



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 6 – Miracles and Parables in Galilee

The miracles of Jesus

When God performs a miracle, He does not show any greater power than He does otherwise, but He shows it in an unusual manner. Many things that we take for granted are really miracles in a sense. For example, when plants grow from small seeds, this is really a miracle because man cannot fully explain how it grows and man cannot duplicate it. We become used to such things and we call them “natural”; We say they happen according to the laws of nature. But when God displays His power and wisdom in an unusual way – in a way different from the ordinary and contrary to the laws of nature – we call this a miracle.

There are many miracles in the Bible. They happened for the most part at certain periods in history, such as in the time of Moses and Joshua, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, and in the time of Jesus and His apostles. The prophets and apostles performed miracles in the name of God and Christ, but Jesus did His works in His own name, as the true Son of God.

In our day many consider the miracles of Jesus impossible. But the angel Gabriel told Jesus’ mother Mary: **“For with God nothing will be impossible”** (Luke 1:37). He who created this amazing world also can control all the things in it as He pleases; He even has the power to raise people from the dead.

Jesus’ first miracle was to change the water into wine at a wedding in Cana. After that He did many other wonders, such as healing the sick, guiding fish into the net, quieting the storm, driving out evil spirits, multiplying food provisions, and even raising people from the dead, such as the widow’s son, the daughter of Jairus, Lazarus, and even Himself.

Jesus’ miracles were intended to strengthen the faith of His disciples and to confirm the words that He spoke. His miracles did not convince His enemies to believe in Him but only led them to harden themselves against Him. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace: His Word and sacraments. If men reject the means of grace, they will not believe even if someone should rise from the dead (Luke 16:31).

The parables of Jesus

Parables are earthly stories with heavenly or spiritual meanings. Jesus used this method of teaching when opposition to His message grew stronger. These parables are in many cases like the pillar of cloud and fire in the Old Testament that gave light to the Israelites but darkness to the Egyptians. Those who had some understanding received even more

knowledge, but those who could not understand the parables became even more opposed to Christ.

Usually we cannot “prove” any Bible teaching based a parable, especially when the meaning of the parable is not explained by Jesus Himself, and the full meaning of a parable is not always absolutely clear in all points. To understand a parable, it is important to look at the point of comparison that the parable is making and at the circumstance in which the parable is told. Jesus used parables to illustrate teachings that are taught in other places in the Bible. We should cite these other, more clear passages to show that a teaching is true.

Jesus’ parables had to do with farming, vineyards, fishing, servants, judges, kings, and other important figures. They are easily remembered stories so that the messages we learn from them are likely to stick with us.

Read the listed passages as you study each of the events below:

A believing captain (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10)

This captain was a Gentile, but he built the synagogue in Capernaum for the Jews. The remains of a later synagogue are still to be found in Capernaum today. This man’s faith in Jesus was so strong that Jesus said He had not found such faith among the Jews. Jesus’ word alone was sufficient for this captain; he did not need Jesus to come to his house.

The faith of this Gentile captain led Jesus to think of the New Testament Church into which many such Gentiles would be gathered in from the east and the west. Jesus healed the captain’s servant, as He said He would.

Jesus raises a widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17)

In the town of Nain, which was about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Capernaum, a parade of death meets a parade of life. Life overpowered death. This is probably the first time that Jesus broke the bonds of death. Imagine the feeling of the people after witnessing this miracle. **“So he who was dead sat up and began to speak”** (v. 15).

John the Baptist sends two disciples to Jesus (Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23)

Did John send these two men to Jesus to strengthen his own faith, or to strengthen the faith of the two disciples? Most likely, John wanted reassurance that Jesus truly was the promised Messiah. John may have wondered why he was stuck in prison if Jesus was really the promised Savior. Jesus pointed to His miracles as proof of who He was.

Jesus talks about John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-19; Luke 7:24-35)

John the Baptist was not a man who lived in luxury, but the Elijah who was to come (Malachi 4:5). He was the forerunner of Christ. He was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. John and Jesus were different outwardly: John fasted and Jesus ate and drank, but the Jewish leaders rejected both of them.

