

A Miracle and a Message

Luke 11:14-36

Jean-Francois Gravelet, later known as Charles Blondin, was fascinated by tight-rope walkers. Using his father's fishing rod as a pole he immediately began practicing and began performing at the age of five. His greatest feat was crossing Niagara Falls 1859. He painstakingly prepared, organized and exploited for maximum publicity. At first they thought it was a hoax and then decided he was mad but went along anyway. Newspapers all over the country were soon interested. Some papers were sarcastic, others thought he should be arrested. Posters boosted the excitement. Trains brought thousands of spectators to watch. The tightrope was taken across the river in a rowing boat. The cable was three inches thick and sagged some 60 feet in the middle. The distance was a little over 1,000 feet. He offered to carry a volunteer on his back but, unsurprisingly, no one volunteered. Bands on both banks played as he began his crossing, a trip that took just over 17 minutes. He took his time over what he privately considered an easy task. At one point he stopped and laid down for a rest and also stood on one leg for a while. After a pause he went back across on the rope much faster. In several later crossings He introduced variations. He carried his top-hatted manager across on his back, crossed blindfolded or on stilts or in a gorilla costume and pushing a wheelbarrow.

We consider achievements like that with amazement. Gravelet sought the adulation of the crowds through maximum exposure by the media. Others have done astonishing feats as well whether through stunning athleticism or architectural design or exceptional creativity in music or art. The skill that some have mastered in their particular field is truly astounding and we sit captivated by their grace and beauty. We describe such feats with adjectives like awesome, amazing, beyond belief, incredible, even miraculous. Highlights hit the print or the internet and become overnight sensations.

Turn in your Bible to Luke 11:14-36 where we see three responses to a miracle and three responses with a message. It didn't matter where Jesus went the response to His deeds and actions was everything from adoration on one end of the spectrum all the way to anger on the other end and everything in between. He didn't come to make a name for Himself. What we learn from the scene and the response Jesus gives is this: how will we respond to Jesus?

I. THREE RESPONSES TO A MIRACLE – v. 14-16

In His short time of ministry spanning some three years Jesus performed some astounding feats, miraculous feats.

He walked on water.

He calmed a raging storm.

He fed thousands of people with one sack lunch of fish and bread and then did it a second time.

He cleansed lepers, made the deaf hear, the blind to see, the mute to talk, and the lame to walk.

He raised a dead girl, a dead son, and a dead friend.

And in just a few short months He will Himself rise from the dead.

People who saw what He did or heard what He said were stirred to respond in some way. There were three typical responses as we see in this passage.

There was amazement, accusation, even allurements.

A. There Was Amazement – v. 14

Let's consider first the reason for the various responses. What caused such a reaction?

It was probably a typical day in the ministry life of Jesus. We aren't given much information about the where or the when or the who. But we do know the why. Someone either came on his own to Jesus or was brought to Jesus by someone else who was demon possessed. *What a great lesson to learn. If you have a problem, no matter what it is, bring it to Jesus.* Throughout the gospels we see time and

time again the compassion that Jesus had for those who were physically or spiritually hurting in some way to the point of His acting on their behalf. Matthew 9:36 “And when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

His ministry was people and His method of reaching them with the message of the Kingdom of God. To authenticate His message He did miracles. He went where people were to serve them and eventually He life as a sacrifice (Mark 10:45).

In this case the need was someone who was demon possessed and we understand from the context that this particular demon rendered the man incapable of speaking. He was a mute. He couldn't talk. We don't know how long the man had suffered in this way, all we are told is his condition and his cure. Jesus either spoke or made some gesture in which the demon had to obey and he left the man. Immediately the man was able to talk again. That's what is so miraculous about what Jesus did. It was instantaneous. Regardless of the condition, the healing was immediate. It didn't take days or months. It didn't take multiple visits or surgeries or numerous specialists. He spoke, He touched - it happened. It was miraculous and the first response we see is that the crowd was amazed. They marveled at what they had just witnessed. The crowd looked and wondered. It was a jaw dropping miracle and couldn't be explained any other way. Like so many other times before, their amazement didn't move them to follow Christ or admit to their spiritual need of a Savior. Amazed – yes. Transformed – no. They didn't hang around for who He was only for what He could do. There was amazement.

