

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Water Into Wine”

Introduction

If you were Jesus, what would have been your very first miracle? If you were the Son of God, how would you begin to manifest your divine power among the people? Miracles are not superficial and trivial, but they seemingly follow human necessity and flow out of impossible circumstances. In other words, when God works miracles, the Lord is supernaturally doing something for us that we simply cannot do for ourselves. In today's lesson, we will study what is often considered the first miracle that Jesus worked: turning water into wine.

Key Verse

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (Jn. 2:11).

Lesson Summary

In John 2:1-11, the first miracle of Jesus took place at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Cana was about 10 miles directly north of Nazareth, Jesus' home town. His mother Mary was at the wedding. Jesus and his disciples were also called to the feast. Such wedding celebrations lasted as long as seven days. The betrothed couple must have been close friends of Jesus. His attendance at the wedding demonstrated his congenial, social nature – he was never too busy to eat and fellowship with his friends (consider Mt. 11:18-19; Mk. 2:15-16). This festive occasion necessitated an opportunity for Jesus to manifest God's power and glory among family and friends. At this particular time during the feast, Mary came to Jesus – not merely as her son but as her Lord – because they had run out of wine. In many parts of the world today, this may not seem like a huge problem with grocery stores at our fingertips; but in Biblical times, a wedding feast with nothing to drink more or less ruined the celebration for many guests. Her statement of the problem was actually a petition for divine help. Mary believed Jesus could supply the need. Of course, she already knew he was the Son of God (Lu. 1:30-38). Her petition proved that she believed Jesus could provide wine through some miraculous means. Her directions to the servants further confirmed her faith in him: “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (Jn. 2:5). Mary believed in the power of God's Word (Lu. 1:38). Although Jesus hesitated to intervene, he nevertheless was willing and proceeded to satisfy her petition (1 Jn. 3:21-22; 5:14-15). Her faith prompted what appears to have been a “premature” miracle (Jn. 2:4). After all, how could Jesus deny such great faith in him, especially from one so dear to his heart? No doubt, Jesus could have supplied their need for wine in a variety of ways. But he chose to meet the need by a physically miraculous and indisputable method. Jesus began with ordinary water. The Jews kept containers of water for washing because of their traditional purification rituals (Mk. 7:1-5). Six stone water-pots were sitting there for all of the necessary washing during the wedding feast. To accommodate the many guests for a one-week celebration, each stone pot must have held many gallons of water. First, Jesus had the servants to fill the water pots to capacity. Then he simply told them to draw from the pots and serve it to the governor or ruler of the feast (i.e. the host). Somewhere during this process, Jesus made water into wine. He miraculously condensed the lengthy process of growing, ripening, harvesting, and treading grapes into a moment of time. By the power of the Holy Ghost, he transformed ordinary wash water into tasty wine (almost certainly the preserved unfermented juice of the fruit, see Mt. 26:29). The servants knew what was done, but the host suspected nothing. He exclaimed, “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (Jn. 2:10).

Scripture Study

The social setting – Jn. 2:1-3; Mt. 11:18-19; Mk. 2:15-16

Mary's faith – Jn. 2:3-5; Lu. 1:30-38; 1 Jn. 3:21-22; 5:14-15

The first miracle – Jn. 2:6-11; Mk. 7:1-5

Conclusion

Miracles are supernatural feats which evidence undeniable proof. We cannot explain it, but the facts stand true. When the servants filled the stone-pots with ordinary water and then served up wine, they were eye-witnesses of the power and glory of God in Christ. Moreover, “his [Jesus] disciples believed on him” (Jn. 2:11). Indeed, Jesus is not here in the flesh, but he has given us the power of his Spirit. We should therefore expect miracle-working power in the church today, so that many will turn to Jesus and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

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“The Miraculous Catch”

Introduction

Jesus did miracles that transformed people's lives, changing the way they thought about God and themselves. In today's lesson, we will see how Peter's life was radically changed by a boatload of smelly fish. It sounds funny, but it's true.

Key Verse

“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net” (Lu. 5:5).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 5:1-11, we read about the miraculous catch of fish. Simon and Andrew, his brother, operated a fishing business with their partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee (v. 10). Their fishing was not for hobby or sport, nor even for a meal, but it was their trade. They were professional fishermen; they knew how to catch fish. In the early part of the day, the men had returned to land and were cleaning up from their work after a long night of fishing with no results (vv. 2, 5). So they were finished for the day. At this same time, Jesus was at the lake of Gennesaret (i.e. the sea of Galilee) with a group of people who greatly desired to hear the word of God. Seeing the two ships at land, Jesus entered Simon's and asked him to push out a little into the water so that he could teach the people from the ship (vv. 1, 3). We cannot be certain of all Jesus preached and taught that day, but we can be sure of his central message – “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mk. 1:15-16; Mt. 4:17-18). Whatever Jesus said, we can be sure that his teaching prepared Peter for what was about to happen. After he finished teaching the people, Jesus then asked Peter to go back into the deep waters and fish again. Jesus was not a fisherman; he was actually a carpenter by trade (Mk. 6:3). Peter was the professional; he owned a fishing boat; he was in fishing business with his partners; he knew the trade. They already worked hard all night but caught nothing. Now, a “master” teacher of the Scriptures – a rabbi – was asking him to “Launch out . . . for a draught” (Lu. 5:4). Why go back out? What does a rabbi know about fishing? Nevertheless, Peter launched out again at his word – just because he said so (v. 5). Something in Jesus' teaching must have gripped the heart of Peter. Although logically he saw no point in fishing again, his faith in Jesus moved him to take Jesus at his word and to obey him. What is the outcome when we believe and obey the Word of God? The results are miraculous. After fishing all night without results, Peter then had the biggest catch of his life. How do we know this was no ordinary catch? First, Luke described it as a “great multitude of fishes.” Second, it was such a huge catch that the net broke [or was breaking]. Their net could not contain it. Third, they had to appeal to their partners for help. Fourth, they caught so many fish, they filled up both ships. Fifth, the catch was so enormous that both ships began to sink from the massive weight of the fish. Finally, consider the reaction of Peter. When Jesus performed this miracle on Peter's behalf, Peter humbled himself. He saw himself as unworthy of the Lord. He said, “Depart from me,” falling down before Jesus and confessing his sin. Clearly, Peter had never seen anything like this; he knew he was in the presence of God, for no man could do such wonders (vv. 6-9). Was Jesus looking for some other response from Peter? No. The Lord is pleased with a humble and contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18; 51:17; Is. 57:15; 66:2; Mt. 18:1-4). Other than Peter's conversion, what was the greater significance of the miraculous catch of fish? In other words, why was this miracle necessary for Peter and his partners? A number of things may come to mind. But foremost, Jesus demonstrated God's overwhelming ability to meet their needs. Peter and his partners could not catch any fish, even after “toiling all night,” but Jesus gave them the biggest catch of their lives. Trusting in the Lord's ability, they answered the call of Christ, left everything behind, and followed Jesus. Therefore, they could believe in Jesus for even bigger and better things, like catching a multitude of souls for God (Lu. 5:10-11; Ac. 2:38-41).

