

Miracles of Jesus 12-04-29a

This is the 29th of April, 2012, Sunday morning. We're going to begin in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, in the vicinity of verse 21, although we'll need to see a little bit of the preceding context as we continue the study of the miracles of the Lord Jesus. As we approach this very fascinating subject, we want to take just a moment to ensure that our hearts are prepared that God the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to teach us as well as to aid the communicator as we tackle these things.

They seem simple, but they very quickly become very profound and it is beyond all of us unless God's Spirit is here to teach and to illuminate. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for this day, for the opportunity to gather and to share with one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to you, celebrating the Lord Jesus Christ, looking into the Word that is before us and hoping for a better understanding and for transformation of those parts of our hearts and souls that are intransigent, that are resistant, that are still leaning in the direction of selfishness and corruption. We know that our nature is such that it is only through your power that we can live and decide and think and act in a way that is pleasing before you and that reflects your glory, that vindicates the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf.

We pray that as we spend this time together that your Holy Spirit will superintend and impress these truths on each heart, that we will all come to a better understanding, be moved, be changed, be motivated and encouraged to live in the light of your Word and in the light of the example of the Lord Jesus so that when He returns for us, we can, having done all, stand on that great day of judgment. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have embarked on a study of the miracles of the Lord Jesus. There are roughly three dozen of these. And the order in which we study them is not necessarily chronological.

It is roughly chronological. But because we piece together the ministry of Jesus from the gospel accounts, and in particular John has quite a different perspective, the chronology is not always certain. So you find if you look at the gospel of Mark here in chapter 1, which I have encouraged you to put before you, Mark, and years ago we went through the gospel of Mark, you remember that it begins not with the birth of Jesus, not with the wise men, not with the shepherds, but with the ministry of John the Baptist, the laying of the foundation of Old Testament prophecy.

This is the Old Testament age. Everyone in Israel is still under the active dominance and purview of the Old Covenant. And after hundreds of years of virtual silence with just the written account to provide ministry and to provide insight, there has arisen the last of the Old Testament prophets.

And the last of the Old Testament prophets is John Ben Zacharias, who we know as John

the Baptist. And Mark begins his account, and of course you will probably remember that Mark seems to be largely the amanuensis or the ghost writer for the apostle Peter. And this is where Peter began his knowledge of the Lord Jesus, is with the ministry of John the Baptist.

So this is a very natural starting place. Peter wasn't a boy living in Bethlehem and seeing the birth of the Lord Jesus, being a few years older or something. His consciousness that something was coming, that something was up, is when he, up in Galilee, as a fisherman, heard that something was going on down at the Jordan, that there was someone down there.

No report of miracles, no report of demons cast out or lepers being healed or the blind seeing or anything. There was a message being delivered. It was delivered in two forms.

It was delivered in a ritual form, through water baptism, and it was delivered in verbal form, through proclamation, repent, prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Now, this was not uncommon. There were people that rose up and tried to be prophets just as today.

You see people rise up and try to be apostles or prophets or whatever. They'll call themselves the apostle this or bishop that, and they're sort of self-appointed harbingers of doom or proclaimers of one thing and another, and they don't typically gain much of a following. This was different.

One of the reasons it was different is that it resonated with people who knew their Old Testament scriptures, and the specific nature of the ministry of John the Baptist was unique. It was unique because the rabble-rousing pseudo-prophets that had arisen, and we have accounts of these from various historical sources, but what would they try to do? What would you try to do today if you wanted to crank up a cult or wanted to get a following? What would be the best way to do it? Well, get known, get notorious, get on social media, make a Facebook and a Twitter account and get yourself on YouTube and get noticed, get on the media, try to get on TV. Go to populated areas.

Go down to the mall on a busy Saturday and stand on a soapbox and start giving out your message. Put out signs. Get on the corner of the Haggard Farm there and add your sign to the 14,000 other campaign signs.

You can't even see that farm anymore. Their wire fence is just solid cardboard, solid plastic down there. And I don't know who thinks that's going to be effective.

I can't even... You might as well just look into your alphabet soup to pick a name. But that's what you do. You go to populated centers.

If I was going to try to start a cult, and this is what the people had done, what other false prophets and false messiahs had done, they would try to gather a following. They would

go down to Jerusalem, and they would try to raise a rabble, raise a crowd, make a noise. And they would be very quickly arrested for disturbing the peace and hauled away and dealt with by the Roman authorities.