B. There Was Accusation – v. 15

There are some in every crowd – the skeptics, the doubters, the nay-sayers. They are the ones who

won't believe because they choose not to believe. They have to rationalize away the evidence of what they just witnessed. They look at something that is miraculous and explain it away through chance, science or reason, something, anything.

I read an article about the recent movie Exodus: Gods and Kings. The director of the movie believes that the 10 plagues can all be proven scientifically there were no miracles involved. It seems to me that he missed some textual arguments for the plagues that are very evident in the Biblical account of which he claims he read before directing. Exodus 8:16-19

Even though Pharaoh's magicians could not duplicate the plague of gnats and even though they acknowledged it to be the work of God, Pharaoh was still unmoved. It's the same with the accusers.

These opponents saw the miracle Jesus performed and accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Beelzebub who was the prince of demons. They didn't deny the miracle. They denied how it was done claiming Jesus did it through the power of Satan. Beelzebub was a variation of Baal-Zebub who was one of the gods of the Philistines (II Kings 1:1-3). It was a play on words and meant lord of the flies.

They were saying that Jesus' power did not come from God but from the devil himself. The second response is one of accusation. They were unwilling to acknowledge who Jesus was. In doing so it would have meant that all their traditions, all their religious rituals, all their self-righteous acts were wrong and this carpenter, this common man, this self-appointed Rabbi was right – that He was the long awaited Messiah and that they were sinners needing a Savior. Accusations seemed a more appropriate response than amazement and acceptance.

C. There Was Allurement – v. 16

The third response to the miracle was by those who tempted Him. They wanted Jesus to give them a sign. Let me just stop and ask you, what had He just done? The sign of casting out the demon was apparently insufficient evidence to prove anything. They wanted something more spectacular, so they baited Jesus to show His power. They wanted Jesus to do something truly astounding that would utterly convince them of the reality of His claims. They remained unconvinced.

It's the same word used in Matthew 4 when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to prove He was the Son of God by making bread from stones, by jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple so the angels could catch Him, and by bowing to him in order to be given all the kingdoms of the world without going to the cross.

This third group was tempting Jesus to give another demonstration.

Some were amazed.

Some accused.

Some allured.

Just as it was in Jesus' day, we see those kinds of responses to Jesus today.

Someone is miraculously cured of cancer or some other chronic condition. Someone else is miraculously spared from what would otherwise have been a fatal accident.

People witness those events and come away amazed yet unmoved. They deny any divine intervention was involved or even if they admit that God had a hand in it, it still isn't compelling enough evidence to move them to follow Him.

Others will excuse the evidence away by attributing it to something else. They have to come up with some logical explanation other than God. They conclude that the stars were aligned just right or that there was a full moon the night before. They may even conclude that some sleight of hand trickery was somehow involved.

Still others want to see if God could do it again so they cast the challenge back to Him. "Hey God, let's see you do that again." They tempt Him to show off His powers. Maybe you have come across people like that. They remain unconvinced or worse yet remain unconvicted by the obvious. A friend at the gym visited his daughter's church once and thinks it's just a big show.

We have seen the three responses to Jesus' miracle, how did Jesus respond? He gave three responses with a message.

II. THREE RESPONSES WITH A MESSAGE – v. 17-36

They didn't even have to say anything aloud and Jesus understood their thoughts and their motives. He had seen it before. Little groups of people and religious leaders huddled together whispering. Jesus' first response is a response from logic.

A. A Response From Logic – v. 17-28

With the former demon possessed man still standing there Jesus gives this scenario for those who would accuse Him of casting out the demon by the prince of demons. It is an argument from logic. A divided kingdom will not stand. A divided house will fall.

Abraham Lincoln used that passage in a speech at the Illinois State Capital on June 16, 1858 when he accepted the Republican Party nomination for U.S. Senator. That speech would be the launching point in an unsuccessful campaign against the incumbent Stephen Douglas. Even though he lost the election for the Senate seat, along with the Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address, this speech became one of the best-known speeches of his career. His platform was the issue of slavery and how a nation could not endure if half the nation favored slavery while the other half opposed it.

Jesus used logic to say that Satan's kingdom

couldn't stand if it fought against itself. He used this idea to refute their claims that the power of Satan was used to cast out one of Satan's minions. If he did how could his kingdom stand? It would be doomed. One author noted, "If Satan gave power to Jesus, who opposed him in every way, Satan would be supporting an attack upon himself." It would be like one army giving its enemy their weapons to fight against them.

