

All Saints' Bible Study – September 26, 2008

1. We remarked that it is widely accepted that Jesus was a **moral teacher** of great stature. We looked this week at the challenge presented by the accounts of **miracles** he performed. That he was renowned as a miracle worker is attested consistently in biblical texts and in other Jewish literature. We also remarked that while the society was familiar with magicians (one is mentioned in Acts) they were not credulous and are seen questioning the miracles closely e.g. the healing of the blind man John 9.
2. We read some of the tales of Jesus' childhood miracles found in the Gnostic 'Infancy Gospel of Thomas'. We remarked that 'the young Christ displays all the precociousness, cleverness, and even destructiveness of the child-gods in pagan mythology. In the early passages of the story, Jesus shows a disturbing tendency to kill off his playmates when they displease him'
3. In contrast, we read Luke's account of some miracles, in **Luke 4:31-44**. We noted the following:
 - the man freed from the evil spirit is unharmed
 - Jesus' authority, already noted before he performs the miracle, is reinforced
 - Jesus is not using his power to draw attention to himself – on the contrary he is concerned to stop the evil spirits from shouting out who he is
 - Jesus similarly rebuked both fever and evil spirits

We considered why Jesus didn't want the spirits publicising who he was. At this period in Israel there was popular belief that the Messiah would appear soon and many were engaged in preparing the way for his arrival in differing ways, some fairly fanatical. People would flock around a possible Messiah in the hope of imminent political liberation. The spirits' shouts of who Jesus is echo the devil's temptation to rule the kingdoms of the world on his terms.

4. We read **Luke 5:1-26**, and considered the following questions:
 - Does faith produce miracles or do miracles produce faith?
 - What is the nature of the recipients of the miracle?
 - What effect did the miracle have on the people involved?
 - In what way was the miracle provocative?
 - Why did Jesus perform the miracle?

We noted that in most of these miracles Jesus is responding to need. The recipients are sick or untouchables. Although in the first miracles in Chapter 4 he was healing on the Sabbath, we see that his purpose is not primarily to do away with the law of Israel – he asks the healed leper to obey the customary practice. This would also be independent attestation of the miracle. When the man is let through the roof it is mentioned that Jesus is responding to the faith of the companions. The teachers of the law are seen to take an interest for the first time. For them sickness did reflect sin in the sufferer or his immediate antecedents, so Jesus healing the man would indeed denote his authority to forgive sin. The implication of this does not escape them: 'this fellow speaks blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

In the miracle of the fish we see faith preceding the miracle as the fishermen let down their nets at Jesus command. The effect of the miracle is profound – Jesus

does something fishermen know is impossible. The miracle reinforces faith and is revelatory as Peter recognises something of God in Jesus.

In these miracles we see the Kingdom of God breaking into the world and the link between the spiritual and the physical as Jesus' confrontation with evil affects the physical world. Jürgen Moltmann "Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly 'natural' things in a world that is unnatural, demonised and wounded".