

Gleaners Bible Studies B 1

A STUDY OF MIRACLES - PART 1

Study 1

THE MEANING OF MIRACLES

Read

Acts 2: 22-36

Many people can't believe the miracle stories. They will accept, without question, many of the facts which surround the life of the Lord Jesus. Some will admit that He had power to heal. They will also readily admit His great influence over the people who had followed Him. But to still the storm, or raise the dead? - NO! This is where their belief ends and human reasoning takes over.

Our aim in these lessons is to study carefully the miracles which are recorded in Mark's gospel. Most of them also appear in one or other of the remaining three gospels. If you have read Mark's record of the life of the Lord Jesus before, you will have noticed that it has many distinctive features. One thing that is evident is the intense activity of the Lord. He never rests - He is always busy responding to the needs of people. Mark portrays the Lord Jesus as God's Perfect Servant. Words like 'immediately', 'straightway', 'again', frequently occur, suggesting the untiring energy of the Saviour. Within these activities, our miracle narratives are found.

You will find it helpful to compare the way in which each of the gospels record the various miracles. To help you do this, the references of the parallel passages will be given, as well as the passage from *Mark's gospel*. Read the Scripture record and jot down in a notebook the ways in which they differ, together with your own thoughts and observations. This method of study will bring you great blessing.

The miracles of Jesus were not magic or folk tales, neither were they designed to catch the eye of the crowd. The Lord Jesus never used the miracles to advertise Himself or make Himself popular in the eyes of the people. Rather, He often withdrew from the people when they wanted to give Him a place of prominence or make Him King. Look at *Mark 1: 35-38 and John 6: 15*. They were never used as part of a publicity campaign - He did not need this!

Most of the recorded miracles were in the early stages of the Lord's public ministry, and were proof that He was more than a man - He was God! What appeared to others as supernatural was to Him, as Creator of the Universe, just the natural exercise of His divine power. The different areas of nature in which His power was exercised was proof of this.

In *Acts 2: 22* Peter is preaching about the Lord Jesus and refers to Him as "**A Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs.**"

1. MIRACLES

We have already said that the miracles of the Lord Jesus were not magic. His miracles were visual evidence that He

possessed a much higher power than men possess naturally. He gave proof that He had divine power - power that belonged to Him as the Son of God. Each different need He met brought out a different aspect of His power. Notice the calm with which He approached those needs, and the care with which He dealt with them. He was Master and Lord of every situation. We must bear in mind that *disorders* in nature and *disease* in people were evidence of the works of sin and Satan. "**The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil**". (1 *John 3: 8*) Through His miraculous power the Lord Jesus proved that He was fully able to deal with any problem that earth presented to Him. Although truly man, He showed Himself to be the mighty Son of God. The miracles then, were DIVINE POWER expressed and displayed.

2. WONDERS

To the people, the works of Jesus brought a sense of that which was wonderful. You will notice how often they were staggered at His power. They were forced, even against their will at times, to confess that He was marvellous. It seemed that the miracles brought an awakening to many and a challenge to believe that He was the Christ. Others even attributed His power to the devil. This was the worst form of blasphemy and quite unforgivable. (*Luke 12: 10*) The disciples were driven to ask the question, when Jesus stilled the storm, "**Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?**" (*Matthew 8: 27*) They were utterly amazed! I wonder if you have ever felt that way about the power of the Lord Jesus?

3. SIGNS

This is an interesting word because it tells us the REASON for many of the miracles of Jesus. They were signs, signposts if you like, to point people to God. In John's Gospel especially, the few miracles recorded there are for this purpose - signs, so that those who saw would believe. It was not the will of God that any should suffer - this and many other problems came into the world through sin. Yet Jesus did not heal every illness He met. But each act of miraculous power was a sign not to be disregarded. Thus, spiritual lessons can be learned from the miraculous activities of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In concluding our first study, let us remember that the miracles of Jesus were not recorded to baffle us so that we have to say, 'I can't believe.' They were written to help us believe that He really was the Son of God. (*See John 20: 30 & 31*) They were signs to unbelievers of the mighty power of God. The Lord could not perform any of these mighty deeds in His own city because of the unbelief of the people. (*Matthew 13: 58*) But there were those who believed, like the disciples of *John 2*, when in the great miracle of the changing of the water into wine, we read that He showed His glory. They were glad to believe.