Jesus played along with their line of thinking to show them how illogical their accusation was. For arguments sake let's suppose He did cast out demons by the power of Satan (of course we know He didn't, but let's just say He did). Jesus then challenged them by asking if He cast out demons by the power of the chief demon, by what power did their people cast out demons? Accusing Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub also implied that they did the same. If Jesus used the power of Satan the only logical explanation was that their people did the same. It made no sense for them to say that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan but turn around and say their own people cast out demons by the power of God. He was charging them with holding a double standard. Their own people would stand up and condemn them for these false accusations.

Jesus did not deny that others cast out demons. We have already seen that His disciples did. Jesus told them that it was by His power and authority they would do so. Then there was the attempt in Acts by the 7 sons of Sceva.

He then jogged their memory with a little history lesson they would be familiar with. He spoke of casting out the demon by the finger of God. It's a reference to the Exodus passage we looked at earlier in which the magicians of Pharaoh recognized the power God contained in just His finger. Here's Jesus' point. The pagan magicians recognized the power of God, but the religious elite rejected that same power when they saw it firsthand.

Don't ignore or reject or conclude that a miracle is something other than what it is. It is the power of God at work and our response should be obedience. Rejection only further hardens the heart to the gospel. And because it is the power of God, then God's kingdom has come because the King Himself, Jesus, was present with them. The evidence of the presence of the king was that evil was being overthrown. The implication is to ready – Jesus is coming again.

Here is how they could tell evil was being overthrown. It's seen in verses 21-27. Jesus talks about a strong man who is fully armed guarding his house. As long as he is guarding his possessions he thinks they are safe. But when someone who is stronger comes along and overpowers the strong man his possessions will be taken away. The stronger man then divides the spoils.

Jesus uses this analogy to stress what He just talked about between the two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. In this story Satan is the strong man, his kingdom is the house and his possessions are unbelievers that he is guarding. Jesus is the stronger person who comes along. The demonstration of his power to overcome the strong man was His ability to cast out demons. They know who He is and tremble and fear Him. Jesus is able to disarm them because they have no power over Him. Since Jesus is the stronger man it is foolish to conclude that He cast out the demons by the power of Satan whose power is also limited against Jesus. It made no logical sense to conclude that Jesus did so by the power of Beelzebub.

Then He made that statement in verse 23 that a person is either with Jesus or against Him. There is no neutral position in this war. Though some nations tried to remain neutral in WWII, it was virtually impossible and they either became occupied or involved with the Axis or Ally nations. There is no neutrality in war.

If you don't intentionally support Jesus, you side with the opposition.

Satan will do all he can to keep those who are bound in sin. Jesus has come to loose them from this bondage and that kingdom and set them free so that they can become part of His kingdom. But here's the thing and Jesus points it out in the next verses. Suppose a demon comes out of a man because for some reason it has become inhospitable for it. In the context it appears that the man was attempting to live a moral life. So the demon left and wandered around the nether world looking for another host. It couldn't find anyone to occupy so it returned to the man it had left and found that the man had really cleaned up his life, but he left the place unguarded so the demon re-entered the man and brought seven other demons more wicked than it, to possess the man. The condition of the man now worse than before.

The implication is clear. It isn't just enough to clean up your life morally. Something else is necessary. Each person must decide what to do with Christ.

Colossians 1:13-14

Hebrews 2:14

I John 3:8

Al Mohler argues that "moralism is the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior. Moralism produces sinners who are (potentially) better behaved. The Gospel of Christ transforms sinners into the adopted sons and daughters of God."

A person can do all they want to try and clean up the outside by moral living, but without a transformation of the heart which transfers the person to a new kingdom, that person still belongs to the strong man.

Some woman in the crowd piped up and blessed Jesus' mother. Every Jewish woman wanted to be the mother of the Messiah. But Jesus put things in

proper perspective by saying in verse 28 that those who are truly blessed are the ones who hear and obey the word of God. How about you?

Jesus gives a response from logic. If we follow it to its ultimate conclusion, it should lead us to obey what we hear about the gospel.

