

Lesson 5: Power for Love

Are the Miracles of Jesus True?

Main Points

- . General Observations
- . Miracles are very authentic in terms of Jesus whole life. .
- . Jesus refused to do miracles on demand.
- . Miracles are very loving, very people focused.
- . Audience Response: Almost identical today. Begin with a question.
- . Healed person's response
- . Jesus

Teaching Tips

- . This lesson is a deductive lesson meaning that you state generalizations and back them up with specific examples. In a deductive lesson they are not discovering truth on their own, you are laying it out for them.
- . When doing deductive teaching such as this it is often better to first tell people what happens in a passage and then read it. It gives them categories to think in when they approach the passage so the story is not so confusing to them. This is especially helpful when you are surveying a number of accounts such as we are in this lesson.
- . You could make this material inductive by first reading the stories and then asking them what principles we can deduce from the stories.

Introduction:

- . **Who is Jesus?** Something weird is going on. We have been studying how to love by looking at the person of Jesus. It has been very helpful and instructive. It was neat to see how compassionate Jesus was as he raised the widow's son back to life, but we can't ignore the fact that Jesus did raise the son back to life. Can this be true? It is not something we see happening on a regular basis around us; and on top of that, we live in the most secular culture that has ever existed. So let's pause
- . **Are the miracles of Jesus true? Did they really happen?** Turn our focus to another aspect of Jesus' ministry—miracles. We will look at some of the characteristics of miracles with an overriding question in the back of our minds: Are they authentic?

Q. How do you determine if someone is lying or not?

List their responses. They will probably divide out into internal evidence (Does the story make sense?) and external evidence (Are their ways of verifying the story?)

A Comparison of John 9 and the Greek Myth, Theseus

Re-read Einstein's comments from lesson 1.1.

Q. "You accept the historical existence of Jesus?"

A. "Unquestionably. No man can read the gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life. How different, for instance, is the impression which we receive from an account of the legendary heroes of antiquity like Theseus! Theseus and other heroes of his type lack the authentic vitality of Jesus."

Let's do what Einstein did and compare the myth of Theseus with an account of one of Jesus' miracles.

Myth of Theseus

Greece had been conquered by the Minonian civilization on the island of Crete to the south. Each year the Creteans demanded as tribute, a dozen young men and women who would be given as sacrifices to the Minotaur, who lived under the palace of Thebes in a huge maze that no one had ever been able to find their way out of. The Minotaur is a beast whose body is half a man and half a bull who devours the hapless humans from Greece.

The time for the yearly lottery came to decide which young men and woman would have to go and be eaten by the Minotaur. The lot fell on the son the king, Theseus. The king wanted to exempt his son but Theseus demanded that he be allowed to go. He promised his father that he would do everything he could to kill the Minotaur and escape from Thebes. If he were successful, he would sail home with a white sail but if he were killed the crew was instructed to use a black sail.

So Theseus and the chosen young men and maidens sailed for Crete. Upon their arrival they were put in jail, but the daughter of the king of Crete came into the jail, disguised and gave Theseus a silk thread to unwind when he was put in the labyrinth so he could find his way out if he was able to kill the Minotaur. Theseus was chosen to die first. When the door was closed behind him he began to unravel his silk thread as he wandered deep into the maze. He climbed up into the rafters and waited for the Minotaur to come by. When it came by he jumped on its back and choked it. Then he followed the thread out of the maze, released his fellow prisoners and sailed for home. Theseus's father was waiting every day high on a cliff for the return of the ship. When he finally saw the ship he gave a cry of despair and leaped to his death—Theseus had forgotten to change the sail.