John was different. Where was John? Was he in Jerusalem? Was he at the temple? Was he in some great population center? He was out on the relatively barren shore of the Jordan, the muddy Jordan River. You remember when Naaman saw that river, what he said about it.

He says, this is pathetic. We've got a much better river than this back in Syria. What would he have given me this little mud hole creek for? You want me to dip myself in that nasty thing? Because it wasn't the time of the spring flood, and it was a pathetic looking little rivulet there.

And he's down there, probably just had barely enough water to dunk people in. They go in with a white robe, come out with a brown robe, and he's, this isn't much. But he's out there.

He's baptizing in the Jordan, and it says that his message was written in the prophets. Now, it's not an accident. Think of this as Peter.

Mark has written this down, but this is Peter talking. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophets, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. People who were genuinely watching for the Messiah, not just as a political solution or an economic solution, or let's get rid of the Romans and get back to being independent.

Those who knew their scriptures knew that when Messiah came, there would first be a forerunner, and he would have a specific message. You have this in Malachi, I will send Elijah the prophet. He will call to the hearts of the fathers and the children to turn toward each other, otherwise I will smite the land with a curse.

And this is when Peter thinks back and he says, how did this whole thing get started? How did the ministry of Jesus start? Well, in Peter's experience, it started with John. It started with the forerunner, the prophet. That was his starting point, and that's how he begins his account, and that's how Mark begins it.

John came baptizing in the wilderness, in the wilderness, out in the unpopulated area. There's a town not too far away, but down at that shore, it's barren. You've got to come out there.

He didn't go and try to use advertising techniques and social media of the day. You wonder, did he just go down there and start yelling at the rocks and the shoreline, and a few people had come down for various things, maybe somebody to fish, somebody to

gather some reeds to weave a basket or something, and they hear this guy just carrying on, shouting to the nature as it existed out there, and they went back and, you know, there's a guy down there just proclaiming, just prophesying. Well, there is.

Well, what's he saying? Why did you come? And they just gradually, people who were interested came down to listen. Well, before long, in a matter of weeks or certainly not more than months, this word has spread throughout the land, and people who are interested in prophecy and say, you know, they're supposed to be a forerunner, this word has spread all the way up to Galilee, and Peter and Andrew and James and John have left their apparently successful businesses and come down to the Jordan to hear this message. Why? They are seeking.

They are interested. They are in this place, and they are going to see, identify, and meet, and begin to follow the Messiah of Israel because they moved to where the word of God was being proclaimed. They recognized that there was something different about John.

His prophecy was rooted in the Old Testament. He had the marks of an Old Testament prophet. He didn't do a single miracle.

There's not a recorded miracle by John. But these men recognized, and they stuck around. They came day after day to hear what he had to say.

They wanted to know about the Messiah. There was a recognition, and this is something that God uses. It isn't obvious.

It isn't in your face. And at this point, the people who became aware of John and later became aware of Jesus were people who were actively seeking. So the first principle, and we've seen this in the first two miracles, who knew that Jesus performed a miracle in Cana? Only those who were paying attention, who were with him, who bothered to inquire.

Hey, I thought we were out of wine. Where did this come from? This stuff is great. And if they bothered, those who were following the Lord Jesus, the disciples that went up there with him, they were the ones who knew.

Mary was the one who knew. The servants in the back, the humble, kind of like the shepherds, they were the ones who knew. But the bulk of the population didn't find out about this.

It's not even in the Synoptic Gospels. You also see that in the way the stories are told. We saw in the first two miracles, that and the healing of the nobleman's son.

The miracle isn't even recorded. The actual happening, it doesn't say, and behold, the servants who were attending the young lad noticed a holy glow and heard the flapping of angel wings, and suddenly he sat up and said, I feel better. It's not even there.

It happens at a distance. It happens out of sight, just like the water changing to wine. We don't even know it.

Until Jesus says, draw and give to the master of the feast. And when he tastes it, he's the one who tells us that it's wine. It has already happened.

Well, there is a really important thing for us to observe, and that is we, as believers in God, as believers in the Lord Jesus, operate on faith. Faith is the substance of things that are hoped for. A hoped-for thing isn't here yet.

