

Miracles of Jesus 12-09-30a

This is Sunday morning, the 30th of September, 2012. We continue our study in the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ and we are in the second part of a study of a specific miracle which we've seen. It's in three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

We'll begin this morning in Matthew, chapter 17, the lunatic boy, the moonstruck boy, demon-possessed, at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. Let's take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration and our souls and spirits and hearts and brains to the study of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we are so thankful for Your grace and Your daily expressions of faithfulness and mercy on us.

We deserve nothing, we merit nothing, we can earn nothing, we can do nothing apart from that grace and apart from the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ who has not only delivered us from the penalty of our fallenness and our sin, but has also delivered us on a daily basis out of this present evil age, out of darkness, out of the grip of forces beyond our control. And through Him we have the ability to partake of eternal things, to begin to build an eternal inheritance, to reflect Your glory, to come to an understanding of Your plan and purpose for the universe, for human history, and for our lives. We pray that as we study this portion of Your Word this morning that God the Holy Spirit will present it to us and impress it on our hearts in a way that will be meaningful to each one, that we will come away with a clearer view and a better grasp of the calling that You have issued to us, the resources You have made available to us, the mission that You have called us to and that You have asked us to fulfill individually and collectively as we invest and attempt to be good stewards of the time that remains to us in this life.

We await the return of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, with great anticipation and we pray that our study as well as our meditation and our application of these things will prepare us for that day and for everything which follows. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

As I said, we're resuming our study of the lunatic boy and we saw last time that there is a great deal of multilayered communication going on here. This is not just a father and not just a son. It isn't a happenstance.

It's not a woman and a daughter. It's a father and a son. It's no accident that it takes place, this particular event, right after the transfiguration.

And we spent a good portion of last week looking at the context. What has Jesus been saying? What was the question that He asked that the disciples answered? Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Well, you're the Christ. And He says, well, you know, the Christ has got to suffer and die.

Oh, Lord, be it far from you. And Peter begins to rebuke the Lord. And Jesus says, get thee behind me, Satan.

Your mind is on the things of men. Now, that's a key. It is fatal to you.

Hear me now. It is fatal to you and it is fatal to me, spiritually, to have our minds on the things of men. You say, well, now, wait a minute.

I've got a car to drive and a house to clean, laundry to do, a few meals and a job and education and a career and a family. How can I not have my mind on the things of men? Listen, all of these things are story problems. They are story problems.

Don't get so wrapped up in the movie that you forget that it's a movie. And boy, have they got the technology to make you forget these days. You go there and you have these Mondo screens and special glasses and they've got the sound and, you know, they lead you into it.

Why people creep through dangerous houses and can't get the lights on, I don't know. But that's what they do. And all of a sudden, there's this event on the screen and they lead up to it.

It's quiet and the floorboards are creaking and then all of a sudden a door slams and the person turns around and their eyes are big as saucers and it was just the wind closing a door. There's nothing there. I mean, this has become just the stock of scary movies.

The first time it's not going to be the real deal. The next time the person is going to look around and say, ah, the wind on the door and there's the scary guy with the mask and the big knife. But we get caught up in, this used to take place in reading a well-written book.

Your imagination would transport you to places and times where you're reading about a thing and you can't put it down. You know, people, you start a book and you think, well, I'll read for a little bit and it'll make me sleepy and I'll get, you know, four in the morning. What was I thinking? But you can't put it down.

You're just engrossed. You're engaged. They have captured you and taken you out of your body to a place and you can't get away.

You can't put it down. You can't get the sleep you should get. Well, this happens in our life and Jesus is trying to illustrate and to teach this point to His disciples.

Don't let your mind be captured and carried away by the things of men. Now, how does He do this for His advanced class of disciples, Peter, James, and John? Right after, who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? We've got Peter's great confession and then we have Peter's great failure. Peter is the classic parabola man.

You know, he goes up this way and then he's going to come down this way. He's the sine wave man. His parabola goes up and he hits a peak.

He's walking on the water. Then it goes below the x-axis and he's sinking into the water. He says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Then He says, far be it from you. You shouldn't die and be delivered into the hands of men. He reflects in many ways the best and the worst of us as believers.

What does Jesus do? He takes Peter and James and John to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration and He says, look, let me help you get your mind on the things of God. It's like I am often reminded, you remember that movie Cocoon where aliens are walking around in human bodies and then somebody finds out that they're not who they look like and they just pull the eyelid down and all that shining glory comes out. This is what Jesus does on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He says, Peter, James and John, you three can handle this information that the other nine cannot. He is transfigured before them and is shown in what will be His post-resurrection, post-sacrifice glory. Who is standing at each side? Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets.