Scripture Study

Believing and obeying the Word – Lu. 5:1-5

The miraculous catch – Lu. 5:6-7

Humbling himself – Lu. 5:8-9

Following Jesus – Lu. 5:10-11

Conclusion

Jesus has already commissioned us to launch out into deep waters and catch souls for the kingdom (Mk. 16:15). He has already promised to provide us with power and authority as we go (Mt. 28:18-20; Ac. 1:8). Let's take Jesus at his word. Let's go fishing!

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“Calming the Storm”

Introduction

In Mark 4:2, the writer explained that Jesus taught the multitudes by parables, and “when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (vv. 33-34). Jesus used parables (symbolic stories) to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God, but he also used miracles as a practical, experiential method of teaching them. In today’s lesson, we will learn lessons from Jesus’ calming the storm.

Key Verse

“And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk. 4:39).

Lesson Summary

In Mark 4:1, Jesus was teaching by the Sea of Galilee, and a great multitude gathered to hear him, “so that he entered into a ship” in order to teach the people. One of the reasons Jesus taught from a ship was to create distance between the people and him, because of the large crowds and the complications this posed. For example, Mark 3:8-10 notes: “. . . a great multitude, when they heard what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.” Therefore, when Jesus desired to teach the really large crowds, a little distance served a great purpose. After a long day of teaching the parables of the kingdom, Jesus and his disciples set sail at evening. Jesus said, “Let us pass over unto the other side” (4:35). Not knowing they were headed for danger, the disciples made the voyage. As they crossed the sea, a violent storm came up and battered the vessel filling it with water. Their lives were clearly in jeopardy. Nevertheless, Jesus was fast asleep in the back of the ship. He was perfectly at peace and rest in the midst of the storm while his disciples were in a panic. At last, they came to Jesus and awakened him, saying, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (v. 38). Jesus then rebuked the wind and waves, speaking to the sea, “Peace, be still” (v. 39). The storm obeyed his voice, and all was calm. What should we learn from this miraculous experience? No doubt, Jesus fully intended to cross over to the other side of the sea. After all, he said so – “Let **us** pass over unto the other side” (v. 35). Consider: “us” means Jesus and his disciples. Although his presence did not stop the storm from coming, his presence on the ship was the guarantee of their peace and safety, even when their circumstances placed their lives in jeopardy. In other words, we should always remember that Jesus is our peace in every situation we face. All they had to do was go to him, and cry out to him. All he had to do was speak the Word – “Peace, be still” (v. 39). From this miracle, we should therefore believe God’s Word and rest in the Lord. Because he is always with us, living in our hearts and guiding our lives, we can be sure to reach our final destination in him. Being scared and overwhelmed, the disciples asked a rather foolish question, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (v. 38). Of course, he cared! He just wasn’t terrified like them. The changing circumstances of life, even the storms, do not diminish God’s care and concern for us. After he calmed the storm, Jesus’ response said it all: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith” (v. 40)? The disciples questioned his care for them; but Jesus questioned their faith in him. The fact that he immediately calmed the storm with the power of his Word proves his point. The disciples exclaimed, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him” (v. 41)? To be sure, Jesus cared; they just needed to believe in his ability to care for them.

Scripture Study

The storm – Mk. 4:35-37; Mt. 8:18, 24; Lu. 8:22-23

Calming the sea – Mk. 4:38-39; Mt. 8:25-26; Lu. 8:24

Faith in Jesus – Mk. 4:40-41; Mt. 8:26-27; Lu. 8:25

Conclusion

Have you ever asked, “Lord, why must I go through this storm?” The hard times (i.e. temptations, trials, suffering, sickness, and so on) in our lives are actually times of spiritual growth. Through these hardships, God is forming us into the kind of Christian who can stand and persevere in the faith to the finish (Ja. 1:2-4). We do not know what tomorrow holds, no more than the disciples knew the storm was coming. But we should take courage in knowing that God uses such storms to establish us in the faith for even greater challenges ahead. For as soon as they reached the other side of the sea and came off the ship, they were met by a violent man tormented by a multitude of demons. Nevertheless, they knew Jesus could calm his storm (Mk. 5:8).

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“Casting Out Devils”

Introduction

After the disciples weathered the tempest on the Sea of Galilee, and after Jesus calmed the raging storm, they were truly amazed by the power and authority of Jesus. Matthew explained, “But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Mt. 8:27). The fear of the storm had passed. Now they feared the one who could rebuke the winds and command the sea to be still. Truly, the fear of the Lord and the wonder of his miraculous power should far exceed any fear regarding our circumstances. In today’s lesson, we will see that the one who has authority over the powers of nature also has authority over spiritual powers.

Key Verse

“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid” (Lu. 8:35).