I hope you will engage in these studies carefully and prayerfully, for they give us a wonderful view of the Lord Jesus. And the greatest miracle of all will, perhaps, hit us with new force the fact that He rose again from the dead and is ALIVE TODAY, and His power never changes.

Study 2

A DEMON IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Read Mark 1: 21-28, Luke 4: 31-37

The setting of this story is in the Synagogue in Capernaum. It would appear that the Lord Jesus spent quite a considerable amount of time in the early days of His ministry, teaching in the synagogues of Galilee. The scrolls of the Law and Prophets were available in the synagogue and the Rabbis and other people would assemble there at different times to listen. So it gave Jesus a wonderful opportunity to make His teaching known. It is obvious that on this occasion the teaching of the Lord caused a great stir. The people were gripped by the authority with which He spoke. Here was not only a new voice, but a profound sense of authority in what was being said; something unknown in the teaching of the scribes. His teaching called for response, and response there certainly was!

A man possessed by a demon or evil spirit was there. The silence, brought about by the rapt attention of the congregation, was suddenly shattered by the shriek of this demon possessed man, ***“What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?”*** At this point Jesus had not even spoken to the man, so the conflict came uninvited as far as He was concerned. The demon showed his recognition of Jesus, ***“The Holy One of God”***, he said. The Lord’s reply came with great majesty as He gave the command that delivered the man and silenced his tormentor. The man was first torn with convulsions as the evil spirit left him and then became quiet. The miracle of deliverance had been accomplished. The people were amazed. Never before had they seen anything like this!

But let us look first at the **CONDITION** of the man. Possessed by a demon in the Synagogue, he appears to be rather out of place, doesn’t he? In the place where God’s Word was taught; in the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, Satan’s power was present. There is no doubt about the reality of Satan’s power. This man’s life was controlled by it! If you study Mark’s gospel carefully you will find that he often describes the work of evil spirits in the lives of people, and we can learn from these incidents that Satan wants to control, and eventually, spoil and destroy the lives of men and women. Even if he does not control our lives in the way he controls this man’s, yet wherever sin is unforgiven, Satan makes his power felt. He is very active today and, sad to say, controls many lives.

Now look at the **CONFLICT** between the evil spirit and the Lord Jesus. Notice that it was the demon in the man that shrieked at the Lord, ***“What have we to do with You... did You come to destroy us?”*** - the challenge came from them, and it shows us the real nature of the conflict between God and Satan. Notice that the evil spirit recognised who Jesus was, for he called Him the Holy One of God. We may well wonder why men and women today deny the deity of the Lord Jesus, when even the demons believe it and tremble! But here we can learn that there will never be a truce between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. Conflict is always there. Yet Satan has already been defeated and there is coming a day when he will be finally destroyed. (**Hebrews 2: 14**)

Now notice the **COMMAND** of the Lord Jesus - ***“Be quiet and come out of him!”*** There is no suggestion here of a trick or of some mysterious incantation. It was the WORD of command. Jesus was giving the orders and the forces of Satan had to obey. We can note that it was one of

the miracles worked through the direct word of the Lord Jesus. Possibly that day men saw in Him just a teacher or travelling preacher. They did not realise that as God, the Son, He could effectively challenge the world of evil that held this poor man captive. The result of such a challenge was freedom and healing. Remember, this was the same Voice that brought creation into being. How wonderful the word of the Lord Jesus was and is, for His Word still has power today.

It is significant to see the **CHANGE** that took place immediately in his condition. The evil spirit seemed to make its last desperate bid for control, then out he came. From being demon possessed, the man became calm and quiet under the control of Christ. This explains the nature of the miracle. Satan had to give up his victim to Christ. Someone has translated **verse 27** as, “When He gives orders, even the unclean spirits submit.”