If you're hoping for a thing, you don't have it yet, right? I'm not at the risk of being a master of the obvious. If you have it, there's no faith involved. This is why you don't see any mention of faith in the Millennial Kingdom.

Look at any Millennial Kingdom passage. There's not any mention of faith. Why? It's the substance of things hoped for, and everything that's hoped for is there.

The Messiah has arrived. The Davidic king is on the throne. The lion has laid down with the lamb.

People are living to ripe old ages. There's swift justice. The king is ruling with a rod of iron.

What is going to be the basis of judging people in the Millennium? It's what they do. What did you do when you saw someone sick, when you saw someone in prison, when you saw someone naked, when you saw someone hungry or thirsty? What did you do? This is the measure of your attitude toward God, because faith isn't pertinent. You're not hoping for anything.

It's here. You don't see any mention of faith with regard to the unfallen and fallen angels in the past. Did Satan get kicked out of heaven for lack of faith? It's not an issue.

He's right there in the presence of God. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. So here we see the trust.

Do whatever he says. I'm not going to fill these water pots. What kind of sense does that make? We need wine, not water.

And besides, these are ritual, ceremonial cleansing pots, and everybody's already come in. We're not expecting any more. That's a waste of time.

I'm not going to do that. They obey because they recognize the authority of the one who told them to do it, which in this case was Mary, and they recognize the authority of the Lord Jesus, and they do what he says. They are obedient, and they know as soon as they dip and begin to carry to the master of the feast, the servants are the first to know that Jesus has performed this miracle, and they know it intimately because they are the ones

that put the water in the pots.

They know it's water. They filled them the first time, and then the water was depleted. He said, fill them back up to the brim.

They did so, and then he says, draw it and take to the feast. As soon as they put that dipper in, as soon as they dipped it out and put it into a cup, and we're going to carry that cup to the master, there's no mistaking the difference between water and wine. Water is clear.

Water has no odor. Water has no taste. You know how it is when you use a dipper.

There's always a few drops that spill, and as soon as they dripped it out, they said, wait a minute. And yet, in the face of this miracle, they don't fall apart or go into ecstasies. They continue to obey, don't they? Those servants do what they are told, even though they have just witnessed a miracle, the like of which nobody has ever seen or heard of.

But they are people under authority, and they do what they are told to do. They don't go running into the middle of the feast and say, it's wine, it's wine. Look, I just filled this with water, and it turned over.

This guy back here just turned. That would have completely spoiled the effect, wouldn't it? They did what Jesus told them to do, and we must do the same. We can't be dazzled.

We can't be distracted. We can't decide that everybody must know what I know. Everybody must see what I've seen.

We have to be disciplined. We have to follow the instructions of the Word of God, because God's plan is better than ours. Can you imagine the slap-happy people that we have today if Jesus tried to pull off this miracle in our midst today? As soon as somebody figured out that that water was wine, all chaos would break loose, wouldn't it? Nobody could maintain their composure.

Nobody would pay any attention. We have so little discipline anymore. People would just go nuts, and they would think nothing is more important than me getting the chance to tell everybody something I know that they don't know yet.

These servants are disciplined. You have to really admire these servants. They see the first miracle that the Lord Jesus performs, and it's a stunner.

And without a word, they do exactly what they are told to do. This is a great model for our obedience. But Peter sees this because he and his brother and his friends, John and James and Philip and Nathanael Bartolomeo, have come down from Galilee to hear this word of a non-miraculous prophet preaching.

That's why they are in the right place at the right time to see this. They are seekers.

They are listeners.

So the question we ask ourselves, Am I a seeker? Am I a searcher? Am I asking? Am I knocking at the door? Am I beseeching the Father to give me insight, not only into His Word, but also into myself? Search me and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. Show me my hidden faults.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The only way the Word of God is going to do its work is if we are actively seeking. So Peter begins his account this way.

He talks about John clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, eating locusts and wild honey. Peter notices how he's dressed and what he eats. Why? Because it's significant.

These are the marks of Elijah. They are the marks of an Old Testament prophet. And his message is, I baptize you with water, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. They hear the testimony of John identifying him and they go up with him. And you'll notice that after that baptism, in the account of Mark, which we see is coming from Peter, it says, Immediately the Spirit drove him, verse 12, into the wilderness.