Lesson Summary

Luke 8:26-35 tells the miraculous story of spiritual deliverance. After the storm ceased, Jesus and his disciples safely arrived on the other side of the sea near Gergesa in the country of the Gadarenes (Lu. 8:26; Mt. 8:28). When Jesus came out of the ship, immediately a demon-possessed man (c.f. “two possessed with devils,” Mt. 8:28) came to him. This demonic control over his life had a number of devastating effects. First of all, the man was mentally insane and incapable of having normal, social relationships. Instead of living in a house within the community, he actually dwelled as a social outcast living among the graves. He acted like a wild animal, roaming unclothed in the mountains and in the tombs. Being mentally tormented, he incurred self-inflicted wounds. People heard him, day and night, crying out and cutting himself. Needless to say, he was dangerous. No one could go near him for fear of being attacked. Moreover, all attempts to bind him were unsuccessful; he was so powerful that he even broke chains and shackles. Being bound by Satan, his condition was hopeless until Jesus came on the scene. When he saw Jesus in the distance, he came running to the Lord, fell down before him, and worshiped him (Lu. 8:26-29; Mt. 8:28-29; Mk. 5:1-7). In fact, the demons within him were pleading for mercy because Jesus had rebuked the unclean spirit and commanded it to come out of him. The man cried out: “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not” (Lu. 8:28). Clearly, demonic spirits know and respect the authority and power of Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:34; 3:11-12; Ac. 19:15; Ja. 2:19). In this case, the man did not have one demon, but he was possessed by many unclean spirits as indicated by the name Legion, a military term referring to a large troop of soldiers. How many demons did he have? We do not know for sure. Nevertheless, the unclean spirits entered into a herd of about 2000 swine when Jesus cast them out of the man (Mark 5:11-13). Thus, Jesus exercised divine authority over the demonic spirits – regardless of their number – proving he has all power to deliver those who are bound by Satan (Lu. 8:29-35; Mt. 8:29-34; Mk. 5:7-15). When Jesus commissioned the church to go forth into the world with the gospel, he assured us of his authority, saying, “All power (i.e. authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). Jesus further assured us: “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (v. 20). Why is the assurance of his presence and authority so important in our mission? As believers, we have the promise of power and authority in Jesus’ name in order to set captives free from Satan’s control. A key feature of Jesus’ ministry was delivering the bound and oppressed; and this continues to be a key component of the church’s ministry in the world today (Mk. 1:39; Lu. 4:18; Mk. 16:17, 20; Ac. 1:8).

Scripture Study

Bound by Satan – Lu. 8:26-29; Mt. 8:28-29; Mk. 5:1-7

Set free by Jesus – Lu. 8:29-35; Mt. 8:29-34; Mk. 5:7-15

Deliverance ministry – Mk. 1:34; 3:11-12; Ac. 19:15; Ja. 2:19; Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 1:39; Lu. 4:18; Mt. 10:1; Mk. 16:17, 20; Ac. 1:8

Conclusion

It’s true – we have no authority or power of our own enabling us to deliver those who are bound by Satan. However, Jesus is more than able to bind the strong man and to cast him out (Mt. 12:28-29). As the head of God’s church, Jesus desires to work through the members of his body. For this reason, we must be wholly sanctified, consecrated to God, and filled with the Holy Ghost. In other words, we must be spiritually prepared for the Lord’s use – instruments of the Holy Ghost – in order to bring deliverance to the captives.

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“Loaves and Fishes”

Introduction

Jesus and his twelve apostles attempted to retreat from the crowds. Why? The apostles had finished an extensive mission campaign. Moreover, John the Baptist, the great prophet, had just been beheaded. Furthermore, because of the crowds, the disciples had little time to rest and eat. Jesus knew they needed a break. So they took a ship to a more remote area near Bethsaida. However, when the people saw him leaving, they followed, and were even waiting on him when he arrived. Of course, Jesus did not turn them away. How could he possibly turn away people who followed him so intently? Having compassion on them, he taught them about the kingdom of God and healed their sick. At evening, the disciples asked Jesus to dismiss the multitude because the people needed to find food and lodging (Mt. 14:10-15; Mk. 6:12-13, 27-36; Lu. 9:1-6, 10-12). Then Jesus said something completely unexpected: “They need not depart; give ye them to eat” (Mt. 14:16).

Key Verse

“And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full” (Mt. 14:20).

Lesson Summary

In Mark 6:35-44, we read the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Rather than sending the multitude away empty, Jesus told his disciples to feed the hungry multitude. But how could they obtain enough food to feed this huge crowd? The only food available was a young boy's supper: “five barley loaves and two small fishes” (Jn. 6:7-9). How can twelve men ever feed over five thousand people with only a few loaves and fishes? Undoubtedly, it's humanly impossible. But they did it! This very point – the impossibility of it all – is primary to our understanding the lesson in the miracle. Supernaturally, they actually fed the multitude until they were all full; and they even had twelve baskets remaining. What does this miracle teach us? The twelve apostles had returned from their missionary travels, going village to village, preaching the gospel, casting out devils, and healing the sick (Lu. 9:1-2, 6; Mk. 6:7, 12-13). The twelve came back telling Jesus all they had done and taught (Mk. 6:30). They were tired and weary, yet they had only begun to fulfill Christ's mission (v. 31). Indeed, the worldwide mission of the church is truly a daunting task. For Zion Assembly to reach the masses – literally billions – with the doctrine of Christ is humanly impossible. But it's not impossible with God (Lu. 1:37; 18:27). Humanly speaking, we will never have enough laborers and resources to meet the demands of our mission. Our mission outreach will always require greater funding; we will always need more pastors and ministers to establish churches; we will never have a surplus of qualified leaders; and church buildings with adequate facilities will always be in short supply. In brief, we will never have more resources than our mission requires. But we simply cannot sit around waiting on enough before we fulfill our obligation. Instead, we must see our mission from a spiritual point of view, exercising faith in the supernatural power of God, because the mission of the church will be completed before the coming of the Lord (Mt. 24:14). Although we may have little to offer in comparison to the need, Jesus still says the same thing to the church today: “You feed them.” We should therefore have confidence that God will supply all we need as we need it. The apostles did not have 200 pennyworth of bread to feed the vast multitude. Nevertheless, when the time came for the crowd to be fed, Jesus multiplied the disciples' meager resources right between their fingertips. Certainly, we do not have enough resources to reach the world. But when we give all we have to Jesus, no matter how little it may seem, he can bless it and then use us to reach the world for him. Indeed, the Lord has much abundance for his church. We will never run short of God's grace and power when we depend on Christ's boundless supply. “And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men” (Mk. 6:43-44). After the disciples fed the great multitude and satisfied the hunger of the people, the disciples then took up twelve baskets of bread and fish – enough food for each apostle to have his own basket (Ph. 4:19).