Receiving the Lord Jesus into our lives also means a change of ownership. Christ takes **CONTROL**. Satan resents such interference with his domain. He certainly assumes that man is his property. You see, we could literally write over this man’s life, ‘under new management.’ The devil was thrown out and there could be no regrets. His victim became a new creation. The Lord Jesus continues to change Satan-controlled lives, and make them calm and useful and full of peace.

Study 3

TOUCHING THE LEPER

Read

Matthew 8: 1-4, Mark 1: 40-45, Luke 5: 12-16

Leprosy is a disease that the majority of us know very little about. I expect you have seen pictures of people who suffer from this dreadful disease. Modern medicine has done much to bring positive cures for its various forms, but there is no doubt about it that at the time the Lord Jesus was on earth, it was medically incurable and a sinister menace to society. It was a common sight to see people badly disfigured and deformed by this disease without any hope of recovery. As we look at this story, we must realise that this leper was not only a sick man, but he was an outcast from society. If he wanted to move among the people of any town or city he had to cry ‘Unclean! Unclean!’, thus making sure that no one came into contact with him. It was a pitiful condition to be in, indeed.

Reading the details of this miracle. you will have noticed how the power of the Lord Jesus meets the desperate need of this man. We read that the leper began to earnestly cry to the Lord, kneeling down at His feet. Remember, this was in the open road where everyone could see. ***“If You are willing”***, he says, ***“You can make me clean”***. Can you imagine the stir this would cause? The crowds would part to let this defiled man through and no one would want to touch him or indeed go anywhere near him. Yet there was One who was ***“moved with compassion”*** and really concerned. The Lord Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him. Can you imagine the gasps from the bystanders? ***“He will become a leper!”***, would be the thought in some of their minds. But instead of the Lord Jesus becoming contaminated, the leper was made immediately clean. The mighty power of the Lord Jesus had been witnessed again.

We notice the CONDITION of the leper. There was really no hope of recovery. This disease was eventually a killer, and every leper had to publicly advertise the fact by his cry of ‘Unclean!’ Leprosy is a vivid picture of SIN. Yet sin is far more deadly and lasting in its effects. The leper’s

body showed clearly the tragedy of his sickness. Those open putrefying sores outwardly disfigured and defiled him. Sin goes much deeper in its effect, for it defiles the minds and hearts of men and women. It is reflected too in the way we live; in our conversation, our desires, even our pastimes and pleasures. But leprosy affected a man's spiritual life too, for a leper could not enter the Temple or the synagogue. He could not worship in the sanctuary. Sin, too, will keep us at a distance from God. So unclean are we as sinners in God's sight, that unless we find cleansing, we shall never enter Heaven. Often the disease of leprosy began in a small way - just a spot in the forehead or on the arm; yet it spread rapidly until the whole body was affected. How rapidly small sins can grow into bigger ones, and the disease spreads until it finally brings death!

Hear the CRY of this man, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." This cry was desperate indeed, but it reveals something very important. There is no question in his mind as to the ability of the Lord to heal. He just casts himself upon the mercy of the Lord. His reasoning was that if the Lord was WILLING, then He was certainly ABLE. In times of need we often cry to the Lord. How good to know that we can do this! Even better - He is ready to listen and able to help.

Notice particularly the COMPASSION of the Lord Jesus, "moved with compassion." (Mark 1: 41) Does it merely mean that He pitied the man? How often we see people in need, someone very ill or in pain, or a person disfigured by an accident. We look at them and we feel genuinely sorry for them. But this is more pity than compassion, for we are at a distance, unable to do anything to help. The Lord Jesus did not stand at a distance. In His love, His heart was moved with true compassion and He became immediately identified with the man's need. This is the wonder of the love of the Lord, and such is His love for us today.

Then came CONTACT. "He put out His hand and touched him." (Mark 1: 41) Because the HEART of the Lord was moved, His HAND was stretched out to heal. He could have just spoken the word, as He did to the man in the synagogue, and the leper would have been healed. But the compassion of Jesus went deeper than that. He stretched out His hand and touched the untouchable! Just think for a moment of what can be conveyed through the touch of someone we love. Yet no one had touched this man in years. Those nearest and dearest to him by the ties of nature had been afraid to touch him. Love had given place to fear. But **"perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4: 18)** and the Lord Jesus' love is perfect. He is the One who meets man's every need. He needed not only to be cured, but to feel again the touch of another human being. To me this is the 'high spot' of this miracle. That touch must have meant much to that man! At His touch and with His Word, healing came immediately. Only the Lord Jesus could touch a leper and not be contaminated. Disease, sickness and sin, are all products of the Fall. The Lord Jesus was the only One over whom these things had no claim. At His touch the leper became clean.