Those two men symbolize, and I'm getting back to my series on the statement here, this Father and this Son and this event have symbolic value beyond just isn't that an interesting story. Here's a little epileptic boy and Jesus healed him. Much more going on.

It's not just an apparition of Moses and Elijah standing on the Mount of Transfiguration. What do they represent? The Law and the Prophets. Has the Law been buried in the ground? Perhaps, but nobody knows the place where it's buried.

Nobody knows exactly where the Law came to an end. They know approximately. They know it went away and went to a mountain, but nobody knows the burial place of Moses.

How about the Prophets? What's the difference in Moses and the Prophets? Moses was the first great prophet, was he not? But he's the author of the Law and the Law has a known ending point. Don't know exactly when, don't know exactly where, but Moses died and was buried, right? How about Elijah? What's the ending point for Elijah? Gets in a fiery chariot and rides away. Is there an ending point? No.

Why? What do the Prophets speak of? And by the way, why is it a fiery chariot? Why isn't it a submarine? Why isn't it a watery boat? Why isn't it a standard chariot or an ox cart? Why wasn't it a winged Pegasus or a lamb or something? Why does he go away in a fiery chariot? Well, as we're going to review here momentarily, fire has a meaning in Scripture also, doesn't it? What is the burden of prophecy in the Old Testament? What's the burden of prophecy from the last great prophet, John the Baptist? What do the prophets... We say, oh, the prophets, it's future things, they're fortune tellers, they're

going to tell the future. What is prophecy in the Bible really about? What is the burden of the prophets? What's the message of the prophets? Repent because judgment is coming. What does fire represent? Judgment.

What does Elijah go and leave in? A fiery chariot. Why? Because he is a spokesman, as all of the prophets are, for judgment. You've got the law which sets the standards.

By the law comes the knowledge of sin, right? That's Moses. The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ to show us our need, right? That's Moses. Well, that mission will come to an end.

There's only so much need indicating that we need to do. Okay, we get it. I look at the Ten Commandments.

I look at the ordinances. I look at the description of what morality and righteousness is, and I recognize I can't meet it. I was listening to something on the way over, and Patty and I were talking about how there is a great effort in large circles, and it's not entirely amiss, but there's a lot of, okay, let's demonstrate that Christianity is valid by evidence.

Let's show that there's evidence that Jesus actually lived. Let's show that there's evidence for the integrity of the Bible. It's historically accurate.

It has prophecies that have been fulfilled. Let's give the evidence. And whenever you get in a discussion with people who don't believe, they say, you can't prove any of that.

There's no secular witness to Jesus Christ. There's a couple of references in Josephus and Tacitus. Somebody scribbled that in the margin after the fact.

He didn't exist. He's a myth, and you can't prove otherwise. This whole thing about God creating the world, and you think the earth is 6,000 years old, which we don't, and you think that there's no such thing as evolution, which we don't.

But all of this stuff is trumped up, and what we do when we get into that kind of argument is we grant them the choice of ground. What is one of the most fatal mistakes you can make as a military commander? Let the enemy choose the ground. Let him choose the battlefield for his own benefit.

Why do you think, let's tone patty this, why do you think Lee lost at Gettysburg? He didn't get to pick the ground. Brilliant general, he didn't get to pick the ground. When you start arguing the merits of Christianity based on evidence, you're on the enemy's ground.

What's the definition of faith? It is the evidence of things not seen. It's not faith is the substance based on the evidence of things seen, is it? But we tacitly grant that point when we start, and nothing wrong with Josh McDowell, evidence that demands a verdict,

and all these other guys that try to make a case. Lee Strobel and a lot of these other guys, they do a nice job, but this is basically preaching for the choir.

You know who buys evidence that demands a verdict from Josh McDowell? Believers. You know who buys Lee Strobel, case for Christ, case for faith, and all that? Believers. Why? Because we've already made the decision about faith, and we find and we are comforted to see that our faith is consistent with the evidence, and it is consistent with reason, but it does not spring from it.

Anybody that came to faith in Christ and remembers the thought processes old enough to remember all of the machinations that went on surrounding that decision, did you sit there and say, well, you know, I just finished reading Josh McDowell, and the preponderance of evidence, I mean, I'm going to have to go with the faith in Christ, because it just seems like, well, it probably was. What is it that compels us to faith in Christ? I am lost. I am sinful.

I am hopeless. I need a Savior. There is no concrete evidence.