Scripture Study

Feeding the five thousand – Mk. 6:35-44; Mt. 14:15-21; Lu. 9:12-17

Fulfilling our mission – Lu. 9:1-2, 6; Mk. 6:7, 12-13, 30-31; Mt. 24:14

Conclusion

Jesus fed the crowd of hungry people; but his message to us is so much greater than filling their empty bellies with food. Like Jesus, our compassion for multitudes of lost people encourages our responsibility to feed their hungry souls with the inexhaustible bread of life.

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“Walking on Water”

Introduction

In Matthew 8:23-27, the disciples were in a raging storm and their lives were in jeopardy; but Jesus was on the ship sound asleep. They felt like they were going to perish in the storm. On the contrary, as long as Jesus was with them, they were secure. That night, the disciples learned a great lesson about having faith in Jesus. Once again, in Matthew 14:22-33, they struggled on another voyage across the sea. This time, however, Jesus wasn't on the boat with them, but he was walking on water. Let's consider the story.

Key Verse

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea” (Mt. 14:25).

Lesson Summary

At evening, Jesus sent his disciples ahead of him to the other side of the sea, and he stayed behind to disperse the multitude (consider Mt. 14:22-23; Jn. 6:14-15). During the night, Jesus was alone praying in the mountain while the disciples were crossing the sea, fighting the winds and waves (Mt. 14:24). Although he was not on the ship with them, he was fully aware of their adversity. “About the fourth watch of the night” (i.e. around 3 o'clock in the morning), Jesus came near the ship walking on water (Mk. 6:48). According to John, they had already toiled for 25 or 30 furlongs, which is approximately 3 or 4 miles (Jn. 6:19). He initially intended to pass by them until they saw him and thought he was a spirit (Mk. 6:49). Had they not seen him, would Jesus have allowed them to continue in the struggle? Certainly, following Christ does not eliminate all adversity. Christian faith offers no guarantee for a problem-free life. On the contrary, facing opposition in our Christian walk serves an important purpose. Rather than undermining true faith in Christ, hardships actually cause us to persevere and overcome by faith. We grow spiritually stronger through perseverance and patience (2 Co. 12:9-10; Ja. 1:3-4). When the disciples saw what they thought was a spirit walking on the sea, they were afraid and cried out. Jesus then spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Mt. 14:27). Peter boldly asked to go unto Jesus walking upon the water; and Jesus said, “Come” (vv. 28-29). Peter miraculously walked on water toward Jesus, but then he began to sink when fear gripped his heart (v. 30). Fear works against faith; it is the opposite of faith and trust in God. Faith focuses on God's ability while fear focuses on man's limitations and circumstances. Faith says, “God can!” Fear says, “I can't.” Jesus said to Peter, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (v. 31). At first, his faith in Christ was strong – strong enough to walk on water – but then the fear of the boisterous sea overtook his faith. Peter allowed the appearance of things to intimidate him and shake his confidence in the power of Christ. How often has fear hindered us from receiving from the Lord? How many times has fear stopped us from doing great exploits for God? Paul admonished Timothy to be bold in his faith, saying, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Ti. 1:7-8). After Jesus came into the ship, everything changed. The strong winds stopped blowing and all became peaceful (Mt. 14:32). John explained that they immediately arrived at their destination (Jn. 6:21). Suddenly, their toil and fear were behind them. What was the outcome of this miraculous event? Matthew explained, “Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Mt. 14:33). The One who walks on water and calms the raging sea is the Son of God. In following the Lord, we will surely face many winds of opposition; but the Son of God always sees our struggles, and his presence ultimately has the calming effect we desire in our lives.

Scripture Study

Adversity – Mt. 14:22-26; Mk. 6:45-49; Jn. 6:16-19

Faith – Mt. 14:27-31; Mk. 6:50; Jn. 6:20

Peace – Mt. 14:32-33; Mk. 6:51; Jn. 6:21

Conclusion

For the child of God, we should take great courage in knowing the Lord is always working in our lives, even through our adversity and trials. We struggle against the winds and waves, but the Lord walks upon the water. He is triumphant over every opposition. Indeed, he has everything under control. So we need to trust him and place our faith firmly in Jesus.

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“Christ’s Transfiguration”

Introduction

For thousands of years, mankind has participated in the routine called “life.” Each day, all around the globe, people busily come and go in every direction, twenty-four hours a day, and seven days a week. As we go through life, the perceptions of our natural senses, for the most part, form the substance of human reality. However, before the existence of the natural world, God dwelled in eternity (Is. 57:15). Genesis 1:1 declares, “In the beginning God.” John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” because he is the Creator of heaven and earth (Col. 1:16-17). Therefore, transcending all we see, hear, and sense with our natural abilities remains the invisible God. Over two thousand years ago, this same eternal Word was made human flesh. He became one of us. In terms of the natural, he made his appearance as a man, one sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Ro. 8:3). But there was so much more to Jesus Christ than a mere mortal; for he was, and is indeed, the Son of God full of glory and power.

Key Verse

“And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them” (Mk. 9:2).