Read John 9:1-41

	Theseus	Blind Man
Which story is more real? Why? What do you see that Einstein saw?	Brainstorming--the rest of the questions bring out nuances...but see if they	

	can pick up nuances without you mentioning them.	
What is the miracle?	Existence of a half-man, half-bull.	A blind man is healed
How does the supernatural function in the story? Is it expected or is it a shock?	It is a seamless part of the story. It is part of the given. There is nothing odd about it.	The miracle is a shock. It is treated as such.
What is the range of emotional responses to the miracle?	Nothing. It is assumed.	Disbelief, denial, acceptance, fear.
Any life-like authentic details?	Nothing specific.	Jesus looking, spitting mud, Pool of Siloam
What kind of characters emerge in the story?	None really. Theseus is just a typical Greek super hero.	Vivid personalities emerge: Disciples: “coldly theological” Blind Man: “charming, bold, delightful, a real character” Religious leaders: mean and judgmental Jesus: caring, non-judgmental.

(If time) What is the difference in the tone of the stories? I.e. which one reads like something that could happen in our day and age? Why?

Q..Does Jesus have some kind of power or control, from outside this world where he can suspend natural law?

Note: there are two kinds of evidences, external (eyewitnesses) and internal (circumstantial). This is true in a court of law. We first mention the external evidence, and then we look for the internal evidence.

- . **Historical Evidence** (See Study on Jesus’ life at end of the notebook)
 - . Most obvious point is that the four gospel writers along with Peter and Paul testified to there reality. But there are some interesting corroborating observations:
 - . No first century accounts deny their existence.
 - . Critics of Jesus did not deny their existence but said the source of the power is Satanic.
 - . Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century mentioned them.
 - . Eusebius, History of the Church mentioned an early letter to the Roman Emperor Quadratus appealed to the fact, that, of those who had been healed or raised from the

dead by Christ, some were still alive, and all were well known.¹

Miracles are authentic in terms of Jesus' whole life.

Example of Food Miracles.

- Two miracles where Jesus made food: Feeding of 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44) and Feeding of 4,000 (Mark 8:1-10).
- **Read Mark 2:23.** Disciples ate the food from picking the stalks of the grain.
- They were following normal Jewish practice laid out by Moses in Deuteronomy 23:25.
- **Read Luke 8:1-3.** Wealthy women, some who had been healed by Jesus, gave money for food.
- Conclusion: Jesus does not go around turning stones into bread. Jesus works for his food. The miracles were not a normal way of Jesus and his disciples eating: gifts and work were the normal means of provision.
- Most of us would collapse under the pressure of this kind of power and use our power to create food as an all purpose walking snack machine.
- **Read Mark 8:14-21.** Disciples were so used to seeing the non-miraculous as normal that they were embarrassed when they forgot to bring bread on a boat trip.

A response to unusual need.

- . Feeding of 5,000 and 4,000 was a simple response to an unusual need.
- . Widow of Nain- a dead son leaves her devastated.
- . Blind People, Lepers

Very human contexts

- . Caught in a squall on the Lake of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41)
 - Jesus sleeping in the boat during a storm.
 - Disciples are irritated with Jesus that he doesn't help them bail.
 - Jesus, after calming the storm, gets irritated at the disciples.
- . A dinner feast that runs out of wine with a nagging mom who knows her son can fix the problem and servants who are the only ones who know that he did fix the problem. John 2:1-11. All so real and so easy to visualize. the miracle fits in seamlessly with life.

Jesus refused to do miracles on demand or for show. I.e. love not miracles were central to his ministry.

Q. If you had power to make anything happen, that you could what are some of the things that you would do?

¹ Edersheim, Book I, 558. Edersheim, speaking of the raising of the widow of Nain's son to life Edersheim writes, "The simplicity and absence of all extravagant details; the Divine calmness and majesty on the part of Jesus, so different from the manner in which legend would have colored the scene, even from the intense agitation which characterized the conduct of an Elijah, or an Elisha, or a Peter, in somewhat similar circumstances; and lastly, the beautiful harmony where all is in accord, from the first touch of compassion till, when forgetful of the bystanders, heedless of effect, he gives the son back to his mother—are not all these worthy of the event, and evidential of the truth of the narrative?" Book I, p 558

What is the normal human response to this question? Most of us tend to think in terms of what we would buy or get. The story of King Midas who had a golden touch is typical of our first responses.

