

BIBLE STUDY | FALL 2022

Signs of the *Savior*

UNDERSTANDING THE MIRACLES OF JESUS



CHRIST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We have three recommended ways for engaging with “Signs of the Savior”: **dig in**, **go deeper**, and **deeper still**.

DIG IN

- If you are in a Connect Group, join your group weekly to enjoy conversation, discuss the lesson, and talk through the study guide questions. If you are doing the study individually, work through the study guide questions at your own pace.
- Listen to or watch the teaching each week. The teaching is available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud, and YouTube. You can subscribe on any of those platforms or visit **christpres.org/group-resources**, where you can find all the Bible study resources. You'll also receive a weekly email with a link to the teaching.

GO DEEPER

- Read weekly Scripture and go through the questions for personal application and study to deepen your dive into God's Word. Feel free to complete questions throughout the week or all in one sitting. If you are in a group, your group will discuss some of these questions each week.
- Read the Application Summary.

DEEPER STILL

- We recommend the book *Mercy Revealed: A Cross-Centered Look at Christ's Miracles* by Gerald M. Bilkes or *The Miracles: Exploring the Mystery of Jesus's Divine Works* by Simon J. Kistemaker as a companion to your study.

SIGNS OF THE SAVIOR

AN INTRODUCTION

What is a miracle? We use the word widely for everything from medical wonder to sandwich condiments (Miracle Whip®, anyone?). However, when it comes to the miracles of Jesus, the word bears an enormous weight of specificity.

Throughout the New Testament, the gospel writers often used the word *semeion*, or “sign,” when referring to Christ’s miraculous deeds. In other words, these miracles were pointers or signposts. Think about how you might interact with a sign; what is the sign’s function? The sign’s purpose is to direct your attention to something else—something beyond the moment.

Bible scholar D.A. Carson says, “Jesus’s miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but signs, significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith.”

In other words, Jesus’s miracles always had a meaning and purpose—they were never performed for convenience or simply to show off and dazzle his audience. Instead, the miracles, or signs, always had a purpose—something *specific*—a deeper reality to communicate.

Think about John the Baptist as he sat in prison (Matthew 11:3). He sent his disciples to seek out Jesus and ask him a straightforward question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Feel the gravity of what John

asks. When he refers to “the one who is to come,” he’s asking Jesus if he is the Anointed One—God’s Messiah who would deliver his people.

What was Jesus’s response?

“Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up” (Matthew 11:5). In no uncertain terms, Jesus is telling John, “Yes, I am he. These signs *validate* the fact that I am the Messiah. These signs reveal the glory of God *in me*.”

As you proceed in this study, with every account you read, seek to understand the deeper reality of the sign; what is the miracle teaching? Does it announce the arrival of the kingdom of grace as foretold by the prophets? Does it foreshadow how Christ will ultimately undo the effects of the fall? Does it tell us the benefits of what Christ would accomplish on the cross? Or does it proclaim that Jesus is the undeniable Son of God?

In the miracles of Jesus, there is always a message. So let’s seek to understand the message and then realize the miraculous application they have in your heart and mine—we who are desperately sick and in need of healing. Or better still—hearts that would be *dead* if not for the miraculous resurrection of Christ applied to us.

“Miracles are not isolated incidents but are meant to reveal the glory of God in his power and might.”—Simon J. Kistemaker

WEEK ONE

THE WEDDING AT CANA

JOHN 2:1–12

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

JOHN 2:1–12 (ESV)

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. Describe the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in this story.
2. Read verse 4 again, then read John 7:30, John 8:20, and John 13:1. What phrase is repeated in these verses? What are they describing?
3. When Jesus turned the water into wine, the master of the feast called it “the best wine,” comparing it to the wine that had been served previously. It was also a large quantity of wine (six jars held 20–30 gallons each). So Jesus made an *abundance* of the best wine. What does that show you about Jesus?

4. Look up the following passages. What connections do you see between this miracle of Jesus and these prophecies from the Old Testament?