Lesson Summary

In Mark 9:1, Jesus promised that some of his disciples would witness something far beyond this world (c.f. Mt. 16:28; Lu. 9:27). They would receive a foretaste of Christ in the power and glory of his kingdom. Six days later, Jesus was alone with Peter, James, and John on a high mountain when he was miraculously transfigured before them (Mk. 9:2-3; 17:1-2; Lu. 9:28-29). In other words, Jesus was temporarily changed; he went through a momentary metamorphosis. In the opening of his gospel, John declared, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, **(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)** full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). Perhaps, he was reflecting on supernatural experiences like the transfiguration when he wrote these words. On the mount, the three disciples actually witnessed God’s spiritual realm breaking forth into their natural sphere. This was not a vision, but they saw with their eyes, heard with the ears, and felt the natural sensations of Christ’s transfiguration (Mk. 9:4-8; Mt. 17:3-8; Lu. 9:30-36). Thus, they were temporarily permitted to see into the coming glory of God in Christ – a reality hidden from them because of Jesus’ humanity (Jn. 17:5). Normally, when people looked upon Jesus, they witnessed the power of God manifested through Christ’s weak humanity (Ph. 2:6-8). But on the mountain, Peter, James, and John actually witnessed the transcending glory of God’s kingdom: “And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mk. 9:3). Mark described God’s glory as white like snow. How white was Christ’s glory to the human eye? His raiment was whiter than any launderer could possibly “white” or “bleach” a garment. In other words, his glory was whiter than anyone can imagine. Likewise, Matthew wrote, “and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Mt. 17:2). He compared Christ’s glory to nothing less than the radiance of the sun in all of its brightness. In this way, the brilliance of God’s glory was manifested in Jesus. To the natural eye, his glory was brighter and whiter than anything the disciples had ever seen. What was the spiritual impact of this experience on the disciples? Once again, they understood that Jesus, and he alone, is the Son of God (Mk. 8:29; 9:7-8; Mt. 16:15-16; 17:5, 8; Lu. 9:20, 35-36). Miraculous encounters like the transfiguration confirmed to the disciples whom they were following, serving, and witnessing to the world. Peter had already confessed to Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). Now he saw the glorious power of his own confession!

Scripture Study

Transfiguration – Mk. 9:1-8; Mt. 17:1-8; Lu. 9:27-36

The Glory of God’s Son – Jn. 1:14; 17:5; Ph. 2:6-8; Mt. 16:15-16; 17:5

Conclusion

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he declared, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” authorizing the church to go forth and fulfill the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). But how could we go forward without him? Apart from Christ, we have no glory and power. Therefore, he sent the Holy Ghost – the same Spirit who anointed him – from the Father to us (Lu. 4:18; Jn. 1:32-34; 14:16-17; 15:26). By his same Spirit, we have access to Christ’s glorious power (Ac. 1:8).

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services
 Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Money from the Fish”

Introduction

Jesus, the man, performed miracle after miracle confirming that he was the Christ, the Son of God. He demonstrated his divine power and authority over natural things beyond the control of man. In today's lesson, we will consider a rather unique miracle of Christ when his disciples supernaturally took money from a fish's mouth. When was the last time you found money inside of a fish? Probably never! Money may turn up in many unexpected places, but finding it in the mouth of a fish is incredible, to say the least. Nevertheless, this is exactly what happened when Peter went fishing.

Key Verse

“Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee” (Mt. 17:27).

Lesson Summary

On this occasion, Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum. Apparently, he was staying in Peter's home as he had in the past (consider Mt. 8:5, 14-16; Mk. 1:21, 29-36, Lu. 4:30-31, 38-40). While there, the publicans (i.e. “they that received tribute”) came to Peter to collect taxes, asking, “Doth not your master pay tribute?” (Mt. 17:24). Peter replied, “Yes” (v. 25). Jesus' life and ministry serve as our pattern of good works that we should know how to please God in all things. We should not only learn of his ways, but we should also follow him and be “doers of the word” (11:29; Jn. 8:29; 10:27; Ep. 5:1; Ja. 1:22). Accordingly, Jesus taught us to follow in his footsteps, saying, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mk. 8:34). No doubt, Jesus was an exemplary citizen who set the perfect example for us. Clearly, he believed in paying taxes because he saw the important role of civil servants who depended on tax revenues for their employment. Jesus was not antigovernment, but he understood that authorities at various levels of society ruled for the overall good of humanity. Sufficient taxation provides the means of supporting necessary government. The apostle Paul explained this exact point in Romans 13:1-7. He referred to civil authorities as “God's ministers” (vv. 4, 6). In fact, resisting their power is like resisting God (vv. 1-2). Paying taxes is therefore pleasing to God. Consistent with the teachings of Christ, Paul declared, “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (v. 7; see Mt. 22:19-21). Again, Peter clearly affirmed that Jesus was a taxpayer. Now consider. Jesus created all things in the universe, “visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Col. 1:16). He has all authority in heaven and earth (Mt 28:18). Furthermore, he is the King of God's kingdom, even the “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Re. 19:16). Moreover, as his followers, we are the children of the kingdom (Mt. 17:26; Ga. 3:26; Col. 1:13). Nevertheless, he gave us his example of paying taxes so that we too would pay taxes. Although we answer to an infinitely “higher power” than man's authority – and this cannot be compromised – we should willingly submit ourselves to civil authorities in order to maintain an influential witness before others (“lest we should offend them,” Mt. 17:27). What do we learn from Christ's example of paying taxes? In following the pattern of Christ and being Christ-like, we will accomplish two things: first, we will please God; and second, we will exemplify Christ and his righteousness before the world (1 Pe. 2:9). In order to pay their taxes, Jesus told Peter to go fishing. He explained that the **first** fish he caught would have enough money in its mouth to pay the tax. We should remember that Peter was a fisherman by trade. He could have easily gone back to the fishing business, selling his catch in the market to support himself. But the Lord had called Peter to follow him in the ministry (Mk. 1:16-18). Paying the tax was necessary, but fulfilling Christ's mission was top priority. Because Peter was committed to Christ and his mission, the Lord miraculously provided all he needed to meet the financial requirements of following him.