“She loved much.” (Luke 7:36-50)

Jesus ate in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, for He sought to seek and save Pharisees as well as tax collectors. A woman with a bad reputation showed up at Simon's house and showed her love for Jesus. Jesus' story was about two people very much like Simon and this woman: one who loved much and one who loved little. All our sins have been forgiven also. Should we not love Jesus very much?

Note: Jesus' story makes it clear that forgiveness comes first and then our love for God. This woman did not earn forgiveness by showing love for Jesus, but the great love she showed for Jesus showed that she had *already* been forgiven much.

Through Galilee (Luke 8:1-3)

Jesus and His disciples were supported in part by the generosity of women whom Jesus had helped, such as Mary from Magdala, Joanna (Chuza's wife), Susanna, and others.

Power over the devil (Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:14-15, 17-23)

Jesus' intense healing and teaching activity led His family to think He was out of His mind.

When He drove out evil spirits, the Pharisees said He was working through Beelzebul (the devil). Jesus responded by saying that He worked with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their false accusations led Jesus to warn them against the sin against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven.

The sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-45; Luke 11:16; Luke 11:24-26, 29-32)

Jesus would not do any miracles for His enemies at their request. Instead, He gave them the sign of the prophet Jonah: three days in the belly of the fish. So Jesus would be three days in the earth before His resurrection. This was Jesus' second prediction of His resurrection.

The mother and brothers of Jesus (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 11:27-28, 8:19-21)

Jesus had four brothers and several sisters. They probably children of Joseph and Mary who were born after Jesus. Jesus' brothers were: James, who later became the head of the Jerusalem congregation and wrote the Bible letter of James; Judas (or Jude), the author of the Bible letter of Jude; Simon, who became head of the Jerusalem congregation after his brother James was killed; and Joseph/Joses.

Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him until after His resurrection. Notice that Jesus considered His family of believers as more important than His earthly family.

The parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:1-9, 13-20; Luke 8:4-9, 11-15)

This is the first parable of Jesus. As Jesus explained, the seed is God's Word. The comparisons are these:

- a) the seed on the path eaten by birds: the devil steals God's Word
- b) the seed in rocky soil: hard times come and some lose their faith
- c) the seed among thorns: the cares and riches choke God's Word
- d) the seed on good soil: some hear the Word and keep it

Why Jesus spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35; Mark 4:10-12, 21-25, 33-34; Luke 8:10, 16-18)

"For whoever has, to him more will be given" (Matthew 13:12).

The parable of the seed growing by itself (Mark 4:26-29)

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Mark. It explains the quiet working of the kingdom of God on this earth. We do not always see the results of the Word of God that we preach, but God promises it will produce fruit (see Isaiah 55:10-11).

The parable of the mustard seed and the parable of yeast (Matthew 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-21)

These parables picture outward growth and inward growth.

The parable of weeds in the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43)

In this parable the seeds are not God's words, but people. This parable has sometimes been used to prove that Christian congregations should not exercise church discipline. But remember: **"The field is the world"** (v. 38). Believers and unbelievers cannot be separated from one another in this world, but surely openly impenitent sinners are to be excluded from the Christian congregation. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew chapter 18. But even in the church, some hypocrites remain among the true believers until the day of judgment.

The parables of the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the dragnet (Matthew 13:44-53)

Some believe these parables show the reaction of men who find Jesus Christ (represented by the treasure and the pearl). Others believe they show the value Jesus' places on His church and His great sacrifice to redeem us.

The dragnet shows how good and evil are found side by side, even in the church, and will remain together until the day of judgment.

Questions

1. What are miracles?
2. What are parables?
3. What was remarkable about the faith of the captain from Capernaum?
4. What happened when a parade of death met a parade of life at Nain?
5. How did Jesus show that He put His spiritual family above His physical family?
6. What did Jesus mean when He referred to the sign of Jonah?
7. Why did Jesus teach using parables?

8. What happens when the Word of God is spoken in the world?
9. Explain the parable of the weeds in the wheat.