- Genesis 22:28
- Deuteronomy 33:28
- Psalm 4:7
- Jeremiah 31:12
- Amos 9:13–14
- Revelation 19:9

Application Questions:

1. If Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15), how does his miracle at the wedding in Cana show us God's design for the kingdom? What does it reveal about the future hope that awaits us after Jesus's return?
2. Reread verse 11. What was the reaction of Jesus's disciples after the water became wine? How can their reaction inspire our own?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

As we study Jesus's miracles together, we'll see how none of them are stand-alone stories. Sure, they may be a short collection of verses tucked in a much broader narrative about the life and ministry of Jesus. Still, each miracle has connections through Scripture that teach us that Jesus is the Messiah and God is always working out his plan to redeem all things. The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana is the first miracle Jesus performed in his earthly ministry; his announcement to a select few that indeed, he was the Messiah when he "manifested his glory." His newly called disciples believed him. But in this miracle, he also showed how he came to fulfill the law and create a new covenant with his people. He used Jewish ceremonial cleansing jars as his vessel to fill with the finest wine, symbolically turning centuries of striving into celebration at the work of Christ. As we read this story, we can be encouraged by the picture it gives us of the abundant blessings that await us in the forever kingdom of God.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK TWO

FIVE THOUSAND FED

MARK 6:30-44

Parallel Passages: Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 6:30-44 (ESV)

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. The passage tells us Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like "sheep without a shepherd." What do you think this means?
2. Consider verse 37 when Jesus tells his disciples, "You give them something to eat." Do you think Jesus knew this idea would perplex his disciples? If so, why would he ask this of them?
3. Jesus fed the crowd bread and fish. Do you suppose there is any meaning behind what Jesus fed them? Does bread particularly carry any significance in other parts of the scriptures? If so, of what significance is it?

4. Skip down to Mark 6:45 and following where we see Jesus perform another miraculous sign when he walks on water. What was the disciples' reaction? Consider verse 52 of the same account, where the gospel writer tells us, "for they did not understand about the loaves." What do the loaves have to do with Jesus walking on water?

Application Questions:

1. Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion for them. Consider the parallel passage in Matthew 14 where he adds the detail, "he had compassion on them and healed their sick." What does this tell us about what Jesus does for us? In what ways does he show us compassion and heal us today?
2. Consider the details of the disciples showing up with nothing at the start of the account, yet at the end, "all ate and were satisfied" with an abundance of leftover food. How can this imagery directly apply to you? How has the Lord provided in abundance for you when you had nothing to show?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The first important detail to note in this account is that this was not merely a miracle of convenience—"The people are hungry, and Jesus can fix that." Not at all! When Jesus neared the crowd, he had compassion on them—like sheep without a shepherd. The religious leaders of the day had gone off chasing things that served their own agendas and left the people without direction or hope. It was the divine calling of the long-awaited Messiah to remedy this problem. Jesus, the Anointed One, would meet their immediate needs (hunger and healing), which pointed forward to how he would meet their ultimate needs (being rescued from sin and death). The means Jesus used to show he is the Anointed One is also significant. The scriptures contain numerous references to bread; in each instance, bread signifies life. In Exodus, we find accounts where God miraculously provided for and sustained his people by making *bread* fall from the heavens (Exodus 16). A miraculous supply of life-sustaining bread is a feat only God can do. When Jesus fed the 5000, in the moment, it would seem that precious few people (if any!) made the connection between God miraculously providing bread for his people and now Jesus doing the very same thing for his. Certainly, the disciples missed it (Mark 6:52)! But now, with the clarity of the gospel in view, we know for certain that this event validated Jesus as the Messiah—God himself in the flesh doing only what God can do—healing us and providing an abundance of life-giving sustenance.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK THREE

A STORM CALMED

MARK 4:35-41

Parallel Passages: Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 4:35-41 (ESV)

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

"Faith and fear are mutual exclusives in the Bible: it was because of lack of faith that the disciples feared that they were about to drown (verse 40), and so it was for lack of faith that they were rebuked. No command is more often reiterated in the Bible than the simple 'Do not fear.'"—R. Alan Cole, from Mark: An Introduction and Commentary

1. Read Mark 4:40 and reflect on the quotation above. Can you think of other instances in Scripture when God or Jesus commanded his people not to fear? Here are a few you can look up:

- Exodus 14:13
- 1 Chronicles 28:20
- Mark 5:35–36

Reflect on your own response to fear or anxiety and what the Lord promises you in the midst of it.

2. Read these Old Testament descriptions of God. How does this miracle help us see continuity between God and Jesus (who is both fully God and fully man)?

