

S e r m o n s o n
Matthew

The Miracle Worker

Matthew 4:23-25

With Study Questions

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And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.²⁴ Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.²⁵ Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:23-25).

Introduction

This morning we will pursue two aspects of the above text: 1) The importance of preaching and 2) the reason for miracles.

The Importance of Preaching

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23a).

A Marketed Church

Years ago I took an advertising class. The things I learned were astonishing. Companies would run an ad in a certain area then, within a few hours, take inventories at the retail outlets where their products were sold. If there was no immediate response they pulled the ad.

In old commercials we would see a man in a suit holding the product and explaining how well it worked and why. As time went on they started using graphics. One headache medicine would show a hammer pounding. My father would joke that if you didn't have a headache "...this commercial would give you one."

Marketing and advertising soon became very scientific. Studies show that the graphics were more successful than the man in the suit. The suited man was summarily dismissed, along with the rational explanation as to why his product was superior to others.

Sound bites, special effects, titillating music, and people giving outward demonstrations of overt happiness over something as mundane as a soft drink have won the day in marketing and advertising. One might call this the dumbing down of society.

I am not incensed by the fact that advertisers have sought to manipulate rather than convince by rational argument. I think it is sad—but such is life. What I do find disturbing is how the church has begun to adopt this same, focus driven, psychologically manipulative mentality with the gospel.

Churches have now become venues for multi-media presentations. And with some of the latest religious movies it has been suggested that the movie theatres have now become churches. Gospel tracts are disguised as twenty-dollar bills in order to grab someone's attention. Instead of a rational explanation of what the Bible says about the sin of man and the grace of God, we want people to give their testimonials of how happy they are now that they have purchased the holy product.

It is no wonder that many of us, when we seek to bring the gospel to our friends or invite them to church, feel more like an Amway representative than a member of the priesthood of believers. This all stems from a market-driven church mentality.

The Force of Preaching

Through Matthew's gospel we have seen that the force used by God in the advancement of His kingdom has been preaching. It started with John the Baptist and now continues with Jesus. Well over a hundred times in the New Testament alone we see the word *preach*. Jesus is adamant about the need to preach. Later in Matthew He will say,

Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops (Matthew 10:27).

Why is this so important to Jesus? Perhaps we can learn from the Apostle Paul.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Could this be important to Jesus because it is the means by which God saves souls?

I realize that God can use even the sin and error of man to convert souls. But I am a bit apprehensive about the person who comes to Christ through effective marketing rather than a rational and biblical proclamation of the gospel of Christ. What happens when something else is marketed in a superior fashion? No wonder today's church has become such a revolving door!

Apparently *The Passion of the Christ* is a very well made movie containing dramatic and inspirational events, but so was *Ghandi*. I wonder if the time and energy Christians are using to invite their friends to the movies would be better utilized inviting their friends to church. A good study question for us might be, "Why are Christians more excited about the message of a movie than the message of a sermon?"

Teaching and Preaching

The passage teaches that Jesus was teaching and preaching. What's the difference? Teaching means to impart instruction or instill doctrine. Preaching means to herald or proclaim formally with gravity and authority.

Teaching tells you the facts. Preaching tells us that the facts lay claim on our lives—that they must be listened to and obeyed. When someone preaches they are not merely imparting information but proclaiming a state of reality to which the listener must respond.

The Reason for Miracles

Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:24-25).

Soon Jesus will give, arguably, the most significant sermon in the history of mankind. Prior to this we have a record of mass healings He performed. This begs the questions: Why is there this record of His miracles—and what was their reason?

Confirming a Message

First we see that one of the expressed designs of miracles was to confirm the message of the one performing the miracle. In the period of time between the temptation of Christ and His Sermon on the Mount, John writes of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus.¹

This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2).

The purpose for miracles is explicitly stated in Hebrews.

...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the LORD, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will (Hebrews 2:3, 4)?

We see this also in Acts.

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the LORD, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands (Acts 14:3).

It is quite clear that this was God's design for miracles even in the Old Testament as we see in the example of Moses.

Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" ² So the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." ³ And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ⁵ "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." ⁶ Furthermore the LORD said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. ⁷ And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. ⁸ "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. ⁹ And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land" (Exodus 4:1-9).

This passage seems to indicate that miraculous signs are inextricably linked to the God-given message of the miracle worker. Other passages that show this reasoning are John 14:11, 5:36, and 20:30.

Confirming a Person

¹ This portion of Christ's ministry is not recorded in Matthew.

We ask our potential communicant children, “Who is the Bible about?” They do quite well at this question. It’s about Jesus. The miraculous signs that we read of in the Bible do more than confirm a message, they confirm a person.

Many times throughout this gospel we see the phrase **“that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the LORD through the prophet.”** This is also true in the case of the miracles Jesus performed. God’s people were looking for the coming of their Savior. One of the ways they would know He was the One were His acts of healing.

Notice the similarities between the prophecy of Isaiah and Jesus’ description of Himself when John the Baptist questioned whether or not He was the Christ.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing (Isaiah 35:5).

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:2-5).*

The way Jesus confirmed to John who He was was to show that His works (the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk) were the works of the Coming One. Certainly John would have been familiar with Isaiah. It is quite likely that many were familiar with Isaiah.

And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done” (John 7:31)?

Demonstrating God’s Goodness

Does this mean that Jesus didn’t really care about the people He healed? Was He merely trying to make a point? Absolutely not!

Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” ⁴² As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed (Mark 1:41, 42).

The compassion of Christ in His healing of the sick, so far from being dispassionate, was a sign of His great love and mercy—of God’s love and mercy. Matthew Henry taught,

Christ designed by his cures to win upon people, and to ingratiate himself and his doctrine into their minds, and so to draw them with the bands of love.²

We read in Hosea

I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped *and* fed them (Hosea 11:4).

² Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 4:23). Peabody: Hendrickson.

When God immersed Himself in humanity He desired to demonstrate His immeasurable love and grace. To those who have eyes to see this irresistibly draws them to faith and repentance. Paul teaches this to be the case.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance (Romans 2:4)?

Miracles served as a sign of the goodness and mercy of God.

Physical Healing Allegorical of Spiritual Healing

And finally the physical healing power of Christ served as a metaphor for the greater work of the spiritual healing power of Christ.

And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”¹² When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick (Matthew 9:11-12).

One needn't press the issue here to see that when Jesus gave sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, or life to the dead, these all served as metaphors for spiritual blindness, deafness, and death (Matthew 13:14; Ephesians 2:1).

Conclusion

Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom. And the best news of the kingdom is its King. He has come to establish a kingdom of healing—a kingdom of light and life, of hope and joy, of unfathomable grace and mercy. In His preaching He beckons men to Himself. Shortly after the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish he used the metaphor of bread to describe Himself.

They said therefore to Him, LORD, ever give us this bread. Jesus said to them, I alone, in contradistinction to all others, am the bread of the life. He who comes to me shall positively not become hungry, and he who places his trust in me shall positively never thirst (John 6:34 ET³).

Would you eat of this bread?

Questions for Study

1. In what ways do you see the church/Christianity marketed in today's society (pages 1, 2)?
2. Is there anything wrong with these types of marketing procedures (pages 1, 2)?
3. Why do you suppose preaching was so important to Jesus (page 2)?
4. What are some of the dangers of market-driven Christianity versus a preaching-driven Christianity (page 2)?
5. What is the difference between teaching and preaching (page 2)?
6. What are some of the reasons for miracles (pages 3-5)?

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1961). *The New Testament: An expanded translation*. First published in 3 vols. 1956-59, under title: Expanded translation of the Greek New Testament. (Jn 6:34). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

7. What do we learn from John 3:2; Hebrews 2:3, 4; and Acts 14:3 (page 3)?
8. When John the Baptist questioned whether or not Jesus was the Christ, how did Jesus respond (page 4)?
9. What do miracles tell us about God's goodness (pages 4, 5)?
10. Discuss miracles as metaphors (page 5).