

## I. Introduction

A. It's been fun getting reports back from those of you: who are in small groups, reading the book, connecting some dots on Christ's life, realizing how much bigger – wonderful, remarkable, beautiful, powerful, significant – Jesus is than you might have thought.

B. About eighty percent of you are in weekly small groups right now. I know that's a big step for some of you. I hope the discussions and prayer times are going well and that friendships are being made. We need each other. We need others who know our story and are praying for us. A good part of the Christian life falls into what we call the "one anothers" – we are to love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, serve one another. We can only do what we are called to do if we are in community with others. And small groups are one great way to move in that direction.

C. By the way, we are about to roll out two 4 week video series for small groups. One is called *The Land of Faith* and the other *The Road to the Cross*. Both of these were filmed on the most recent trip to Israel. You can expect to hear more about that soon, as well as January small group plans. All of this is part of our focused effort to foster greater – more meaningful, more purposeful – relationships within the church. We want to make it really easy for you to stay in a small group!

## II. Review

A. We are putting together a puzzle. I didn't really appreciate that that is what we were doing until a few days ago. But I think the metaphor works. Each week we are looking at a different piece (or pieces) of a puzzle that ultimately gives us a picture of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I also like the symphony metaphor. We can isolate one instrument and listen to it and marvel at its beauty. And there is value to that. But what is truly amazing – what takes your breath away – is when they all play together. When 100 different instruments are all playing their part and it's presented as one song.

B. There are some challenges here. There is no picture on the box and so some of you are having problems putting the pieces together because the mental image you have of Jesus is not very accurate. It's not only too small, it's not very accurate. Some of you are having problems because you have pieces that are never going to fit. They are from a different puzzle. You are trying to make Jesus be someone other than who he is. And some of you may be ignoring pieces that you don't want to include. You are trying to leave some pieces out that you don't like.

C. In one sense, it's a challenging puzzle. Lot more pieces that anyone might have thought.

D. So far we've looked at a couple big pieces – or lots of smaller pieces that made up a big piece.

E. On week one we looked at the profound way Jesus has shaped this planet. I argued that we live in a Jesus-impacted world – that, more than anyone else, Jesus has shaped things for the better. Though technically uneducated and limited to only three years in the lime-light, this first-century carpenter did more for the good than any of the other 60 billion people who have lived.

1. The three examples I noted were the way he: 1) Elevated the status of all people, especially the have-nots; 2) Created a love for learning that helped pull Europe out of the Dark Ages, launched the scientific revolution and gave birth to higher education; and 3) adjusted our moral compass – downgrading revenge and celebrating humility.

F. In the second message we looked at the pieces linked to what he said – specifically, the content of his preaching and teaching, which I divided into two big categories.

1. The first is what he taught about how to live, which I suggested was made up of five smaller pieces: God is first; Others are second; The way up is down; We are going to live forever; and We are accountable for what we do with all that has been temporarily entrusted to us. The expectation is that Christ's followers will lean into the values of the kingdom today.

2. The second piece of Christ's teaching was what He had to say about Himself. And Jesus had a lot to say about Jesus. This surprises many. They expect him to be self-effacing. After all, he lived simply – he had no home or money, He hung out with the sick and the poor. He served and sacrificed himself for others. And this is the posture of other religious leaders. Prominent religious leaders tend to be humble. But Jesus was not. He claimed to be God – eternal, all-powerful, the One through whom the world was created, the One to whom all authority has been entrusted, the King of Kings. Jesus said, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Light of the World, I am the Way the Truth and the Life. I will return with power to judge everyone.

3. I noted that Jesus made the biggest claims anyone can make – and that, that leaves us with a very simple option. We accept him on his terms or we move on. We either decide that He is God, bow our knee and rearrange our life to reflect his greatness, his glory, his plan, his will. Or we say that he is a liar or deranged. He knew he was not God but claimed to be, or he thought he was God when he wasn't.

4. The early church framed this discussion with the statement: *aut Deus, aut homo malus*. Jesus is God or a bad man. C.S. Lewis expanded it a bit when he said: Jesus is Lord, Liar or Lunatic.

5. Last Sunday evening I gave a lecture that considered one other option some have proposed - that is, he was a legend. You can listen to that lecture if you are so inclined. Let me assure you, He is not.

a) There were not many people writing history 2,000 years ago – no 24 hour news channels, no bloggers, no newspapers. But, there is enough information from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman and Jewish historians to make it clear that: Jesus existed; He taught with power; He did – they would claim that he appeared to do – miracles; He claimed to be God; He was crucified for blasphemy and sedition; His followers claimed he rose again. This view spread quickly.

b) If you dismiss Jesus because there is not enough evidence, be prepared to write off everything that happened more than 500 years ago. There is a lot of evidence for Jesus.