- Job 37:1–13
- Psalm 135:6–7
- Jeremiah 10:12–13
- Jonah 1:4–5

3. What are the three different ways the disciples ask Jesus to save them? Compare and contrast the questions. Do you relate to one approach more than the others? Why or why not?

Application Questions:

1. What did you learn about Jesus and his character in this story?
2. As you think about your posture in times of fear or need, which of the disciples' phrasing of their condition resonates the most with you? What can you learn from Jesus's response to them?
3. When the disciples asked Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" what is the greatest evidence that showed them and shows us that he does care?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

“Do not fear” is the most repeated command in Scripture. From the Israelites standing on the banks of the Red Sea, to the pharisee Jairus whose daughter had died, to the disciples facing a notoriously terrifying storm on the Sea of Galilee, God’s people cry out to him for physical salvation. In this miracle in Mark 4, Jesus treats his disciples’ fear with rebuke, immediacy, and a display of his power. Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith, yet he immediately silences the storm, showing his power over nature. The disciples ask each other, still with fear in their voices, “who then is this?” This miracle reveals another layer of Christ’s deity and power; this is no gentle miracle. The God who created the seas and the skies controls them with just a word. These newly minted disciples have to reckon with the question—is Jesus who he says he is? This miracle compels them to answer yes. And thousands of years later, studying the miracles asks the same question of us.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK FOUR

DEMONS AND PIGS

MARK 5:1-20

Parallel Passages: Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 5:1-20 (ESV)

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs.

And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. ⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷ And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹ And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many."

¹⁰ And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, ¹² and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

¹⁴ The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

"When Jesus landed on the shore, it seems this man saw Him coming from a distance and began to run wildly at full speed down the hill toward Him, crying out, 'What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?' (Mark 5:7). What a strange mixture of aggression and reverence in this man. We can understand the hostility, for what greater opposites could there be than light and darkness—Christ and Satan? But, at the same time, the man fell at the feet of Christ, the verse tells us, in a prostrate position, doing obeisance to Him."—Gerald M. Bilkes, from Mercy Revealed: A Cross-Centered Look at Christ's Miracles

1. Consider the quotation above. What might the behavior of the demons indicate insofar as their understanding of who Jesus is? Why is this important insofar as the greater story of redemption is concerned? Does this foreshadow anything? Here are a couple of verses to consider in your answer:

- James 2:9
- Philippians 2:10-11

2. In what ways does this passage show us Christ's power and compassion?

3. It's easy to admire that Jesus traded a herd of pigs for a man's life. However, place yourself in the shoes of the local pig farmer—this wasn't a random herd of wild pigs; it was the property and means of supporting a local economy that Jesus disrupted. Why would Jesus do this? Did Jesus not care about the local farmers? Consider how the account ends to inform your answer.

4. Why would Jesus not allow the healed man to join them? How might the region they were in (Gentile) inform your answer?

Application Questions:

1. How can Jesus's response to the man with a demon teach us something about how he loves us? How can Jesus's response teach us something about how he looks at our friends, neighbors, and acquaintances who don't know Jesus?

2. The people responded to Jesus by asking him to depart from the region instead of celebrating that he healed a very sick man. Is there anything about this response with which we can identify? Do we ever have a similar reaction to Jesus when he gets involved in our lives in an unexpected way?
3. With mere words, Christ could do more than the chains that bound the oppressed man. What does this tell us about the power of his word? How might that impact how we live?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

This account is full of unexpected responses. It's somewhat shocking to see the demons react the way they did—the enemy of God bowing before Jesus and immediately acknowledging him to be the Son of God. It's surprising to see Jesus not simply casting out the demons but instead acquiescing to their request to be sent into—of all things—a herd of pigs. Also surprising—destroying a farmer's property; sure they were pigs, but they were valuable to someone! After seeing a man miraculously healed, it's a response of asking Jesus to leave the area that might also not be what we would expect. And of course, when the healed man asks Jesus if he can join them, why would Jesus say no? All these unexpected details point us to specific information about who Christ is. The demons would only react to Jesus this way if he were indeed the Son of God. Sending the demons into a herd of pigs would only be the actions of one who sees beyond the moment and has sight of a bigger redemptive story—one where people of every nation proclaim the mercy of the Lord *after* the Lord had left their presence. Only Jesus—the Messiah—can do such things and his miraculous deeds bear testimony to it.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK FIVE

THE BLEEDING WOMAN HEALED

MARK 5:25-34

Parallel Passages: Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 5:25-34 (ESV)

²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. What other healing miracle happens alongside the healing of the bleeding woman? Is there any significance to the Lord weaving these two miraculous accounts together?