Scripture Study

Follow Jesus – Mt. 11:29; Jn. 8:29; 10:27; Ep. 5:1; Ja. 1:22; Mk. 8:34

Pay the tax – Mt. 17:24-27; Ro. 13:1-7; Mt. 22:19-21

Exemplify Christ – Col. 1:16; Mt. 28:18; Re. 19:16; Mt. 17:27; 1 Pe. 2:9

God will provide – Mt. 17:27; Mk. 1:16-18; Ph. 4:19; Ps. 37:25

Conclusion

In the church, we should face every financial obligation with the expectation that “God shall supply all [we] need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Ph. 4:19). We should have complete faith in Christ's miraculous ability to provide for us as we seek to do God's will. Sometimes we may have abundance, and sometimes we may lack, but we can be confident the Lord will ultimately satisfy our needs (Ps. 37:25).

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services
 Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Raising Lazarus”

Introduction

When situations turn out wrong and leave us disappointed, this does not mean God has stopped working in our lives. He may actually be working beyond our expectations. In today's lesson, we will see that Jesus allowed things to get worse in order to show his glory in the end.

Key Verse

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11:25).

Lesson Summary

In John 11:1-45, we read the story of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who lived in Bethany. Jesus was a close, personal friend of this family; he loved them very much, and they loved him (vv. 3, 5). This same Mary later anointed Jesus with expensive ointment (v. 2; see also Jn. 12:1-8). At this time, Lazarus became severely sick and was dying. His sisters called for Jesus to come and heal him. But Jesus deliberately delayed in going to them, waiting two more days before he left for Bethany. He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (Jn. 11:4). Specifically, why did Jesus delay? He intentionally postponed his trip until Lazarus died in order to accomplish a much higher purpose – raising him from death to life (vv. 11-15). Because the Jewish leaders desired to kill Jesus, he was fulfilling his ministry in the region of Galilee at this time. Going into Judaea presented certain danger (7:1, 30-32, 44-46; 11:7-8, 16). The journey from Galilee unto Bethany of Judaea was approximately four days. So by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already been buried for four days. By all accounts, Jesus arrived too late. The initial reactions of Martha and Mary express this very point: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (vv. 21, 32). Clearly, they believed Jesus had the power to heal all sicknesses and diseases. But from their perspective, he did not come soon enough. Nevertheless, Martha's faith in Jesus was unshaken, even in the face of death. She declared, “But I know, that even now, **whatsoever** thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee” (v. 22). “Whatsoever” indicates “anything” – she believed Jesus could do anything, even raise the dead! This kind of faith set the scene for all that was about to transpire. When Jesus told Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again,” she boldly declared her faith in the resurrection (vv. 23-24). But Jesus spoke of the resurrection – not as an event – as a person, saying, “I am the resurrection, and the life” (v. 25). Both spiritual and physical life is in Jesus, the Son of God, who is the creator and sustainer of all things (vv. 25-27; Jn. 1:1-4; 3:16; 14:6). Mary, along with her comforters, came to Jesus broken and weeping. Being compassionate, he felt their sorrow and wept with them (c.f. Mt. 14:14; Mk. 1:40-41; Lu. 7:11-16). For obvious reasons, they did not understand God's greater purpose in Lazarus' death. As they went to the grave weeping, some said, “Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?” (Jn. 11:37). They only thought in terms of healing, but Jesus intended something beyond their expectations (v. 40). At his word, they opened the grave (vv. 39, 41). Jesus prayed, and his prayer expressed God's purpose in glorifying the Son: “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (vv. 41-42). He then cried out, “Lazarus, come forth;” and after he came out of the tomb, Jesus said, “Loose him, and let him go” (vv. 43-44). God's purpose was accomplished through this powerful display of his glory in Christ. God's intent was to turn the Jews to faith in Jesus: “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him” (v. 45). They saw this life-giving miracle with their own eyes. How could they deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? In fact, many Jews later came to see Lazarus for themselves, and because of him they too believed in Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Lazarus and silence his witness (Jn. 12:1, 9-11).

Scripture Study

Lazarus' death – Jn. 11:1-22

Jesus is life – Jn. 11:23-44

Believe in Jesus – Jn. 11:42, 45; 12:1, 9-11

Conclusion

Jesus proved his authority over the power of death. He raised people from death to life (Lu. 7:11-16; 8:49-56). In fact, raising the dead was an indicator that he was the Christ, the Son of God (7:20-22). Because of such miracles, many people believed in him. Truly, his authority over death confirms that he has the power to give eternal life to those who believe and trust in him as their Lord and Savior (Jn. 11:25-26).

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services
 Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Withered Fig Tree”

Introduction

The Bible is filled with many stories of those who received great miracles through faith in God. Some of Christ's supernatural wonders are peculiar, to say the least, such as the miracle in today's lesson when Jesus cursed a fig tree. Let's consider the significance of this miracle, both then and now.

Key Verse

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Mt. 21:21).

