

Parables / Miracles

Read Matthew 12:22-45, Mark 3:19-30, Matthew 13:1-35, Mark 4:1-34, Luke 8:5-18, Luke 8:22-56, Matthew 8:18-9:38, Mark 4:35-5:43.

At the height of His popularity, Jesus initiated a dramatic directional change. Jesus had already selected the Twelve to "be with Him" continually. Their fellowship had one thing in common. They were outsiders, not part of the "most likely to succeed" club. With their selection, Jesus was sending a clear message. "Get used to different."

Talking Points

- Religious leaders placed a blind and mute, demon-possessed man in front of Jesus on Shabbat. They wanted to see if He would cross the line and break one of their "man-made traditions" concerning work on the Sabbath.
- Jesus cast the demon out. The crowd was amazed and asked the religious leaders, "Is Jesus the Son of David, our Messianic King?" The leaders claimed Jesus' power came from Satan, not God.
- Rather than make their own decision about Jesus, the people sided with their leaders out of fear rather than supporting and believing in Jesus as their Messianic King.
- This rejection initiated a radically new direction in Jesus' public ministry: the use of parables and qualified miracles.
- Matthew 13 contains a collection of Jesus' parabolic teachings. Using parables, Jesus hid information from Israel as a nation while privately explaining it to His surprised and confused disciples.
- These parables were key in preparing Jesus' disciples for the ministry He would entrust to them in Acts 1:8. They all spoke of a "Mystery Kingdom."
- The use of miracles also changed. Their new purpose was to confirm Jesus' divinity for those who believed. From this point forward, Jesus asked, "Do you believe?"
- The national rejection of Jesus' Messiahship in Matthew 12 narrowed His outreach focus in Israel while laying the groundwork for extending it among the Nations.
- From this point forward, Jesus prepared His disciples to introduce Him to the world.

Background

Like His earlier declaration of Himself as God in Nazareth, Jesus clarified who He was in Capernaum. It is not what He said but what He did that created controversy.

Then, a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to Him. He healed him so that the man could both speak and see. All the crowds were astounded and said, "Could this be the son of David? (Matthew 12:22-23).

Up to this point in his ministry, Jesus openly declared himself the promised Son of David, Israel's Messiah. This miracle prompted people who observed it to question their spiritual leaders if Jesus was who He claimed to be. Many Pharisees were present. The question put them in a difficult position. To protect their position, they made an astounding claim of their own.

This man (Jesus) drives out demons only by Beelzebul (Satan), the ruler of the demons (Matthew 12:24b).

The people in the middle were forced to make a decision. Would they follow Jesus or the Pharisees? From that day until the day He was crucified, Jesus' popularity dwindled. The Twelve also had a decision to make. Would they continue to be associated with Jesus?

Eternal Plan, Earthly Programs

Cause and effect. Something happens that leads to something else. As a corporate body, Israel, comprised of tribes and families, followed the Pharisees rather than Jesus. Most walked away out of fear. Immediately, Jesus started talking and teaching differently. The first to notice was Jesus' band of new disciples, His small group.

1st Century Jewish people looked forward to a literal 1,000-year reign of their eternal Davidic King from His throne in Jerusalem, their Messiah. Today, this period is identified as the Messianic or Millennial Kingdom. The Messianic Kingdom is a future period. It was, however, offered by Jesus during the first half of His earthly ministry. He withdrew His offer following Israel's national rejection in Matthew 12.

None of this surprised Jesus. God's plan was always for Israel to be an example to the Nations, whether in obedience or disobedience. Israel's rejection opened the door to direct Gospel proclamation to Gentiles. Jesus began building His Church at Pentecost. He is continuing to build His Church at this time, but the Church is only part of what God is doing.

There is a Mystery Kingdom program and a program for the Jewish people.

Coming Destruction

Jesus' disciples received His explanation of the Matthew 13 parables. Because Israel rejected Jesus by siding with Pharisaic claims, the masses were now subject to two irreversible judgments.

1. Instead of teaching plainly, Jesus began teaching through parables to hide the light from national Israel throughout the remainder of Jesus' life and the subsequent Mystery Kingdom/Church Age.
2. The unpardonable sin of attributing Jesus' power to Satan brought a curse on the existing Jewish generation of Jesus' life. Destruction was coming to Israel. There would be no escape from Jesus' judgment. In 70 A.D., quelling an uprising among the Jewish people, the army of Rome destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, effectively eliminating Jewish religious practices.

Parables In Context

The parables of Matthew 13 flow out of what happened in Matthew 12. They reveal information about a "Mystery Kingdom" comprised of Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers. The Mystery Kingdom began at Pentecost and will end with the Rapture of the Church. You are now living in the Mystery Kingdom. Another name for this time is "Church Age."

Uniquely Purposeful Miracles

During the first two stages of Jesus' public ministry (Come & See, Follow Me), there was no secrecy surrounding what Jesus said about Himself or the miracles validating His messianic claims. He publicly offered Himself as the long-prophesied Son of David. The miracles performed were His resumé. During the "Be With Me" stage, Jesus focused on training the Twelve privately.

The miracles of the "Be With Me" stage training validated the belief of those who followed Jesus. Luke's gospel records that following His introduction of the parables of the "Mystery Kingdom," Jesus performed four miracles that proved His messianic authority as the Son of David.

- Power Over Nature – Luke 8:22-25
- Power Over Demons – Luke 8:26-39
- Power Over Disease – Luke 8:40-48
- Power Over Death – Luke 8:49-56

Bible Conversations

- The rejection of Jesus in Nazareth was a prelude to His rejection by the people of Israel as a nation. What were the consequences for the Jewish nation? How did believers in Jesus suffer for the rejection of others?
- The 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled Jesus' judgment over Israel's national rejection in Matthew 12. The position of demonstrating the Good News was removed from Israel and placed on the Church. Does this mean that Israel is the New Israel? Why or why not?
- As the number of people openly aligned with Jesus decreased, the disciples faced conflicting emotions concerning Him. What unsettling thoughts may they have had?
- Is following Jesus supposed to be safe? Discuss the challenges Jesus' disciples face in the 21st Century. What price have you paid for your faith?
- Why do most Jesus followers seldom, if ever, come face-to-face with Satan in spiritual combat?
- What do you fear more than anything else? How do the miracles of this lesson address your fear?