2. How does the woman display her faith in Jesus? Compare that to the other methods in which she placed her faith. How does Jesus describe her faith?

3. Read these Old Testament descriptions of the uncleanness of blood. What should have happened when the unclean woman touched Jesus? What happened instead? What does this tell us about Jesus?
 - Leviticus 15:19
 - Leviticus 15:25–27

Application Questions:

1. Think about a time you were desperate for Jesus to intervene in a situation in your life. Reflect on your posture toward him during that time. What lessons can we draw from the bleeding woman?
2. What characteristics of Jesus are most on display in this story? How can we be challenged to be more like Christ because of how he acted in this passage?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The story of Jesus healing the bleeding woman is sandwiched between the opening and closing of the story of Jesus healing Jairus' daughter. While it is possible and richly rewarding to take each story individually, together, they give us a picture of Christ's heart for the vulnerable in society. In these verses, he makes contact with a woman who had been considered unclean for over a decade. According to the Levitical law, she wouldn't have even been permitted into worship because of her condition. Alongside this encounter, Jesus touches Jairus' daughter, who had passed away and was therefore unclean. In both of these cases, Old Testament law would have dictated that the touching of an unclean person would have made Jesus unclean. And yet, the opposite happens. Jesus healed, cleansing them of the stain of their sickness and death. In the same way, he heals us of the stain of our sin—as long as we, like the bleeding woman, believe Jesus heals. Our faith in him makes us well, and that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK SIX

THE TRANSFIGURATION

MARK 9:2-10

Parallel Passages: Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 9:28-36

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 9:2-10 (ESV)

² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. The timing of this miracle is important. Consider what transpired in the account just before this one:
 - Mark 8:31 —What would you expect the disciples' mood to be after hearing this news?

In light of hearing Jesus say these things, why would seeing Jesus transfigured be such an important element of their faith in Jesus? (Consider 2 Peter 1:16-18.)

2. Why, of all people, do you think this account included Moses and Elijah? Think about their roles in redemptive history—what do they each represent in the Old Testament? What does Jesus's inclusion in this scene tell us?
3. Peter, James, and John were witnesses of the glory of heaven, so it might be understandable for Peter to suggest that they should "make three tents" and stay awhile. What do the events *after* Peter's suggestion tell us about God's redemptive plan? What must occur for God's plan to be made complete (Mark 9:9-10)?

Application Questions:

"As they walked down the mountain, the three disciples were overcome by the experience of witnessing heavenly glory. Jesus gave them strict instructions not to talk to anyone about this event until he had risen from the dead. His word was not clear to them, and they were puzzled about what he meant by the reference to his resurrection.

The conversation Moses and Elijah had with Jesus centered on his departure from this earth. The stark truth was that Jesus would suffer and die in Jerusalem. Then Jesus plainly told the three disciples that he would rise again from the dead."—Simon J. Kistemaker, from *The Miracles: Exploring the Mystery of Jesus's Divine Works*

1. Consider the quotation above. The three disciples were clearly puzzled by everything that transpired. They saw the glory of heaven, but before and after this event, they heard Jesus speak of his death. How can the way these events unfold help us on our own faith journeys?
2. Consider the role that suffering plays in this account. How can this passage be used and applied to the one who faces difficult circumstances? What promises do the scriptures embed in this story that would apply to all believers?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The account of the transfiguration of Jesus is one of ups and downs. Nearing the end of Mark chapter 8, we read about Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi; he said, "You are the Christ." Jesus affirmed his response by telling the disciples to tell no one—his time had not yet arrived. Hearing that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah—the Christ—must have been the best news the disciples had ever heard; they were ready to take on the entire Roman army! However, Jesus quickly followed this confession with teachings that included things like, "the Son of Man must suffer many things . . . and be killed." And even further, he told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Death and the taking up of one's cross are not the pictures the disciples had imagined of the Messiah's reign. They went from exhilarated to feeling puzzled and defeated. But then, just about a week later, three of the disciples get to see a glimpse of heaven on earth, including a visit from Moses and Elijah—the symbolic representatives of the law and the prophets. At this moment, we have a picture of the entirety of the scriptures—the law, the prophets, and then Jesus, who would fulfill everything foreshadowed in the law and prophets. What a scene this must have been! Peter stumbles around with his words and suggests keeping the glory of heaven on earth starting right then and there. But instead, Jesus reminds him and the other disciples that if God's plan of redemption is to come to completion, Jesus cannot bypass the suffering. This miracle gives us a foretaste of what's to come, not just in the resurrected and glorified Jesus but in the lives of all who believe in the saving work—which includes the suffering—of Jesus Christ.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus? How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK SEVEN