Lesson Summary

In the week before his crucifixion, Jesus made his “triumphal entry” riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey as the crowd cried out, “Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Mk. 11:7-10; Zec. 9:9). After he came into Jerusalem, he cleansed the temple casting out those who were selling and buying, saying, “Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mk. 11:15-17; Is. 56:7). Within this same context, Jesus did something miraculous; he cursed a fig tree, and it withered and died (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-21). When Jesus saw the tree in the distance, he came near expecting to find figs, but finding it bare, he said, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (v. 14). Strangely enough, the season was too early for figs. Why then did he curse it? By the power of his word, the tree immediately dried up (Mt. 21:19). The disciples were astonished at how quickly it died, saying, “How soon is the fig tree withered away!” (v. 20). What was the significance of this miracle? No doubt, the withering of the fig tree was instructive to his disciples because the Scriptures specifically note, “And his disciples heard it” (Mk. 11:14). The fig tree was figurative of the nation of Israel, and its withering signified the nation's spiritual demise (consider Lu. 13:34-35; 19:35-38). The Jewish nation as a whole no longer produced spiritual fruit pleasing to God. Therefore, they were rejected by the Lord and judged to be spiritually dead. Moreover, the cursed fig tree demonstrated the ultimate outcome of Jesus' cleansing the temple (consider 19:41-45). In other words, his cleansing the temple was a testimony against the Jewish religious leaders that God's judgment was coming; and the cursed fig tree was representative of his judgment. Remarkably, the fig tree that signified judgment upon those who rejected Christ and his gospel, also offered great hope to the disciples who believed and followed the Lord. When they expressed their wonderment at the miracle of the fig tree, Jesus said, “Have faith in God” (Mk. 11:22). Jesus said this, not because they lacked faith in God, but because he wanted them to know that faith in God is the key to receiving from him. How powerful then is our faith in God? As Jesus explained, faith in God produces miracle-working results. By faith, the disciples could also curse a fig tree, if necessary. But even more, Jesus assured them that faith in God will move mountains (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Then Jesus added, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mt. 21:22). “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mk. 11:24). Clearly, faith is the essential requirement in order to receive from God. But there is a difference between believing God is able to meet our need (i.e. that he can do anything) and actually believing God has already supplied the need even before we have received it. Believing and trusting in the Lord is not the same as believing we have received the answer to a specific need at a given moment. Miracles are therefore obtained when we exercise a faith that believes we receive, even as we are praying for it (v. 24). We believe it as though it is already accomplished. God's promises work on this very basis; and he requires us to exercise such faith in his supernatural ability to fulfill his promises in our lives (Ro. 4:17-21). God “calloeth those things which be not as though they were” (v. 17). Abraham was “fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform” (v. 21; consider Ac. 7:5). To Abraham, all that God promised him was as good as done. Not even the offering up of Isaac could void the promises (He. 11:17-19).

Scripture Study

Judgment – Mk. 11:7-21; Lu. 13:34-35; 19:35-45

Hope and faith – Mk. 11:22-24; Mt. 21:21-22

Abraham's example – Ro. 4:17-21; He. 11:17-19

Conclusion

We need this same kind of miracle-working faith in the church today – a faith that can move mountains. Of course, we need to believe that God is able to do great things, but we also need to exercise a faith in Jesus that believes we receive right now in his name (Ac. 3:6-7, 16; Jn. 16:23-24).

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services
 Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Christ’s Resurrection”

Introduction

Jesus did many wonderful miracles during his earthly ministry. Many celebrated his supernatural works while many others scoffed and refused to believe in him. In today’s lesson, we will consider, no doubt, the greatest of Christ’s miracles: his resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection was the ultimate confirmation of his divinity, for who could lay down his life and then take it up again, except the Son of God (Jn. 10:18)?

Key Verse

“He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee” (Lu. 24:6).

Lesson Summary

Jesus taught his disciples that he would suffer at the hands of the Gentiles and be crucified, but then he would rise again on the third day (Mk. 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; Mt. 26:1-2). On one such occasion when Jesus was teaching these things to his disciples, Peter rebuked him, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (16:22). Clearly, he did not yet embrace the necessity of Christ’s death in fulfilling God’s will for mankind’s salvation (v. 23; Lu. 9:44-45). Peter simply could not accept his death. Moreover, the disciples did not yet fully understand Jesus’ teaching about “rising again” (Jn. 20:9). Nevertheless, these teachings of Christ were not hidden, for even their enemies knew Jesus had taught of rising again from the dead. Therefore, the Jewish religious leaders petitioned Pilate to seal the tomb in order to prevent anyone from taking the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:62-66). But the tomb could not contain the life and power of God in Christ! On the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determine counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Ac. 2:22-24). Christ’s resurrection was the fulfilment of David’s prophecy: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). Death could not hold him! When the women came to the tomb early Sunday morning with perfume for the body, the stone was already rolled away and Jesus was gone (Mk. 16:1-4). The angels of the Lord declared that he had arisen from the dead. They said, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, “The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Lu. 24:5-7). On that Sunday morning, Jesus triumphed for all who will believe in his victory over sin and death (Col. 2:10, 12, 15; Ro. 10:9; 8:2). Because he has risen from the dead, we have the assurance that the dead in Christ will also rise again at his coming (1 Co. 15:20-23; 1 Th. 4:14). Jesus taught about the resurrection of the righteous, saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself . . . Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life . . .” (Jn. 5:25-29). Accordingly, Paul taught that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies on that day (Ro. 8:11, 23; Ep. 1:13-14). Moreover, Paul declared our glorious victory over death at Christ’s coming: “for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed . . . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Co. 15:52-54).

Scripture Study

Christ’s death – Mk. 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; Mt. 26:1-2; 16:22-23; Lu. 9:44-45; Mt. 27:62-66

He is risen – Ac. 2:22-24; Ps. 16:10; Mk. 16:1-6; Lu. 24:1-7; Mt. 28:1-6

We will rise again – 1 Co. 15:20-23; 1 Th. 4:14; Jn. 5:25-29; Ro. 8:11, 23; Ep. 1:13-14; 1 Co. 15:52-54

Conclusion

Paul declared, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Ro. 5:10). Truly, we serve a risen Savior. Because Jesus lives, we have the assurance of life eternal (Jn. 3:16). Praise the Lord; we will rise!

Faith-N-Focus: Equip Your Faith
Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Vanished”

Introduction

In the New Testament, we read the eyewitness accounts of Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Of course, the biblical eyewitnesses are foundational to the faith and doctrine of Christ (2 Pe. 1:16). For the apostle Thomas, seeing was believing (Jn. 20:29). Nevertheless, their faith in Jesus went beyond all they could see with the natural eye. They ultimately believed in him because of their spiritual vision and revelation, and thus declared their eyewitness accounts because they were convinced from the Scriptures that he was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. In today's lesson, we will see once again that Christ's supernatural signs established their faith in God's Word.