Similarly, when the Lord Jesus comes into our lives, He can cleanse us completely because of His mighty power over sin through His death at Calvary, and subsequent resurrection. Thus **1 John 1: 7** says, **"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."**

Finally, we notice the **CURE**. It came immediately and it was complete. The man was to show himself to the priest and so fulfil the requirements of the Law, but was not to

advertise what the Lord Jesus had done. Would you have kept silent if you had been so wonderfully cured? I think not! Again, this incident illustrates the point that Jesus did not want to use His miracles to blaze the way for a popular mission. Yet those who have experienced His power in their lives, find it difficult to keep silent. This should be just as true of believers today - **"Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you!" (Mark 5: 19)**

Study 4 LIFE TO PARALYSED LIMBS



**Matthew 9: 1-8, Mark 2: 1-12,
Luke 5: 17-26**

The miracle of the healing of the paralysed man is recorded in three of the Gospels. It is an important incident in the early ministry of the Lord and it is obvious that He was becoming a prominent figure in the country. We read that the house at Capernaum was overcrowded because **"it was heard that He was in the house." (Mark 2: 1)** Compare this with the last verse of **chapter 1, "they came to Him from every quarter"**. His power and concern for the needs of the people made Him attractive to all. Undoubtedly, at this time, pressures on His life and time must have been tremendous. As a man He would know tiredness, even exhaustion. His was a very busy life indeed.

The opening action of the narrative centres around the four friends of the paralysed man. It is probable that without them he would never have known that Jesus was in the vicinity. He certainly would not have been able to meet Jesus by his own efforts. But he had good friends who had a true concern for his welfare, and this concern prompted them to action. They brought him to Jesus. Do you have this kind of deep concern for the spiritual welfare of your friends? Maybe we have friends whose lives are paralysed by sin. We could do no better for them than to bring them into contact with the Saviour. There may be obstacles in our way as there were for these men, but obstacles can be overcome, and the end result is always worth the effort! Remember this as you study this miracle.

There is a twofold purpose in this story. It is designed to show a double expression of the power of the Lord Jesus. In Luke's record of this incident, he tells us that **"the power of the Lord was present to HEAL" (Luke 5: 17)** The man sitting down at the feet of the Lord, certainly needed healing. No doubt this need was uppermost in the minds of the men who brought him that day. The fame of the Lord as a healer was spread abroad, but it is clear that another kind of power was shown by Him that day. **"The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins." (Mark 2: 10)** What a stir was caused when Jesus said to the man, **"Your sins are forgiven". (Verses 5 and 10)** This is very interesting, for it shows that Jesus considered the forgiveness of sins more important than the healing of the body. Which do you think is the more necessary?

Severe criticism greeted the Lord as He pronounced forgiveness of sins for the man. **"Why does this man speak blasphemies like this?", (verse 7)** they muttered. **"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"** These religious teachers were so caught up in the legality and ritual of their religion, that they failed to recognise in the One standing in their midst, the characteristics of their promised Messiah.

But Jesus could read their thoughts and the workings of their minds. So He asks them a penetrating question, **“Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk?’”** (verse 9) Well, of course, to the crowd standing around, the first statement was the easier. Anyone could say that, it was mere talk! The most difficult thing, in their estimation was to heal the man. They wanted visual evidence.

But let us pause here and think about it from the Lord’s standpoint. It was no problem for Him, as Creator of the Universe, to heal this man’s body. He only had to speak the word and it was done. But to forgive this man his sin involved something much greater. His own death on the cross! How often man’s reasoning fails in its attempt to understand the mind of God. So, by healing this man, Jesus visibly demonstrates His power in both the physical and the spiritual realms. Yes, when He speaks the Word, something really happens.