A FIG TREE CURSED

MARK 11:12-25

Parallel Passages: Matthew 21:18-22

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

MARK 11:12-25 (ESV)

¹² On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

¹³ And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶ And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." ¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came they went out of the city.

²⁰ As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." ²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. When Jesus comes upon the fig tree with no fruit and curses it, what is your initial impression? Does this seem impetuous of Jesus? Irrational? Short-tempered? Or are you not bothered at all by Jesus's actions here?

2. Read the following verses—what do they have in common?

- Hosea 9:10
- Jeremiah 8:13

In these passages, who do the prophets liken to a fig tree? Does knowing this impact the way you answered the first question?

3. How do verses 15-19 fit in with the passages about the fig tree? How does the cleansing of the temple relate to a barren fig tree?

Application Questions:

"Jesus, among other things, was a prophet. One of the most graphic forms of prophetic communication in the Old Testament was the object lesson. The prophet would take something from nature or everyday life, as Amos did with a plumb line, and use it to communicate God's truth. Here Jesus found an object that illustrated the sin of hypocrisy. It had the appearance of fruitfulness, but it was actually barren."—R.C. Sproul, from Mark (Saint Andrew's Expository Commentary)

1. The object lesson Jesus employed with the fig tree taught of his disappointment with Israel and their spiritual condition, and more specifically, with the religious leaders of the time and their empty acts of worship. How then can this passage challenge us as Christians today?

"Indeed, has anyone ever seen a more beautiful and fruitful tree than [Jesus]? Heaven's verdict of Him was 'this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. 17:5). Never was there such matchless beauty! But despite His being a glorious Tree, heaven would pronounce a curse on Him just three days after these events. He would be 'made a curse' (Gal. 3:13) and enter an infinitely greater judgment than this tree. The tree lost only the plant life it had, but nothing more. By His death on the cross, Christ endured eternal death for each one of His people."—Gerald M. Bilkes, from Mercy Revealed: A Cross-Centered Look at Christ's Miracles

2. When discussing topics like hypocrisy, we may spiral down in fear because of our own hypocritical tendencies; we worry we will suffer the same fate as the fig tree and all it represents. How does the prior quotation and its interpretation of Mark's account help assuage these concerns for the believer?

3. How do verses 22-25 relate to the rest of the passage? Why is having faith in God and petitioning him in prayer a fitting response to the events of the fig tree and the temple cleansing?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

If we read the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree in isolation, it might be challenging to understand what's going on. In the gospel of Mark, he does what many Bible scholars call the "Markian sandwich," that is, he splits the account with a sidebar of sorts. The reasoning behind this technique is to provide clarity—further understanding of the account he splits into two. The temple cleansing clarifies Jesus's interaction with the fig tree. Jesus isn't being short-tempered with the fruitless tree; instead, he's providing an object lesson for his disciples and all the readers to follow for ages to come. In the Old Testament, Israel is likened to, among many other things, a fig tree (Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah 8:13). In Micah 7, the Lord speaks of himself as being desirous of eating the fruit produced by his people, but "there is no cluster to eat." It's not difficult to see the symbolic connection as Jesus approaches the tree, having just experienced his "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem in the account prior (Mark 11:1-11), where it seems that no one truly understands the role the Messiah is to have in saving God's people. Once again, Jesus sees a clear depiction of fruitlessness when he enters the temple. He sees an impressive structure full of properly attired priests, imposing Pharisees, and rich people giving remarkable gifts—or stated another way—beautiful leaves with no fruit. This miracle teaches us that Jesus came to judge; however, it also teaches us that *he* would take the tree's curse on our behalf.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus?
How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

WEEK EIGHT

LAZARUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

JOHN 11:1-44

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. If there are parallel passages, read those and note the differences, if any. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

JOHN 11:1-44 (ESV)

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."

¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."

¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,

¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha

said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Here are a few questions to consider as you read the passage. These are optional, but we encourage you to read through them to help you interpret and apply the passage in the next section.

Review the Passage

1. Where did the miracle happen?
2. Who was present? How did they respond after the miracle?
3. What happened just before and just after the miracle?
4. What was the obstacle or challenge that needed a miracle?

Reflection Questions:

Spend some time rereading the passage and praying through it. Then, ask the Lord to reveal more of himself to you as you reflect.

1. Everyone but Jesus seems to be in a hurry to get to Lazarus. What are the reasons Jesus cited for not being rushed? What does this tell you about Jesus that speaks to who he is and what he came to do?
2. Everything about the posture of Jesus indicated that he knew what was about to transpire—that the Lord would raise Lazarus from the dead. Yet, despite this, Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Why did Jesus weep if he knew the ultimate outcome?

“Jesus embodies the doctrines of the resurrection and of life with the bold words I am. As Jesus personifies these teachings, we must conclude that without him there is nothing except death. He teaches that both resurrection and life can be appropriated only by believing in him, that is, anyone who places faith in him rises from the dead and lives forever. This means that everyone who believes in Jesus on this side of the grave has already received the principle of life that can never be taken away.”—Simon J. Kistemaker, from The Miracles: Exploring the Mystery of Jesus’s Divine Works

3. Consider the quotation above. Do you think the purpose of this miracle was to foreshadow Jesus's resurrection, our resurrection, or both? What else is Jesus teaching us in this miracle about himself?

"At this point in Jesus's ministry, the resurrection of Lazarus was indeed the greatest miracle he had performed. He did this so that those who were present at the tomb might witness and confess that God the Father had sent Jesus. When they in faith accepted this truth, they would know that he was their Messiah, the Son of God."—Simon J. Kistemaker, from The Miracles: Exploring the Mystery of Jesus's Divine Works

4. Read the following passages. Do you notice anything different about these miracles than what transpired with the raising of Lazarus? Why the difference?

- Mark 1:42-44
- Matthew 9:30
- John 2:4

Application Questions:

1. On several occasions in this passage, Jesus alerted those he came into contact with that something miraculous was about to happen (vs. 4, 15, 23, 40). Yet, it would seem everyone believed Jesus was too late and wouldn't be able to do anything about the death of his friend. In what ways can we compare this with our own interactions with Jesus?
2. Notice Jesus's conversations with both Mary and Martha. What do both exchanges have in common? What differences do you notice between both exchanges? What lessons can we learn from this when we encounter those who mourn?
3. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, yet presumably died years later. Why would Jesus go through the exercise of bringing him back from the dead only for him to die again later? How could this be an encouragement for all believers?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

This account gives us evidence that timing is everything—and God’s timing is perfect. In the verses before our account, we see that Jesus delayed his journey and deliberately arrived after Lazarus died. Why would he do this? As he told his disciples, he let Lazarus die “that you may believe.” The disciples were about to receive a definitive lesson from Jesus about death and his ultimate plans for it. Once he arrives at the tomb of Lazarus, he has a conversation with Martha telling her, “I am the resurrection and the life,” in other words, he alone has power over life *and* death. In his conversation with Mary, he weeps with her showing us that death is an unwelcomed intruder. These words and actions *tell* us of death’s destiny, but in the action that follows, he *shows* us what will become of death. Yes, he raised Lazarus from the dead, foreshadowing his own resurrection, but equally, he foreshadows what his ultimate plans for death entail, that is, he will undo the effects of death, neutralizing it once and for all. It’s in this moment he puts on display what the apostle John would later tell us in Revelation, that Jesus will one day “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Revelation 21:4). The miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead teaches us this: Though we mourn in the moment, Jesus not only has power over death, but he can—and will—do away with death forever.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you learned from this story, especially anything new if you have studied or heard this story before.
2. Did any of the questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the overarching message behind this miracle?
4. How does what you learned today change the way you think about Jesus?
How does it change the way you would share with someone about Jesus?

Resources Used in this Study

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