6. Which means the options are as stated: God or a bad man. He cannot be a good man, a wise teacher, a prophet. He claimed to be God. So either he is or he isn't. And we need to decide. Jesus forces a decision. There is a take-it-or-leave-it, all-in or all-out quality to the way Jesus frames his claim.<sup>2</sup>

G. I ended last week by saying, "I'm betting my life on the fact that He is God." And I encouraged you to come back and bring your friends, promising that we'd take up another question – look at another piece of the puzzle. This time: what did he do?

III. Before we turn to John 9 let me briefly note three key points.

A. First, Jesus did a lot of things. We are focusing on His miracles – His supernatural powers. But these are just one piece among many. Jesus "did" a lot: He revealed God; He showed us what a perfect life looked like; He fulfilled prophecy; He loved people; He taught us to suffer; He sacrificed his life for us. The list of what Jesus "did" is long. Our focus today is on one small part of that: the miracles that he performed.

B. Second, even as we focus on one aspect of Jesus I want to be sure you have some idea of the big picture – the big claim. Namely, that Jesus, the One around whom this book pivots, existed as God from before time began, created all things and then became part of that creation in order to rescue us and restore God's Kingdom. The Creator became part of the creation in order to redeem those who ruined it. The claim is, that while remaining 100 percent God he became 100 percent man. (The math does not work on this.) And that he did all of this out of love. It's a big, big story. Jesus is at the very center of it. He is bigger than we can imagine.

C. Third, we are picking up right where we left off. Last week we were in John 8 – the chapter in which Jesus took the name of God for himself. We noted that there were many titles of God, but only one name: Yahweh, which means, "I Am." And we noted that though it was so sacred the Jews wouldn't even write it let alone say it, Jesus took it as his own. He said, "before Abraham was 'I AM.'"

IV. We are picking up right there. I am reading all of John 9.

A. As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

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<sup>2</sup> It's a multiples choice question. You either shade in the "accept" dot or the "reject" dot and there is no room for you to modify or explain your answer.

B. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

C. After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

D. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was.

E. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

F. “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

G. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

H. “Where is this man?” they asked him.

I. “I don’t know,” he said.

J. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

K. Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

L. But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided. Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

M. The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

N. They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

O. “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

P. A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

Q. He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

R. Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

S. He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

T. Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

U. The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

V. To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

W. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

X. “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Y. Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

Z. Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

AA. Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

BB. Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

CC. Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

V. As always, there is a lot going on here. There is much to ponder. But I want to focus your attention on one key point. And that is this: Christ’s unique powers are displayed chiefly so that we realize that He is God.

A. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Who sinned to make this man blind?” Jesus said, “No one. This happened so that the works of God might be displayed.” The reason this man was born blind was so that people could see that Christ was God.

B. The topic of miracles is a big. It’s not the topic of today’s message. If it was I’d unpack a number of things. Ever so briefly let me note just a few, especially since some of you are, well, skeptical.

VI. Now, let me call a time out for a few moments here and recognize that there is a bigger conversation to be had about miracles.

A. Especially with those of you who are bothered by them. Who think: I’m an educated person. I’m enlightened. I know about science. I’m not like one of those gullible, first century simpletons who didn’t know any better.

1. Well, that is a popular view. David Hume, the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish skeptic gave voice to it. He said that, “Miracles don’t exist, therefore the miracles in the Bible didn’t happen.”

2. Ever so briefly let me note that:

a) Hume’s argument is not an argument. It’s just a statement of his beliefs. The only way to prove that miracles don’t exist would be to prove that we live in a closed system. That the universe lacks anything - or anyone – who is transcendent, any Law-Giver who stands above the laws. Hume didn’t do that.

- b) Those who try to take the miracles out of the New Testament run into problems. More than a few have gone down this path. Jesus didn't walk on water, he just knew where the sandbars were. He didn't calm a storm, he predicted the weather. He didn't multiply food, he convinced people to share.
- c) The problem with this approach is – you are left trying to explain why anyone paid attention to Jesus. You think a bunch of fishermen didn't know about sandbars? Were going to follow a person because he found one?
- d) Additionally, some of his teaching was based on the miracles. If you take away the miracle the teaching is nonsense.
- e) And the people were not gullible. The picture that is presented in the New Testament is not of people who are quick to believe, but of those who are slow to believe.
- f) That's what we get in John 9. They don't know what to make of a blind man who can see. Some argue that it must be a different man.
- g) We get the name "Doubting Thomas" because Thomas was not quick to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.
- h) When Paul preached about Christ in Athens they tracked with him until he spoke about Christ rising from the dead.
- i) In 2 Peter 1:16, Peter says, "We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (He knew the people were disinclined to believe this).
- j) People didn't jump to supernatural explanations then any more quickly than we do today. The man who was healed said, "I don't understand it. I don't know what happened. All I know is, I was blind but now I see."