B. A Response From Lore – v. 29-32

Jesus then talked about the result of what would happen if they didn't obey the truth of the gospel. Speaking to a crowd of Jews who were steeped in following the Old Testament, the most religious people around, Jesus referred to them as a wicked generation. They were wicked because they wanted another sign and refused to believe what was right in front of them. They asked with the wrong motive and so Jesus was gave them a sign from way back in their history.

As the crowd began to increase He took them back to a couple of historical figures, people they would have learned about through their study of the Old Testament. The first was Jonah. Every Jew growing up had heard the story about the guy who disobeyed God and ran away. He didn't want to go to the feared Assyrians. His task was to preach a message of repentance. Just a Jonan was a sign to the Ninevites, so Jesus was a sign to that generation. Both proclaimed judgment and called for repentance.

Jonah was swallowed up by a great fish.

Jesus was swallowed up by the grave.

Jonah was miraculously delivered from certain death, while Jesus was delivered from death by rising again.

Following Jonah's experience in the fish he was led to experience a great ministry in Nineveh.

Following Jesus' resurrection He too had a great ministry.

The greatest sign would be in the resurrection, but even at that many still didn't believe. Their unbelief resulted in their rejection of the Messiah.

John 12:37 “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him.”

Whereas the Gentile and pagan Ninevites who neither knew about nor looked for a Messiah repented of their sin, the religious Jews chose to ignore and reject Him.

Jesus gave a second example that further demonstrated their judgment for refusing to see and believe that He was the Messiah. It was the sign of the Queen of Sheba. She traveled a very difficult journey for the purpose of hearing the wisdom of Solomon. She had heard of it and needed to hear for herself. The wisdom of Jesus was close at hand and His generation rejected it. She was a pagan and had no knowledge of the true God, yet when she heard she came a great distance and believed. The Jews were steeped in the knowledge of God and were invited to believe in Jesus yet rejected Him.

If the people of Nineveh responded to the preaching of Jonah and the Queen of Sheba to the wisdom of Solomon how much more should they respond to the message of Jesus? Both Jonah and the Queen of Sheba serve as examples of judgment that were brought on that generation to condemn them for their rejection of Christ. Obedience to the Word of God begins with responding to the Gospel. Our nation is saturated with material in print and on TV or radio and yet people are not responding to the saving grace of Jesus Christ revealed in His Word, yet in countries like Iran where preaching and proselytization of Muslims is illegal many are coming to Christ in salvation.

C. A Response From Light – v. 33-36

Jesus concludes with something else that seems rather ridiculous. A person doesn't light a lamp and then stick it under a bushel to hide it. The obvious place to put a lamp is up high out in the open so that illuminates the whole area. He likens the eye then to the lamp. If the eye is good then it will receive

the light, but no matter how bad your eye is the brightest light can't make a blind man see. In the same way those asking for a sign didn't need more light through another sign, they needed to have eyes that would see the truth of what was already revealed. Jesus was the true light, shining in dark places, yet many rejected the light believing they were already following the light. How about you? What light are you following?

The psalmist declared “The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” (Psalm 119:130)

Psalm 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to path.”

John 8:12 “When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

As His followers, we are to reflect His light to others that they might see their need of a Savior.

II Corinthians 4:3-6

Ephesians 5:8-14

Just as when God brought light into existence in the creative act by which it dispelled darkness, so it is in spiritual creation when we become a new creation God has brought light into the hearts of those who had been in darkness. When Saul experienced the brilliant light on the road to Damascus, it not only blinded him, it condemned him because he was now confronted with the true light of the gospel in Jesus Christ. At that moment he was confronted with continuing on in the traditions of Judaism and reject the living Christ with whom he now knew was true or allow the transforming work of Christ to transfer him from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. If we have been transformed by the light then a change in our character should follow. He is the light of the world, but many are still lost in darkness.

Jesus had a message for those who rejected the miracles that were evidence of His being the Messiah. They either obey it or reject it. To reject it would bring certain judgment. As Jesus left them with a challenge in verse 35, He leaves us with the same one – “See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.” Many thought that what they were doing in following Judaism was actually following God, when in fact they were actually standing opposed to Him. See to it that you are following the true light of the gospel. It is a call for self-examination to make sure you aren’t following some perceived path to enlightenment when in fact it is a path of darkness. The religious leaders thought they were following the light, but Jesus said they were actually spiritually blind guides leading the spiritually blind down the same lost road. Jesus is the only one true light and He is the only way. Blessed is the person who hears and obeys.