You can't put that in a beaker and heat it up or measure how many grams of mass it has or any of that. The ground of faith is our recognition of intangible, ephemeral things, not mundane matter and energy. So we just have to be careful.

Don't, you know, what is it they say, don't argue with an idiot because he'll, I don't know, you have him on his own ground and he'll beat you with it. Don't get on the enemy's ground. Don't try to make this a discussion about, well, my faith is valid because there is enough evidence to support it or Scripture is inspired because look at all these fulfilled prophecies.

That's not the issue. And Satan successfully diverts the discussion away from the central issue which is sin and righteousness and judgment. Moses and Elijah, by the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Because of God's righteousness there is going to be a judgment. Elijah, flaming fire, right? This is what Jesus shows the disciples. So now this is of a piece and we've established this in great detail.

So look at Matthew chapter 17, right after the transfiguration his disciples ask him in 17:10, why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Why do they even ask this question? After the vision they lift up their eyes and they see Jesus only. And as they come down from the mountain in verse 9, Jesus commanded them saying, tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead. Now, little reminder here.

What was the problem? Who do you say that I am? You are the Christ. Well, the Christ is going to suffer and be delivered into the hands of men and be crucified and rise again on the third day. Oh Lord, be it far from you, got the knowledge but can't deal with it, can't

digest it, can't apply it, can't say, well this would make sense based on all of the types of the Old Testament, based on all of those suffering servant passages.

Peter just doesn't unstick the machine there. He doesn't take that data and process it and draw any conclusions. He's just, why? Because his mind is on the things of men.

Arrest, bad. Death, bad. Hands of men, bad.

This is how we look at our lives, isn't it? Oh, problem, bad. Must solve problem now. We don't step back and look at it that this is part of something larger.

So, shows him the transfiguration. Coming down from the mountain, he says, now look, I only took you three up here and showed you this because you're the only ones. The bonus problems at the end of the chapter, how many kids actually work those? It's only the brainiacs.

In my experience, 10 problems and number 11 is extra credit. If you get the 10 done and you're really sharp, try number 11. It's a bonus question.

Well, Peter, James and John get the bonus question. And when Jesus comes down, he says, now look, don't confuse the rest of the class with the answer that you've just seen to the bonus question. They're not ready for it.

It'll throw them off. Wait until the Son of Man has what? Risen from the dead. Risen from the dead.

Now, what does this do? This is such a brilliant example of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you know a thing and you're bursting to tell it, but there's something that prevents you from telling it, all you're going to think about is, well, can I tell it yet? Can I tell it yet? How soon can I, when can I, when can I tell it? And so what does this do? Every time they think back on this amazing thing that they have seen and they're saying, hey, Andrew, you'll never, I can't tell him until Jesus rises from the dead. It fixes the fact of the resurrection in their mind.

Anytime they think about the transfiguration and they can't talk about it until what? Jesus rises from the dead. They're forced to remember. Jesus has given them the best mental bookmark, the best refrigerator magnet, the best coffee cup, the best string around the finger.

He will rise again from the dead. Do you not remember when I was with you, I told you these things, Jesus says to them. Same thing Paul says to the Thessalonians.

Do you remember I told you these things? How could you forget? Well, he's given them this fantastic memory aid because they've seen one of the most dazzling things they've ever seen, heavenly glory. And anytime they want to speak of it, not yet. When did he

say I could tell this? Oh, when he's raised from the dead.

And yet even this isn't going to be sufficient. You know what happens to the disciples after the crucifixion. They're all depressed and down in the dumps and what have they not done? They're not thinking back.

Well, didn't Jesus say that he must suffer and die? Didn't he say that that transfigured glory would be revealed and we could talk about it after he was raised from the dead? I mean, when you look at it from our distance and not being us, we say, wow, what a colossal failure. But we're made out of the very same clay, aren't we? This is what we do. We know better and we just forget what we know.

We go to the enemy's ground. We grant the enemy the choice of battlefield and then he beats us with his expertise. You know, you argue with an idiot and he drags you down to his level and beats you with his expertise.

That's what happens. Don't argue with idiots. They're experts at being idiots and they'll make you an idiot and then they'll beat you with experience.

So, we cannot grant the enemy the ground. So, as we come to this, when they come down to the multitude, a man came to him kneeling down and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son for he is moonstruck and suffers severely. He often falls into the fire and into the water.

Often falls into the fire and into the water. Now, what do fire and water represent? Just reviewed fire, what is it? You can say it. You can say it louder than that.

Judgment. He often falls into judgment. He also often falls into the water.

What does the water represent? The wicked are like the what? You can say it. Troubled sea. The water, water that's deep enough and troubled enough to hurt you.

