17 disciples can't cure a boy with epilepsy, they don't have enough faith.
- Lazarus - sister believes.
- Leper Mk 1 - Jesus feels pity.

## Mark 4 and 5 : Parables and Miracle Stories

### Parable of the Sower:

- Begins/ends “listen!”
- In early church might have served as an exhortation to members; explained what happened to those who fell away.
- A little seed getting into the right soil goes a long way.
- Even Jesus couldn’t get people to listen.

### Secret of the Kingdom

- Quote from Isaiah 6.
- They need to understand since they have been called fish for people.
- To you has been given the mystery: Dan 2: apoc. Motif. Only elect members understand, insiders.
- Jesus doesn’t want to cut off anyone from salvation. May intend narrow group here – Pharisees?
- Harkens back to old testament idea that God hardens hearts as a punishment?
- Don’t be surprised or discouraged if some people do not hear; outcome is in the hands of God.
- Maybe it’s ironic – “the last thing they want is to change and have their sins forgiven!”

### Series of Proverbs

- Don’t conceal your faith.
- Whoever has spiritual insight will have in increased by Jesus’ parables; those who do not will end up in greater spiritual ignorance; the “rich” get richer, and the poor get poorer.

### Miracles around the sea of Galilee

- Jesus has power over nature, demons, death.
- Calming of storm:
  - Makes us ponder question – who is this?
  - Common motif in ANE: god exercises power over forces of chaos.
  - Asleep on a cushion – sounds like Jonah. Jesus doesn’t care – like Jonah.
  - NB disciples don’t understand.
  - Jesus has power to save believers even in worst of circumstances (like Mark’s persecuted church).

### Gerasean Demoniac

- Traditional site is 30 miles southeast of sea.
- Poor man has totally lost his humanity.
- “Legio” – 10<sup>th</sup> legion, stationed in area, symbol was a boar.

- As soon as Jesus steps into Gentile territory, a legion prostrates itself before him. God's kingly power has subdued imperial domination.
- Driven into sea - chaos -where they belong.

Parables mediate an appealing experience of God and the kind of life Jesus lived. What he spoke of in parable he lived.

What is the proclamation of the parables?

- now is the day of salvation, God is merciful to sinners and will deliver his loved ones from the coming tribulation, catastrophe is imminent – it's time to make up your mind

Parables can be instructive for preaching today – when we preach in a religious dialect it's often unintelligible both inside and outside the religious community. Nothing is purely religious or purely secular; daily experience can be the bearer of God's presence.

Interpretation of parables is polyvalent, i.e. can have multiple meanings.

Examples:

Matthew 13:31-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

31 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

(Ezekiel 17:23: On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches.)

Matthew 25:14-30 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Parable of the Talents

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents,[a] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you

- Faith doesn't earn a miracle.
  - o Openness to the power of God in one's life. If one's heart is closed, power can be blocked.

Miracles teach us that reality has mystical and spiritual dimensions our scientific worldview doesn't recognize.

Show us that God is working - trying to work - in everyday life. Faith allows us to see this, recognize the power of God in operation.

### Parables

Biblical statements about God and God's action are expressed in a language of images. Aramaic "Masal" - riddle or enigmatic saying.

- 1Sam 2:6 The Lord kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
- Deut 5:15 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.
- Job 4:38 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"
- Is 49:14-15 14  
But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,  
my Lord has forgotten me."  
15 Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.

Jesus continues in this spirit using parables: "metaphor of simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."

40 parables, use imagery of nature, human deviousness, little vignettes, dramatic stories.

Invite people to contemplate their own lives.

in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

## Luke 15

### The Father with Two Sons

11 Then Jesus[b] said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with[c] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'[d] 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father[e] said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"