

## The Gospel of Mark (3)

### Jesus' Galilean Ministry

#### Miracles

- A West Brom supporter might say, "It'll be a miracle if we stay up this season"
- A mother might say, "It's a miracle he gets to school on time".

Is a miracle something just something that is unexpected or extraordinary? **or**  
Is a miracle something that seems to violate the laws of nature?

We use the word "miracle" in our everyday language but the accounts of miracles in the Gospels refer to events much more extraordinary than those that happen everyday. Three words used for miracles: *teras* = wonder, *semeion* = sign, *dynamis* = power.

#### Miracle Workers

In the Bible it isn't only Jesus who works miracles. The Old Testament is full of them. Even in the Gospels we find references to other miracle workers. e.g. Mark 9 .38-41.

#### Miracles and the Gospel writers

As we have seen in previous weeks each of the Gospel writers recounted events in Jesus' life in a way that served their own purpose. In Mark's case that was to give hope and determination to a persecuted Christian community. This means that sometimes the same event is told with considerable differences. Look at the two accounts of Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6 .45ff and Matthew 14 .22ff.

#### Mark's use of Miracles

For Mark the miracles show the power of God working in Jesus. The rule of evil is being replaced with the rule of God. Mark wants to show that;

God's power working in Jesus is:

- Stronger than mental illness (understood as "demons")
  - Mark 1 .23 Man with an evil spirit
  - 5 .1 Man healed at Geresá (and bad news for some pigs!)
  - 7 .24 Daughter of a woman of faith
  - 9 .14 Boy with an unclean spirit
- Stronger than physical illness
  - Mark 1 .30 Peter's mother-in-law (a miracle with other motives!)
  - 1 .40 Man with a skin disease
  - 2 .1 A paralysed man.
  - 3 .1 A man with a paralysed hand
  - 5 .25 A woman with severe bleeding
  - 7 .31 A man who can neither see nor hear (*this is only in Mark*)
  - 8 .22 Blind man at Bethsaida (*this is only in Mark*)
  - 10 .46 Blind Bartimaeus
- Stronger than death itself
  - Mark 5 .22 Jairus' daughter

- Stronger than nature
  - Mark 4 .35 Calming the storm
  - 6 .31 Feeding the Five Thousand
  - 8 .1 Feeding the Four Thousand
  - 6 .45 Walking on the water

## Mental Illness

In the world of the New Testament most mental illness was thought to be caused by evil spirits living inside people. Let's look at the **Man at Gerasa** (Mark 5 .1).

- The man believes he has a legion of demons (*legion* = 6000)
- The man "was too strong for anyone to control" but Jesus' power is greater.
- The crowd are frightened (in awe) when the man appears "normal".
- The man doesn't want the spirits to be cast out of the region.
- The spirits ask to go into a herd of pigs (unclean animals).
- The pigs go into the sea. Jews feared the sea as a powerful beast.
- The man wants to go with Jesus but that would be too easy, Jesus wants him to do the difficult thing and preach to his (former) persecutors.

So what do you think really happened?

## Physical Illness

In the time Jesus physical illness was understood as:

- unclean forces binding people, whereas the Kingdom of God is about freedom.
- suffering as a result of sin.

In the account of the **Paralysed Man** (Mark 2 .1) the story is in two parts. The healing is straightforward but in the middle (vv 6-10) Mark introduces Jesus' conflict with authorities.

If we look at the miracles of the **Man who can neither see nor hear** (Mark 7 .31) and the **Blind Man at Bethsaida** (Mark 8 .22) we see similarities in the two accounts. Jesus uses spittle, each follows a feeding miracle, neither mentions evil possession or a need for faith and each time Jesus asks for silence about what happens.

## Nature Miracles

In the **Calming of the Storm** (Mark 4 .35) Mark wants to bring reassurance to a community passing through stormy times. After all they already know the answer to the disciples' question, "Who is this man?"

In the **Feeding of the Five Thousand** (Mark 6 .31) and the **Feeding of the Four Thousand** (Mark 8 .1) those fed fail to see the significance of the event. In the first it's followed by **Jesus Walking on the Water** and in the second by the **Blind man at Bethsaida**. Why two accounts? God feeds over and over again? Jews and Gentiles?

## Seeing clearly

Let's go back to the Blind Man at Bethesda. Mark uses that account in a specific way. The first part of Jesus' ministry is over and, when this account ends, a new part begins and the eyes of the disciples will be opened as to who Jesus is. Peter will soon say "You are the Messiah". He sees clearly. Here a miracle account has been used almost as a parable. It leads us to the next stage of Jesus' ministry - the Journey to Jerusalem awaits.