

THE WONDER OF JESUS

Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, ¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

A bit of background as we begin: on Sunday, August 6, 1995, I preached from this pulpit for the first time—the first of many as it turns out—but on that day, the future of my being in this pulpit was still in question. You see, I was preaching a "trial sermon" that day.

The text I chose for the occasion was Mark 2:1-12. And my topic was "The Wonder of Jesus"—yes the same text and topic as today's sermon. In fact, it's the same sermon—more of less.

Now, I've gone through some changes in the nearly 23 years since that day—you have too--but this sermon hasn't... because the Word is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

But somebody here today likely has written in the margin of their Bible, "The Wonder of Jesus, Mk. 2:1-12, Dr. Thomason," 8/6/95—something like that (anybody?).

Well, I know! This message from back then is just as important today as it was then—so here we go. When you consider the life and ministry of Jesus, are you ever overcome with a sense of wonder?

They couldn't get through the door that day in Capernaum when they brought the paralyzed man to Jesus. Too many people there to hear him preach, so they lowered the man through a hole in the roof.

Jesus was so impressed by their faith, he told the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven." But there were those in the crowd who objected to that kind of talk from Jesus—only God could forgive sins. So Jesus said, "Okay, then how about this?"

He looked at the poor crippled man and said, "Get up! Take your mat and go home." And he did! The people were all filled with wonder, and they said, "We have never seen anything like this!"

A missionary shared the Gospel with a tribal king. When he finished, the king asked, "Supposing I accept your Gospel, what shall I find?"

The missionary replied, "If you accept this Gospel and become Christ's man, you will stumble on wonder upon wonder, and every wonder true."

What a wonderful gift, the gift of wonder! I experienced this while reading the newspaper. "Quasar Explosion Detected" said the headline. For some of us, I should probably mention that this was not a television (color TV by Motorola).

A quasar is a heavenly body, similar to a star, that emits radio waves. The article said, "A satellite detected an eruption of energy equal to almost a million years of sunlight and gave astronomers new insights into the mysterious stellar objects called quasars (G'ville News, 1/15/91)

Wow! Here we are so dependent on the sun's energy and this quasar produces a million years worth of sunlight in one giant bang! "The heavens declare the glory of God" said the Psalmist (19:1), and he'd never even heard of a quasar.

But I wonder how many people glanced at that article, shrugged their shoulders, and thought nothing of it?!? It would be even worse today. It's one of the tragedies of modern life--the way our ability to experience wonder gets blunted and corroded.

This is certainly true of life in general. It seems to be in fashion today to be astonished at nothing. Don't lose your cool over anything.

We're much too in-the-know, too sophisticated to be surprised by anything. Whatever it is, we've seen it, heard it, been there and done it (sent pics to friends)!

It seems we've forgotten what Jesus said, in words that cut our sophistication down to size, "Except you become as little children"—(which surely includes a child's wide-open eyes of wonder)—"unless you become as a little child, you will not see the Kingdom of God."

Don't we get caught up in this—even as Christians? It's so easy to take the marvelous facts of our faith for granted. 1) Even the fact of an almighty God whose power spoke this world into being.

Whether you believe it happened in six twenty-four hour days, or over the course of millennia—the fact that it happened at all really is amazing, isn't it? Do you ever wonder about God's creation?

2) And how about the fact that this bewildered, war-ravaged world is in the hands of One who is above all and over all. Why didn't God just give up on us and walk away a long time ago? Ever wonder about that?

3) What do you make of the fact that through the gift of God's Spirit, our own creaturely existence can be infused and transformed by eternity?

I'm talking about God's promise to us that He didn't bring us into this world just to live for a few years and then to die, but that He

actually has eternal intentions for our lives. That's got to make you wonder.

"I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene..." That's what we sing; but do we ever actually experience what that beautiful old hymn says?

We should. We should stand in awe and wonder before Jesus, the Savior—and by the way, it's really Jesus that makes all God's other wonders come alive for us--let me share with you some reasons why.

I. First of all, there's **the wonder of Jesus' words**. Do you ever stop and wonder about the extraordinary things Jesus said?

The people who first heard His words certainly did. In the Gospels, we read expressions like: "They were astonished at his doctrine." "Never had any man spoke like this man."

Another passage says of Jesus: "His word was with power" (or "with authority"). Those who were open to Jesus' words found them to be truly awe-inspiring and wonderful.

As people listened to Jesus, their hearts stirred within them and they knew, "Here is the real thing at last. Here is the authentic light of God shining into the darkness of this world."

Jesus knew something they needed to know. Finally, someone was speaking to their deepest needs: and they knew, as they listened to Jesus, that His words would stand.