B. By the way, if miracles was the topic, I'd also address those of you who are too interested in them. Those who camp on the other side of doubt.

1. I'd start by noting that not all claims of the miraculous are true. Some are clearly staged hoaxes designed to mislead people or get attention.



2. I'd move on to note that there are actually not that many miracles in the New Testament. Most of what Christ did that required unique strength and power was heal people. Beyond the healings Jesus only did eight other miracles. Five were around multiplying food and three were acts over nature. (He calmed a storm, walked on water and cursed a fig tree).

3. I'd argue that many Christians make more of miracles than they should – they turn to Christ to get the miracle, rather than seeing the miracle as a revelation of Christ.

C. The miracles that Jesus did pointed to him, not to the miracle.

1. Please realize, Jesus healed people, but it was a temporary reprieve. These people didn't live forever.

2. He fed people, but it wasn't a permanent solution to their hunger.

3. The big deal was not the miracle itself – it was the miracle worker.

4. The point wasn't that hungry people needed to be fed or that they needed more wine at a party – it was that Jesus could multiply food and turn water into wine.

D. The miracle is never the main point. Jesus is. In fact, the word miracle never occurs in the New Testament. The word that is used is "sign."<sup>3</sup> And that is significant, because the supernatural activity we that is reported is a sign advertising Christ's power and nature.

1. Think about this for a moment. A sign never points to itself. The big deal about the sign is not the sign.

2. You might be looking for a sign. If you are lost you might be really happy when you find a sign. But you don't stop the car, get out and go hug the sign. You don't stop at the sign. You go to where the sign is pointing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The events that we label "miracles" are called: signs, wonders, works of God, acts of God, what is wondrous, astonishing, powers, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Years ago someone sent me a picture that showed a sign that said, "Warning, this sign has sharp edges. Do not touch." Hey, that's nonsense. It's a goofy, joke of a picture because it screams out, get rid of the sign. The sign does not exist for itself, but to point to something else.

3. Remember when Jesus called Peter. Luke 5 reports that Peter and others had been out fishing all night and not caught anything. Jesus tells them to try again. Tells them where to throw their nets and they catch so much that they need another boat to help them haul them in, and even then both boats start to sink.

4. Well, the purpose of Jesus catching the fish wasn't so they had fish. It was a sign demonstrating his power.

E. Taken collectively, the miracles Christ performs demonstrate that he has power over sickness, death, evil and nature – in effect, everything.

F. Who has that kind of power? Who can control everything? God!

G. The miracles of the New Testament are principally signs that point to Christ saying, "This man is God."

H. The topic of the miraculous is not small. But... what I want to be sure you see right now is that the "miracles" found in the Gospels are principally there to point to Christ. Alongside his teaching, his character, his birth, his impact, his claims, his fulfillment of prophecy, the miracles are there to help us see that He is God.

I. Christ's supernatural power is consistent with the rest of what we know about Jesus.

J. This is all just one more piece of the puzzle – another instrument in the orchestra.

VII. The Bible is about Jesus. It's not a book, it is a book that explains God's plan, which depends chiefly on God's Son.

A. The way forward includes leaning into Christ's teaching, but it focuses first and foremost on embracing Christ as Lord.

B. Next week we will take up yet another piece of the puzzle.

C. Let's pray.

VIII. Quotes

A. Our problem is this: we usually discover Him within some Christian ghetto. We meet him in a province and, having caught some little view, we paint him in smaller strokes. The Lion of Judah is reduced to something kittenish because our understanding cannot, at first, write larger definitions. Calvin Miller

- B. The most pressing question on the problem of faith is whether a man as a civilized being can believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for therein rests the whole of our faith. Fyodor Dostoevsky
- C. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age. G.K. Chesterton
- D. A miracle in healing is not the conjuring of some magic, nor a disruption in the created order, or something supernatural. Rather, healing exemplifies the redemption of fallen creation, the restoration of the created order, the return to the usual, the normative, the natural. William Stringfellow
- E. Christ Himself ... is the supreme miracle and the chief attestation of the truth of the biblical revelation. Alan Richardson