He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered him. Peter is not a witness to this. This is what he finds out later.

But obviously there has been a gap of time here. And we saw the day sequence in John. So how does this reconcile? Because it looks like we have that seven-day period where they go up to Cana of Galilee.

And in those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting, and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. A voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Immediately, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness, and he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered him. And then we have a gap. A large gap.

Now, after John was put in prison, well, we know from other passages that there were many things that took place before this. If you keep your finger here and turn over to John chapter 3, verse 24, you remember everything that happened in chapter 2, the wedding feast, the healing of the nobleman's son that we've already seen. Then after that, John records him going to the Passover of the Jews in 213.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and He has a cleansing of the temple. Take these things away. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise.

The Jews ask Him for a sign. He says, Destroy this temple. In three days I will raise it up.

Verse 23 of 2, When He was in Jerusalem at Passover during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. He did a lot of things in Jerusalem at that time. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

So He does these signs, but He does not reveal Himself fully. Then you have chapter 3, Nicodemus, John 3.16, the whole dialogue regarding the Holy Spirit. Are you a teacher of Israel and you do not know these things? Then in verse 22 of John 3, After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea.

There He remained with them and baptized. John also was baptizing in Anon near Salim because there was much water there. As I said, the Jordan could get pretty tricky and muddy and unusable.

So he has moved where there's enough water to dunk people. By the way, anybody that wants to know whether effusion and sprinkling are proper methods of water baptism, John had to go to do his baptism where there was enough water to immerse. If all it took was a handful sprinkled on your head like the Methodists, like I got when I was a child, he could have stayed at the Jordan.

He could have done it out of a pot or a cup or a well. But it had to be living water. It was a flowing stream, which, by the way, kind of makes you raise your eyebrows about baptistries.

The only way that's running water is coming from the faucet and going down the drain, I suppose. But biblical baptism, you notice John did not use a mikvah. He didn't use the ritual bath that Judaism had constructed for proselytes and converts.

John baptized in the river, and there's a reason for that. It was living water. It is representative of the stream of living water.

It's representative of the tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season. And there's a reason why it was living water. And if you're going to practice water baptism, you should find a flowing stream.

That's the right place to do it. Not a swimming pool, not a bathtub, not a baptistry. You know, we say, well, we're going to modify things.

Well, you can if you want. I'm just saying. Biblical, John the Baptist's baptism.

And baptism, you remember when Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch? Here is water.

Well, it's a stream. That's where he got baptized.

So notice John is still baptizing, and all of these things have taken place. John has not yet been arrested. As it says in verse 24, John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Jesus has done numerous signs and miracles that are not recorded in Scripture. And one or two of them may be recorded in Scripture. As I said, we're not totally certain of the chronology.

For example, if you go to John 5, you find the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda. And there is some doubt if you read Alfred Edersheim. He thinks that the Pool of Bethesda thing happened right after the healing of the nobleman's son, if you look at his chronology of Jesus.

So we're not too worried about the chronology. That's a different kind of study. But what we see here in Mark is that after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

So the first time he came to Galilee, he told his mother in Cana, my hour has not yet come. I'm not ready to publicly proclaim the gospel. Since that time, his hour has come, and he has begun to proclaim it.

And this is after John is put in prison. And that's not an accident, because John's ministry is preparatory. And Jesus figures that God the Father is going to perpetuate John's ministry until the time of preparation is complete.

When John is imprisoned, John's ministry of preparation is complete. That's when Jesus begins his public proclamation. That's one of the ways Jesus knows that his hour has come, is that the forerunner has finished his run.

After John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, and he actually comes back to Galilee. He has been there before, as you know. Now he is preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

He's not telling his mother, trouble me not, my hour has not yet come. And he is saying the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Now this is a second great observation.

The first observation is, if we want to see and benefit from the presence and the power of God, we need to be seekers. It is not going to happen just out of some sovereign lightning bolt. God's presence and God's power are manifest to those who are looking, to those who are obedient, to those who are watching.

Secondly, awareness of the time. John and James and Andrew and Peter and Philip and Nathaniel know that the time is ripe. Jesus knows the times.

He knows when he should start his ministry. The time is fulfilled. Well, how does he know? Because he knows his Old Testament Scriptures.