He's not falling into a puddle, right? The father says, oh, help my son. He just gets himself muddy. This is turbulent water in which he is liable to drown.

This is life-threatening water, right? Well, what is life-threatening water? This is the troubled sea. This is the chaotic forces of darkness. This is water out of human control.

It's not like, oh, he's playing in the hose again. Somebody turn it off or why is he sticking his foot in that bucket of water? This is water that will kill him, right? The father, as I suggested last time, represents the patriarchs. Israel is beloved for the sake of the fathers, right? What does the son, what do the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always do? What happens in the book of Judges? What happens in the descent of the book of Kings and Chronicles? What happens, you know, do they get better from David and Solomon? Do the people get more faithful and more diligent and more, you know,

more waters part and more mountains shake and more enemies are destroyed and the kingdom just grows and grows and grows? What happened? What is the history of the nation of Israel? They either get themselves under the judgment of God or they get themselves into destruction by their evil neighbors.

They either fall into the fire or they fall into the water. And God is in control of both, right? So I brought him to your disciples but they could not cure him. Now, which disciples? The three or the nine? The bright guys working on the extra credit problem or the guys that haven't even gotten a number eight yet? We brought them to the anchor draggers.

We brought them to the slow squad and surprise, surprise, surprise, they could not cure him. Now, what is the problem with the nine? What's the matter with them? And even taking them to the top of the mountain of transfiguration would not fix it. What's their problem? Your eyes, your mind, your heart is immersed, is enmeshed in the things of men.

So when the nine, this little poor victimized boy, is taken to the top of the mountain of transfiguration, this little boy with all of these problems is brought to them, what are they trying to do? What is their notion of the problem as they see it? What is it? Well, this little boy's got some kind of a malady and he's just nuts. He falls down, he foams at the mouth, he flings himself into the fire, he flings himself. So what are we going to do? Well, let's see if we can cure that.

This is like looking at somebody with measles and saying, look at all those red bumps. My wife's got some makeup. You know, if I paint over those bumps, well, that'll fix it.

Dealing with symptoms, dealing with effects, dealing with what's visible. What does Jesus always do? He goes to the source. He goes to the cause.

He gets at the roots of the things, the internal problem and fixes that. The man with the legion that's been terrorizing people and living in caves and cutting himself with stones and terrorizing the whole neighborhood, what did men try to do? They bound him. They put on shackles.

They tried to restrict his movements and of course they failed. He broke the shackles. He wore away the bonds and he tore away the clothes and everything the people tried to do to control him.

Why? Because they're dealing with his behavior. They're dealing with his outward effects. What did Jesus do? Legion? Leave.

The cause is eliminated. These disciples at the foot of the mountain could not cure him. That's what it says.

Could not cure him. So Jesus answers and says, oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Now, who's he talking about? The crowd? The father? The son? The disciples? Who? It's an interesting question. Oh, faithless and perverse generation.

Now, Jesus, you figure if anybody understands the higher symbolic value of all of this, it's the Lord Jesus. Is he looking at the nine disciples that could not cast it out and saying, oh, faithless and perverse generation? Do the disciples ever represent the generation? They are part of the solution to the generation. So if Jesus is looking around and he says, oh, faithless and perverse generation, he's talking about something besides they could not cast it out.

They could not cure him. What's he looking at? What does the son represent? Father, son. When you say father, son, what are you looking at? A generation, right? Here's the father.

Here's the boy. The boy is nothing like the father. The boy has got this huge problem.

He's perverse. He throws himself in the fire. He throws himself in the water.

He's not like the guy on the pallet carried by his friends, let down through the roof. He's not a little boy of faith. He's not like the demon-possessed man that saw Jesus from afar and ran and fell at his feet.

This boy has made no manifestation of faith whatsoever. Why does this boy get cured by the Lord Jesus? Why does the demon get cast out? Is it for anything having to do with the boy himself? Does the boy ever say a word? Does he ever make any sort of affirmation or protestation or any other indication of his attitude at all? No. This miracle takes place for the sake of the father.

Israel is beloved for the sake of the fathers. Look at Paul in Romans 9, 10, and 11. Branches are broken out of the tree because they are faithless, but the tree is not cut down.

Israel is not utterly cast aside. Has God cast away His people whom He foreknew? God forbid. Blindness has happened in part to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in, but there is a remnant, there is a root and a stalk.

All through history there is always a preservation. Why? Because God made promises to Abraham. He made promises to Isaac.

He made promises to Jacob. He made promises to the people who came in the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb. He made promises to David.