Key Verse

“And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight” (Lu 24:31).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 24:13-31, “the beloved physician” shared one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Col. 4:14). After Jesus arose from the dead early Sunday morning, he first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9). But later on the same day, he walked and talked with two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lu. 24:13-15). One of them was named Cleopas (v. 18). Interestingly, Mark stated that Jesus “appeared in another form” (Mk. 16:12). Therefore, they did not immediately recognize he was the Lord (Lu. 24:16). Apparently, Jesus did not look the same after his resurrection. Based on the apostle Paul's explanation, Christ's spiritual, eternal body was not like his natural, mortal body (c.f. Jn. 20:14-18; 1 Co. 15:44). As he came near them, the two disciples were sad and troubled, discussing all of the events surrounding Jesus' death. When Jesus questioned them, they began to rehearse the story of the crucifixion and the empty tomb, thinking he knew nothing about these things. Although the women, as well as Peter and John, saw the empty tomb, these two disciples were still not convinced that Jesus had risen. Instead, they were filled with disappointment (Lu. 24:17-24). Jesus then said, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (vv. 25-26). Jesus wanted them to believe, not merely because they physically saw him and recognized him with their natural eyes, but he wanted them to believe God's Word and to see him with spiritual eyes of faith. Jesus then took this opportunity to explain the prophecies written about Christ in the Old Testament. He wanted to open up their understanding from the Scriptures. When they finally reached Emmaus, it was later in the day. The two disciples pressed the Lord to stay with them, so he turned in for the night. When they were eating, the Lord blessed bread, broke it, and gave it to them (consider Mt. 26:26; 14:19; 15:36). Instantly, their eyes were opened, and they knew Jesus through the “breaking of bread” (Lu. 24:27-31, 35). Moreover, they did not know him by his appearance, but they knew him through his disappearance. Jesus vanished before their very eyes (v. 31). This supernatural sign was a miraculous confirmation of his resurrection. One moment, he was there, and in the next, he was gone. After this, any shred of doubt was removed. They knew this was the Lord; Jesus had risen from the dead. What was their reaction to this wonderful experience? They said to each other, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures” (v. 32)? As he declared the Word of God along the way to Emmaus, their spirit was greatly stirred within them. God was working deep in their hearts revealing Christ from the Scriptures. Then as he broke bread with them, they spiritually discerned that this man was actually the Lord. They finally saw him for whom he was. His miraculous disappearance then confirmed and established their understanding.

Scripture Study

On the road to Emmaus – Lu. 24:13-24

Expounding the Scriptures – Lu. 24:25-27

The revelation of Christ – Lu. 24:28-32, 35

Conclusion

After revealing himself to the two disciples, why did Jesus depart in such a miraculous, mysterious way? He departed supernaturally to prove he was in a resurrected, glorified state and was no longer humanly limited by the mortal flesh (v. 26). They saw him with their eyes and heard him with their ears, becoming eyewitnesses of his resurrection. But ultimately, they were convinced from the Scriptures – their hearts burning within them – that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Vanishing before their eyes served to validate and establish their faith in God's Word.

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“Christ’s Ascension”

Introduction

Sir Isaac Newton has been credited for the discovery of gravity – the natural force that pulls us toward Earth and keeps our feet on the ground. There was a time when mankind could only dream of flying in the clouds and ascending into the heavens. But, of course, these dreams transitioned from possibilities into realities. Overcoming the gravitational pull of Earth, astronauts have rocketed into space, orbited the globe, and floated around under the effects of negligible gravity. In today’s lesson, we will see Jesus defying the forces of gravity when he miraculously ascended back to the Father in heaven.

Key Verse

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Ac. 1:9).

Lesson Summary

Jesus came into this world through both supernatural and natural events. Mary’s conception was supernatural, but her pregnancy and birth were quite natural (Lu. 1:30-31, 34-35; 2:4-7). Howbeit, God’s providential hand was upon these events from start to finish. Nevertheless, to outsiders looking on, Jesus came into this world like anyone else through a perfectly natural process. When he stepped forward to fulfill the call of God, his earthly ministry was uniquely characterized and distinguished by supernatural signs and wonders (Ac. 2:22). Following his death and resurrection, Jesus further appeared to his disciples forty days, and demonstrated beyond any doubt (i.e. “by many infallible proofs”) that he had indeed risen from the dead (Ac. 1:3; 1 Co. 15:3-6; compare Jn. 21:1-12 and Lu. 5:1-11). When the appointed time came for him to depart to the Father in heaven, how would he accomplish this? How would the risen Lord go back to the Father? His departing was a purely supernatural event. Luke explained, “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Lu. 24:50-51). He could have simply vanished once again, but instead the apostles watched him as he miraculously went up into heaven and “a cloud received him out of their sight” (Ac. 1:9). When his feet left the ground, no earthly power could hold him (Mt. 28:18). Seeing Jesus defying gravity and rising toward heaven must have been a breathtaking experience. Let’s briefly consider the significance of his ascension into heaven in this manner. His bodily ascension served to confirm that he actually returned to the Father in heaven just as he promised. Jesus declared, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also . . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:1-6). Jesus’ bodily ascension into heaven visibly substantiated his promises: namely, that he is the way to the Father, he is preparing a place in heaven for us, and he will come again from the Father to receive us and take us to heaven. In fact, as the apostles watched him ascending, two angels appeared to them, saying, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Ac. 1:11). Furthermore, his bodily ascension affirms the promise and hope of our ascension in the rapture when “the dead in Christ will rise” and the living saints will be changed and “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Th. 4:13-17; 1 Co. 15:51-52).

Scripture Study

Supernatural wonders – Lu. 1:34-35; Ac. 2:22; Ac. 1:3; Jn. 21:1-12

Miraculous ascension – Ac. 1:1-11; Lu. 24:50-51

Significance of Christ’s ascension – Jn. 14:1-6; Ac. 1:11; 1 Th. 4:13-17; 1 Co. 15:51-52

Conclusion

Jesus ascended to the right hand of God in heaven (Mk. 16:19; Col. 3:1). Therefore, the hope of our salvation is not of this world, but we look up toward the heavens where “Christ, who is our life, shall appear” (v. 4). Just as Christ ascended, we too will be caught up and “appear with him in glory” (v. 4). Our glorified bodies will rise to meet Jesus in the air, and then we will be with him forever. Let’s encourage each other in God’s promise (1 Th. 4:17-18).