Perhaps just here in this study we should ask, ‘What is the connection between SIN and SICKNESS?’ Was there a direct link between the paralysis of this man and his sin which Jesus forgave?

1. Let us remember that the primary reason the Lord Jesus came to earth was to deal with the PROBLEM of SIN. This was the greatest disease of all. The Lord Jesus did not want to restore to men and women their health and strength just so that they could continue to sin. **1 John 3: 5** tells us that **“He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”** This is a wonderful statement in itself. You see, Jesus did not heal everyone, even during the time that He was on earth. But when He died on Calvary, He did make it possible for EVERYONE to be forgiven. However great the sin, the Lord Jesus has power on earth to forgive that sin. Make sure you know the value of this in your own life.

2. But sin does DAMAGE LIVES. I feel sure that this man’s sin was in some way connected with his illness, so the Lord was dealing with his sin first. Eventually He was able to say to the man, **“Arise, take up your bed and walk”**, and the miracle of healing took place. It is important for us to realise that we can damage our bodies by careless, sinful living. We live in a day of greed and excess. Drugs, drink and sexual immorality, are spoiling so many young people’s lives, and even smoking has been proved to be damaging to health. As Christians, we should not sin against our bodies in any way. Notice what **1 Corinthians 6: 19-20** says about a Christian’s body. It is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and we are not our own. This is a lesson that we would do well to learn from this story.

3. Finally, we have noticed how readily SICKNESS becomes a picture of SIN in its various forms. The healing ministry of the Lord Jesus was wonderful in its far reaching effects. Think of the three miracles we have studied in this way. We noticed the MADNESS of sin - the devil’s power in a demon-possessed man. We cannot measure the power of Satan to drive people to uncontrolled acts of rebellion and lawlessness, but it is a very real power, and we see it on the increase today. Then we saw something of the BADNESS of sin in its defilement and disease of the leper. All that makes life rotten and unattractive - the loathsomeness of

moral shame - this is the real evil in a life without God’s power to cleanse. Again we noticed the SADNESS of sin as a helpless man is laid at the feet of Jesus. When we feel helpless to conquer our own sinful weakness, it does make us feel sad. How good to end our lessons on a note of positive joy. The Lord Jesus, the Saviour of men and women, is sufficient for ALL SIN. His death on the cross and His wonderful resurrection tell us of VICTORY. Sin and Satan are defeated foes!

Questions

Study 1

THE MEANING OF MIRACLES

1. Name one of the distinctive features of Mark’s gospel and give references to illustrate your answer.
2. What was the main reason for the use of miracles by Jesus?
3. Why are miracles sometimes called ‘signs’?
4. Luke tells us that there is one sin that cannot be forgiven. What is it?
5. What is the greatest miracle of all, and what is its importance for us today?

Study 2

A DEMON IN THE SYNAGOGUE

1. Why were the people in the synagogue astonished at Jesus’ teaching?
2. What can we learn from this story about Satan’s activities in the world today?
3. How does this miracle reveal the true nature of the conflict between God and Satan?
4. What did the demon recognise about Jesus that most men and women fail to see?
5. What parallel do you see between this miracle and what takes place in the life of a person who becomes a Christian?

Study 3

TOUCHING THE LEPER

1. In what way is leprosy a picture of sin?
2. What did the cry of this man reveal about his appreciation of the Lord Jesus?
3. What have you learned from this lesson about the meaning of true compassion?
4. In what way does this incident demonstrate the Lord’s understanding of, and ability to meet, the total need of men and women?
5. Why was it that only the Lord Jesus could touch a leper and not be defiled?

Study 4

LIFE TO PARALYSED LIMBS

1. What lesson can we learn from the four friends of this paralysed man?
2. Why do you think Jesus put the forgiveness of sins before the healing of the body in importance?
3. What criticism did the religious leaders level at Jesus, and why was it so mistaken?
4. Why was it easier for Jesus to heal the man’s body than it was to forgive his sins?
5. Why, according to **1 Corinthians 6: 19-20**, should Christians live holy lives?