He made promises and for the sake of the fathers to whom those promises were made and who latched on to those promises by faith, God will never let Israel be destroyed. Throughout the Old Testament history, all of the fire and all of the water in the world does not kill the little boy, but the little boy represents generation after generation after generation. All day long I have held on my hands, God says, to what? A crooked, a stiff-necked, a perverse people, disobedient.

So when Jesus looks at this little boy, He sees the picture. He sees the Father who has brought the Son. This is like Abraham pleading for his descendants, Lord, did you not promise, like the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky, did you not promise that through me all the nations of the earth would be blessed? I know this is Moses pleading with God, do not destroy these people because what will the nations say? Your promises are no good.

How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to me. The hymn to be brought is the representative of this faithless and perverse generation. And Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him.

What is the new covenant to Judah and to Israel? In that day, God says, I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will do what? I will take out their heart of stone and I will give them a heart of flesh. I will pour out my spirit upon them, right? Now, how does this happen? Is this Calvinism? Is God going to take a recalcitrant individual and take out his recalcitrant heart and put in a receptive heart? It's a covenant with the nation, with the Judah-Israel dichotomy of the nation, right? And God says, I will take out your heart of stone.

Well, what is going to happen in the millennial kingdom? There are two kinds of people in Israel. All Israel is not Israel and Isaac shall thy seed be called, right? So, what does God do? How does he remove the heart of stone? Well, there is a division. There's the good and bad fish.

There's the wheat and the tares. There is the separation of the two kinds of people, sheep and goats if you will, in Israel. They will pass under the rod.

There are some who will go into the nation of Israel, the millennial Israel, and there are the majority who will be cast out. You'll see many coming and sitting down. You yourselves cast out.

That's the heart of stone. The heart of stone is separated. These disobedient, disinterested, apathetic people will be taken out.

And that remnant, that faithful 7,000 that don't bow the knee to Baal, those who are patiently waiting, the Annas and the Simeons and the Joshua's and the Caleb's and the Phinehas' and the Daniel's and the Ezekiel's and the Azariah's and Mishaël's and

Hananiah's of Israel will be in. I will take out your heart of stone. I will give you a heart of flesh.

The heart of the nation will be these faithful believers and there will be more that will grow up in the millennial kingdom. So when Jesus rebukes the demon and it comes out of the boy, it is the demon that throws him into the fire. It is the demon that throws him into the water.

It is the demon that throws him to the ground and causes him to foam at the mouth and try to hurt himself. That element within the boy is removed. Oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Be with you and bear with you in this state with this mixed result, this intermingling of the faithful and the faithless.

What is Jesus going to say on the cross when he looks out over this sea of Israelite humanity? Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. What they are doing to Jesus on the cross, does every single person out there believe in it and endorse it? No, but the majority do. The controlling element in the nation does and they overwhelm the faithful few.

Oh, perverse, faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to me. Jesus has the power to separate the boy, the rightful descendant of the father from this element that has possessed and overtaken and controls the boy. And it came out of him and the child was cured from that very hour.

The disciples came to Jesus privately and said, why could we not cast it out? Well, why could they not cast it out? Why is it that we, as we live our lives and come into contact with opposition, with persecution, with difficulty, with challenge, sometimes of our own making, we shoot ourselves in the foot. We throw ourselves in the fire. We throw ourselves under the bus, as it were.

We throw ourselves into the water and consequences result. Well, and we pray, oh, God, I keep failing. Oh, God, I messed up again.

Oh, God. And we try to get this element out of us. We want to be better than we are.

We want to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us. And we want to run with patience the race that is set before us. And we pray to God.

And we try to cast it out. Actually often we don't pray to God. But we try to solve it by a lot of different means.

And we'll go to God and say, oh, God, I need to do better. Well, we're going to pause and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to see that one of the reasons this particular miracle is preserved is for this discussion which follows.

This answers the question, what do I do about that which dwells within me? Remember Paul in Romans 7 and 8 talking about, I find, you know, with my mind I serve the law of God and with my body I serve the law of sin. And who will deliver me from the body of this death? What I want to do, that I don't do. And what I don't want to do, that's what I do.

There's a war going on in my members. Well, this is a perfect illustration of it here. And it represents not only what happens individually but what happens and what has happened historically in the nation of Israel ever since its inception with Abraham.

So when we come back, Jesus is going to talk about this situation. He's going to answer the disciples' question. And it is an answer for us as well.

What does it take? Is it prayer and fasting? Is it hopeless? What's the answer? Let's take our break. And when we come back, we'll see what Scripture has to say.