As indeed they continue to stand to this day--convicting, and comforting, and challenging us, just as they did them—those illuminating, enlivening, incomparable words of Jesus.

They continue to echo across the ages and find their way to our hearts. If you haven't done so in a while, read them again. Listen deeply, with your ears and your heart, to what He says. Let the words of Jesus fill you with wonder.

II. Now add to these words of Jesus...**His works**—the things He did. Wherever Jesus went, impossible things happened.

One day, it was a poor soul—possessed by demons, out of control, living among the tombstones. Everyone knew his case was hopeless—everyone except Jesus.

When Jesus came and encountered the man, that pitiful creature was transformed; and to the amazement of all, he stood before them as a man set free, and in his right mind. Jesus made him whole.

On another day, it was Zacchaeus. You remember Zacchaeus, the man everyone loved to hate (this IS April 15!). He was a tax collector for the Romans, after all—in their minds, a traitor.

“Convert Zacchaeus?—you might as well try to convert a stone—it just won’t happen!” the people said.

But it did! And suddenly the incredible news was spreading around the Jericho grapevine that a dozen people whom Zacchaeus had defrauded had gotten their money back four times over.

Here’s something we can wonder about. What manner of man is this, who casts out demons—demons of the body, and demons of the soul?

And, friends, this is not just the old, old story—it’s fresh and new and up to-the-minute! Jesus is still in the world today seeking and saving the lost, drying the tears of the broken-hearted, driving out the demons of sadness and loneliness, of prejudice, hatred, and greed.

Where would some of us be today if He had not in fact delivered our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, our souls from death?

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” This is Jesus’ most wonderful work of all—the way he saves the likes of you and me by his magnificent mercy, amazing grace, and unconditional love.

III. But now let me ask you what is it, above everything else, that impresses this truth upon us? Is it not **the wonder of Jesus’ cross**—that Jesus would lay down his life for us on Calvary’s

cross—the absolute wonder of His supreme sacrifice for each of us. It makes you wonder.

You know this Scripture, Romans 5:7-8—“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rarely will anyone die for a righteous man; though, for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die.”

But that’s not the half of it. The Gospel claims that Jesus Christ lay down his life for the cruelest dictator...and the most hardened criminal...and whoever it may be in this world that you personally find most repulsive—Jesus lay down his life for them, just as He did for you and me. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

And, in the eyes of a holy and righteous God, there may not be as much difference between us and them as we like to think! Wonder of wonders, that Jesus would give his life for any of us—that He would give His life for me...and you.

Reflecting on the cross, James Stewart, a famous Scottish preacher and teacher of the last century, made this observation:

“I cannot fathom by any theory of atonement what it was that happened at Calvary. I cannot measure how deep were the waters crossed or how dark the night the Lord passed through.

I only know that through those deep waters and that dark night the Shepherd found his sheep. I only know that in that decisive hour when all hell was mobilized for the challenge, its supreme triumph was turned to its final and irrevocable defeat.

This is the victory of the cross, the fact that cannot be shaken, the very rock of God beneath our feet.”

That’s it—the marvelous wonder of Jesus’ Cross. Just in case it’s been a while, friend, let it amaze you once again! Stand in awe and wonder before the cross of Christ.

IV. Finally, there is one other wonder that we must add, and that’s **“the wonder of Jesus’ resurrection.”**

Follow this. It's way too easy to bury Jesus in a book that we argue about more than we practice, or to entomb Him in a way of doing things that we follow because it's simply the way we've always done it, whether or not it's still effective in making disciples for our Lord today.

There should be nothing dead or stagnant about the church of Jesus Christ. You and I are the sons and daughters of our resurrected Lord.

Every worshipping congregation is a community of the risen Savior. This is who we are: a fellowship built upon our Living Lord.

And speaking of wonders, this crucified but risen Christ has promised that "Wherever two or three of you are gathered in my name, there am I in your midst."

Right now, friends—in this gathering--right here, right now: Emanuel—God with us! Wrap you mind around that! It's amazing!

Our Lord Jesus Christ is here in our midst today. This is reason enough for wonder, adoration, and praise.

In that great hymn of praise that we began this service with—"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"—Charles Wesley put into words what you and I should experience each time we gather to worship the Lord.

The last phrase of that great hymn speaks of us being "lost in wonder, love, and praise." When was the last time you experienced that?

We have not begun to understand what God is saying to us through the gift of His Son unless sometimes, at least, the sheer glory of it all gets us by the throat, and blinds our eyes with tears, and grips our hearts with wonder.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace." (#320)