

11:20 Miracles Aren't Enough

Surprisingly, observing supernatural miracles didn't typically lead people to repent and follow Jesus' teaching. Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed annoyance with crowds who flocked to see a popular leader do something supernatural. He wanted from the spectators not applause, but commitment. Gradually, he relied more and more on parables, which he would explain in private to his disciples (see 13:11-17).

GUIDED TOUR

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Mark 3

Miracles and Magic: Jesus uses power with discrimination

3:10 For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.

The Gospels record some three dozen miracles performed by Jesus, and Jesus states plainly one of their benefits: "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (John 14:11). Miracles offer convincing proof that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son.

Large crowds gather from far away as word of Jesus' power spreads. Some people come for healing, others just to witness the extraordinary phenomena. Who but a messenger from God could perform such works? Yet Jesus himself has an odd ambivalence toward miracles. He refuses to do "tricks" on demand, like a magician.

Jesus seems not to trust miracles to produce the kind of faith he is interested in. Mark reports that on seven separate occasions Jesus warns a person just healed, "Tell no one!" He is protecting himself from the crush of crowds that flock to him when word of his miracles spreads—as it usually does, despite his orders—and from the opposition forces that always tail him.

In addition, Jesus remains suspicious of the popular acclaim that his miracles stir up. He is calling for obedience and sacrifice, whereas miracles tend to attract gawkers and sensation-seekers. The excitement generated by miracles does not automatically convert into the life-changing faith he seeks to arouse.

Spontaneous Compassion

Mainly, Jesus uses his powers in compassionate response to human need. Every time someone asks directly for healing, he heals. When his disciples grow frightened on a stormy lake, he walks to them across the water or calms the wind. When his audience feels hungry, he feeds them. When wedding guests grow thirsty, he makes wine.

Much like people today, Jesus' contemporaries look for ways to explain away his powers. Here in Mark 3, the Pharisees seek to credit Jesus' miracles to Satan's power. On another occasion they arrange a formal tribunal, complete with judges and witnesses, to examine a man Jesus has healed. The man and his parents confirm the story—"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"—but still the doubters hurl insults and throw him out of court (John 9).

In short, the crowd's mixed response bears out Jesus' suspicions about the limited value of miracles. They rarely create faith; rather, they affirm faith in true seekers.

Life Questions

If you were to ask Jesus for one miracle today, what would it be?

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