Read John 6:22-26,30-31.

This was right after the feeding of the 5,000. They had followed him around the lake during the night and met him on the opposite shore near Capernaum.

Q. How can you tell from John's account that they just wanted free food? You can tell they just wanted food because Jesus says that is why they sought him out (vrs. 26) and they hinted at it very strongly (vrs. 30 and 31). There was no need here. They just wanted a free meal; they wanted a welfare system; they wanted a Messiah who would give them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Summary: Jesus didn't do miracles to help people be selfish. They were another way of loving people.

He got angry with people who just wanted a show. Luke 11:29

Historical Background: By requesting a sign they were requesting that Jesus do a miracle for show. The Talmud, the ancient Jewish history, has references to great rabbis doing a sign to prove their authority such as make the walls of a room grow larger.

Fits in with Jesus' teaching on the danger of pride in religion. Deeds are never to be done for show. . . they should always be focused on love and people.

• "Dangers in giving", Matthew 6:1-4

• "Dangers in praying", 6:5-8

• "Dangers in fasting", 6:16-18

Act of doing the miracles is very loving, very people focused.

• **Very focused on the person: Widow of Nain, Blind Bartimeaus.** No need to review this point other than mention it.

• **Touching.** Jesus often touches the dead or unclean thing that he is about to heal. It is almost like an involuntary movement of compassion. Mark 1:41,42 is an especially tender example.

• **No pattern of legalism or formula in them.** They are remarkably different because people are remarkably different.

• Blind man in John 9... made clay and put it over his eyes.

• Groaned over, spit, and touched a deaf man, in Mark 7:31-37. Very similar to his wailing at Lazarus' tomb.

• Sent lepers away, healed on the way.

• **No programs to eradicate leprosy or heal long distance.** Always connected to real, living people.

Audience Response: Almost identical today.

Q. What are some of the ways you would respond if Jesus lived with us now or you lived back in the 1st century?

This is just a brainstorm list, but if you wait long enough and draw them out you will

probably match most of the answers.

- . **Astonishment.** Expected. (Saw this in Luke 7)
- . **Running to tell their friends,** many more needy people coming. Mark 1: 32-34. A couple of miracles and the whole city showed up at the door. Mark 1:42-45 the healed leper disobeys Jesus, tells his friends, making it very difficult for Jesus to go out into the cities.
- . **Selfishness:** We want more! Very expected. (Saw this in John 6.)
- . **Jealousy.** Miracles of Jesus were a big problem for the Pharisees. Because if they hated Jesus they had to account for the miracles.. Conclusion: Jesus is demon possessed. Mark 3:22-30. Jealousy is also expected.
- . **You want to see it again.** Some wanted to see a miracle just like fireworks. Herod in Luke 23:8.

. **Healed person's response**

- . **Some thankful, some not.** Very typical. Story of Lepers: Luke 7:11-19.
- . **Some you aren't even sure if they want to get healed** (John 5:1-16).

Q. **How does this man respond to the same question that Jesus asks Blind Bartimeus in Mark 10:51?**

He doesn't answer Jesus question and blames other people twice! Disease almost provides them life. Very real.

Q. **How else, in the account, does the lame man's character come out?**

- . Jesus' rebuke to him in 5:14 implies that it was because of sin that he became sick.
- . The man rats on Jesus in 5:15
- . **Some became financial supporters.** Luke 8:1-3
- . **Some became disciples.** John 9:35-38.

. **Jesus**

- . He was aware that miracles were a matter of power. Bleeding woman in Luke 8:43-48.
- . Clear limitation of his power: Asking Directions to Lazarus' tomb.
- . Big Question often asked of God: **How can a loving God permit sin and evil in the world?** If Jesus somehow represents God, then his life is a beautiful answer to that question. Jesus does not remain distant from any danger or evil. He constantly confronts the effects of sin in the world and rolls back the relentless tide of evil.