

Prelude to Passion: The Miracles of Christ

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Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (Acts 2:22)

During Jesus' three year ministry He performed numerous miracles. A close examination of the Scriptures identifies three types; those having to do with healing (which are numerous), those that superseded the laws of nature and those which pointed to His Passion. Of the healing miracles one finds that He caused the blind to see, crippled people to walk, demons that caused insanity or seizures to leave the body and leprosy to vanish. On the night when He was betrayed he restored the ear of a soldier that had suffered the wrath of Peter. Each of those miracles was performed out of a sense of compassion and their effects lasted only as long as the recipient lived. The miracles suspending His own laws of nature pointed to His absolute sovereignty over all of creation. However, the other miracles focused on things that taught lessons having more to do with eternal consequences. It is these that were a prelude to His passion. John's Gospel records a mere seven miracles. Of those three have to do with healing and the other four His role as the Son and Lamb of God.

The First Miracle, at Cana.

This miracle's significance has been lost over the years, being eclipsed by the perpetual controversy and debate over whether Jesus actually converted water into a fermented alcoholic beverage or whether it was merely grape juice. Without further adding to the eclipse, this author will simply point out the fact that the word used in John 2:3, 9 and 10 for the beverage involved is the Greek word *oinos*, which translated into English means wine. Having said that, the miracle of the water being turned into wine has much more significance than merely supplying the guests at a wedding reception with more adult beverage. They had consumed the first supply before Jesus' arrival.

Turning to Luke 22:20 one finds that Jesus raises a cup of **wine** and says, *This cup is the new covenant in my **blood**, which is poured out for you.* From that point on every time believers

gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper we are to remember that the wine (and in some churches grape juice) represents the blood that Christ shed on the cross for His sheep and that through that blood believers have a remission (a forgiveness) of sins past, present and future. We are "washed" in that blood.

Thus when Jesus performed His first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana He was subtly announcing the fact that He was the Lamb of God and that He was the author of a new covenant, one that would be symbolized by a cup of **wine**. In Psalm 104:15 one reads that God provided *wine that gladdens the heart of man*. When a Christian thinks of that first miracle and the eternal significance of that the wine (which represents the shed blood of Christ) and what it means for every believer, then while partaking of the sacrament of Holy Communion the heart can certainly be extremely glad.

In Matthew 9:16-17 Jesus taught about the necessity for Christians to be made new persons, through the new birth, and thereby being made Holy in God's sight before the **Holy Spirit** (therein called the "**new wine**") takes up residence in the believers soul. This is how Jesus taught that truth, *No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on a new garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wine skins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.* (Matthew 9:16-17, emphasis added). Unlike today, when wine is aged in barrels (wooden or stainless steel), in ancient times it was aged in wineskins. This metaphor was therefore something that the people understood quite well. Jesus was in effect saying that the Holy Spirit ("new wine") had to have a newly regenerated person ("new wineskin") in which He would abide forever, thus the term "preserved."

Feeding the Five Thousand

In the sixth chapter of John one finds this miracle recorded: It was also recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The story is well known and will not be repeated here. However, reading further in the same chapter of John one again discovers that this miracle had a greater purpose than to merely feed a crowd of hungry, curious people who had come to see a miracle

worker; see John 6:1-5.

Jesus later taught the significance of that particular miracle and the previous Old Testament miracle of the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4-35) when He said, *I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the **bread** from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the **true bread** from heaven. For the **bread of God** is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.* (John 6:32-33, emphasis added) Then Jesus makes this most vital statement, *I am the **bread of life**. He who comes to me will never go hungry.* . . (John 6:35, emphasis added)

In Matthew chapter 5 and verse 6 Jesus taught, *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.* At the last supper Jesus also broke bread and said that it represented his body that would be broken for His followers of all time. Furthermore, the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus ,through His perfectly obedient body (the bread of life), supplied the righteousness that one needs in order to commune with God and stand in His presence and that His perfect body was sacrificed in our place for the remission of sins. That righteousness is imputed to each believer at the moment of the new birth. (See II Corinthians 5:21)

Thus when Jesus multiplied the bread and fed all of those physically hungry people He was in effect showing how His one perfect body, the Bread of life, soon to be broken, would eventually feed millions of spiritually starved people; folks who would be starving for righteousness, and through Him they would be filled for all of time and eternity.

Raising the Dead

The accounts of Christ's raising of persons who had succumbed to physical death are chronicled in Luke 7:11-15 (the widow's son), Luke 8:49-56 (the daughter of Jairus) and John 11:1-44 (Christ's friend Lazarus). The obvious significance of these miracles is their focus on and prelude to the greatest miracle of all time Christ's own bodily resurrection. Furthermore

because of their resurrection experience and Christ's, all believers can rest in the absolute assurance that He will keep His promise concerning our eventual resurrection. Jesus assures the believer with these words, . . . ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*** . . .(John 11:25-26)

The belief in Jesus is also the result of a "resurrection" from the dead, so to speak; a resurrection of the soul from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Before one is born again that person is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). When a person is born again it is because God has made that person come alive spiritually (Ephesians 2:4 and Colossians 2:13). Read what Jesus said about that; *I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.* (John 5:24-25) Jesus taught us there that a person that has been born again crosses the divide between spiritual death and spiritual life, and once there will live forever. Note however, that to "hear" Christ's Word one must have already been born again (the dead do not hear) before that person believes by faith; thus regeneration always precedes faith.

This coming resurrection of the body was not merely a promise voiced in the pages of the New Testament. Many Old Testament references also speak of this destiny for all of God's faithful followers. Job spoke of his anticipation of this resurrection experience when he said, *And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.* (Job 19:26.) Daniel too was reassured of his resurrection and that of his fellow believers, *But at that time your people_ everyone whose name is written in the book_ will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to everlasting shame and contempt.* (Daniel:12:1-2) Isaiah also spoke of that glorious day when he wrote, *But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. . .the earth will give birth to her dead.*(Isaiah 26:19)

Testimonies to His Divinity

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the creators of the universe and they control creation through various laws of nature; laws which they set in motion. Several of Christ's miracles suspended those laws, as only God can do. Christ caused a tree to wither (Matthew 21:18-22), He walked on water (John 6:15-21), was transformed from His natural state to a glorified state before His death (Matthew 17:1-13), told people about their innermost thoughts (John 1:47-51; 4:29, 39), directed fish into the empty nets of his disciple fishermen (Luke 5:1-11), calmed a storm (Luke 8:22-25), caused a coin to enter a fish's mouth (Matthew 17:27) and finally ascended bodily through the earth's atmosphere, beyond 15 billion light years of space and into heaven where He sat down at His Father's right side. (Acts 1:4-11)

The apostles, enabled by the power of God, would carry on the miracles of healing and God would continue to work miracles on His own throughout the first century and beyond. However, today those miraculous events are few and far between, especially where God's Word is more accessible. There are scattered reports from the mission field of some supernatural events that attest to the reality and power of God in third world countries, but even there the miracles are less numerous than they were during the church's infancy.

Today, one kind of miracle is continuing to occur all over the world and that is the miraculous supernatural event of the new birth. There is nothing so miraculous, thrilling and possessed of more eternal consequence than a life changing experience through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Those miracles are the result of what Christ did during His earthly life and what He finally did at Calvary. While the miracles He performed during His three year ministry were in effect a "prelude" to His passion, the miracles of the new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17) that have occurred over the past two millennia have become a "postlude" to Christ's life, death (passion) and resurrection.

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