Elijah will come first. He knows his Old Testament Scriptures as he is going to announce in the synagogue. And you have this over in Luke.

Keep your finger in Mark and turn to Luke chapter 4. By the way, he also knows because he is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, was tested for 40 days. Then, verse 14, Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

And news of him went out through all the surrounding region. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.

And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He reads this Isaiah passage, closes the book.

All the people are fixed on him. And he says, Today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. What was the Scripture? The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

That's how it begins. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. This is something that can be recognized.

It can be recognized from what the person says. It can be recognized from what the person does. He has anointed me to do what? To preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty, recovery of sight to the blind, to set, by the way, to proclaim liberty and to proclaim recovery of sight.

Right? You look at the way that sentence is constructed. This is the proclamation of the recovery of sight, meaning you can recover your sight if you want to. Israel is largely blind.

And Jesus says, If you want to, you can see. Remember what he told the Pharisees? They say, Are we blind also? After he heals the blind man, he says, Well, if you were blind, you would have no sin. But because you say, We see, your sin remains.

You have to acknowledge the blindness to have it removed. This is the proclamation of the removal of blindness. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

I had an interesting thought. I didn't have time to research on this as I was reviewing and musing on it this morning. There is an interesting possibility when you look at that verse 19, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

The acceptable year of the Lord is a jubilee year. And you remember that Jesus' ministry is going to extend almost exactly three and a half years, which by the way was, if you look at the ancient lectionary, the teaching schedule for the synagogues, they had divided the law and the prophets up into anywhere from 154 to 175 different parts. You can get all this out of Edersheim.

He goes into great detail about synagogue worship in this day. Jesus goes to the synagogue. What's fascinating to me is that the cycle of readings and repeating was three and a half years.

So you would begin at the beginning and you would finish all of the passages and start over every three and a half years. This gave you two cycles every seven years. Well, seven years, then you're supposed to have a Sabbath year, right? And every 49 years, then you're supposed to have a jubilee year for the 50th.

When Jesus says, I'm here to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, it would be interesting to do the calculations because I think on the original calendar of Israel, this year that Jesus begins his public ministry would be a jubilee year. The acceptable year of the Lord is a jubilee. This is liberty to the captives.

This is freedom and restoration. This is what the jubilee represented. And so you might be able to actually nail down exactly which year this was.

If you can go back and work out the times and the chronology because not only would this be a year where Passover fell at sundown on Thursday, but it would also have been on a 50-year cycle from the beginning of the calendar. But he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he says, Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Today. Well, when in Nazareth they hear this and you can see your words of Christ in red there, verses 23 through 27, when he says, You all are going to say, Physician, heal thyself, and you're not going to listen to me.

He says, Assuredly, no prophet is accepted in his own country. I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah. How did the Gospel of Mark start out? With the ministry of the latter day Elijah.

Jesus said, Elijah has already come. John the Baptist is the impersonation, if you will, of Elijah. And he says, In the days of Elijah, there were many widows in Israel when the heavens were shut up three years and six months.

Three and a half years. Shows up again here. This is almost a prediction of how long Jesus' ministry is going to last.

There was a great famine throughout the land, but to none of the widows in the land was

Elijah sent except to Zarephath in Sidon, to a woman who was a widow, someone who was looked at by the community as not blessed by God. Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet. Elisha had the twofold spirit of Elijah, didn't he? And in the days of Elisha, none of them were cleansed.

None of those lepers were cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian. You've got a Sidonian widow and a Syrian general are the only ones in those days in terms of that miraculous intervention. And what did you have? For the widow, you had provision, just as Jesus did in the first sign miracle.

For Naaman, you had healing, just as Jesus did in the second sign miracle. And of course, with Naaman, you have that period of seven dips in the Jordan. And for the woman, you have that three and a half year time of famine, so you've got that three and a half and seven year thing.

Well, you know my ambition is to do one miracle in each session, and it's going to be a miracle if I can do that, because we're out of time for our first session, and we've really just laid the background for our third miracle, which is the casting out of a demon. But this background is really essential. I just don't think you can understand this miracle.

We can't understand it if we don't look at the context, because context is everything. So at the risk of disrupting my schedule, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up in Mark 1.21 and Luke 4.31, where we are going to see the first instance of demon possession and the casting out of a demon in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

But let's pause here and take our break.