

Jesus' Greatest Miracle (#29)

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The one Gospel¹ records 35 miracles² performed by Jesus Christ. Matthew, the apostle symbolized by the Lion³ who wrote to the Jews circa 45 AD, records 20. Mark symbolized by the ox who wrote to the Romans circa 50 AD records 18. Luke, the physician symbolized by the face of a man who wrote for the Gentiles circa 60 AD, records 20. Finally, John is the theologian and apostle Jesus loved, symbolized by the eagle, who wrote to the "world" for the unsaved⁴ circa 98 AD and records only 7. John put the seal on the NT by completing 14 (seven times two) lists of seven. The four evangelists often record the same miracle. We know the great commandment⁵, but what is the great miracle?

Three Miracles Raising the Dead

Musing on the subject, we might conjecture that it was one of the three times Jesus raised someone from the dead such as Miracle #11 raising the widow's son at Nain in Galilee⁶, or Miracle #16 raising Jairus' daughter in Capernaum⁷, or Miracle #30 the raising of Lazarus in Bethany as the first of the three Signs of Jonah⁸. These three people were not raised immortal to their glorified bodies. This means that they died again. Further examples of this kind of miracle are the many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep and were seen coming out of the tombs and entering the holy city⁹ during the earthquake after Jesus died. These miracles are significant because they presage the Resurrection.

Three Miracles over Nature

Another series of miracles that might be considered are the three miracles over nature. Miracle #4 is the miraculous catch of fish¹⁰, or #13 stilling the storm¹¹, or #33 cursing the fig tree¹². These miracles perhaps even more than #20 walking on water¹³ instilled a sense of awe in the seven apostles who were fishermen¹⁴ and the remaining who were not.

Three Messianic Miracles

The great miracle might also be among the Messianic Miracles. Jesus performed seven Messianic Miracles of three different types. These were miracles that observant Jews at the time of Christ said that only Messiah would do.

The first of these miracles was #7 the cleansing of the leper¹⁵. In Biblical history, two people had previously been healed of leprosy: Miriam, the Hebrew¹⁶ and Naaman, the Aramean¹⁷. Never, however, was a Jew healed while under the Mosaic Law. When this was done for the first time after Jesus' second Passover, Jesus sent the leper to the priest who became the first priest in 1500 years of Jewish history to apply the law from Leviticus 13-14, a law the rabbis

considered waiting for Messiah. After this miracle, the leaders of the Jews began tailing Jesus to determine who he really was.

The second of these miracles was #12 the healing of a blind and dumb demon possessed man in the Gerasenes near the Sea of Galilee¹⁸. The rabbis using the teachings of Solomon according to Josephus¹⁹ could cast out demons, but as part of the ritual, they needed to ask the demon his name after which they could cast him out by name. If the man were dumb, however, he could not vocalize the name of the demon and the rabbis by tradition said that only Messiah would be able perform such a miracle. After the second Messianic miracle, the Pharisees were forced to make a ruling on Jesus since people were beginning to ask whether he was the Son of David²⁰. Two evangelists cover this miracle, but only in a single verse, because it was not the thaumaturgical aspects of this miracle that were important, but the result, i.e., the National Sin of the Jews and the need to form the church.

The third of these Messianic miracles was #27 the healing of a man congenitally blind²¹. This miracle is recounted only by John and occurs after the third Passover. There was a thought among the Jews that if a fetus kicked in the womb, it could be born blind because of its own sin. Jesus refuted this explanation saying that this particular man had been afflicted to glorify the Messiah²² and that he showed his faith by going to the great Pool of Siloam²³ to be washed.

So technically, the miracle with the most far reaching consequences was the Second Messianic Miracle. The implications of this miracle were threefold: 1) The Kingdom of God would not be ushered in while the Romans controlled Palestine. 2) The Jewish nation which was already divorced from Yahweh²⁴ would add to their punishment by committing the national sin of rejecting the Messiah. 3) The church would be betrothed as the Bride of Christ²⁵ for two millennia.

Walking on Water

The miracle that was most didactic regarding New Testamental teaching, however, was Walking on Water because it underscored the underlying tenet of faith in Messiah. This miracle was recorded by three of the evangelists. Matthew tells us about Peter asking the Lord to command him to also walk on water. Peter failed, to which Jesus said: *O you of little faith, why did you doubt?* Both Matthew and Mark tell us that the wind abated when Jesus got into the boat causing them to utter: *You are certainly God's Son!*²⁶ Mark then reveals that the reason for their amazement was because the Great Miracle, that of the loaves and fishes, had not yet had its intended impact upon them.²⁷ John then concludes that the boat was teleported to land.²⁸ In conclusion, although Ryrie records a single miracle here, there were four: 1) Jesus walking three miles on water during the fourth watch, 2) Peter walking on water until overwhelmed by fear, 3) the winds abating, and 4) teleportation of the boat to land. They are all about faith, and Mark summed it up best when he opined that the Great Miracle had not yet had its cranial impact.

These four miracles were a sequel to the Great Miracle and a prelude to Jesus' discourse on the Great Miracle while in a synagogue.

The Great Miracle

Finally, if we consider the fact that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved²⁹ and had the mind of Christ³⁰, only mentioned seven miracles³¹, and that he considered these to be signs³², we might suspect that the greatest miracle would lie herein. When we further consider that only one of the 35 recorded miracles was covered by all four evangelists, our attention turns to Miracle #19 the feeding of the 5000 (Mt 14:14-21; Mk 6:34-44; Lk 9:12-17; Jn 6:5-13) also called the miracle of the loaves and fishes, which occurred just before the third Hidden Passover by the Sea of Galilee.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke narrate the rudiments of the story, but John tells it best and mentions two names that the other evangelists omit. The story can be told like this. Herod Antipas who was the son of Herod the Great, ruled as the tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea. After hearing about Jesus' miracles, he thought that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Hearing this from his 12 apostles, Jesus withdrew across the Lake of Galilee to a lonely place, but the people were persistent and followed him. A crowd of approximately 10,000 including 5000 men stayed with him for the greater part of a day and the people were hungry at day's end. Jesus wondered aloud where in this remote place they might buy bread for the people. Philip quickly replied that it would cost more than \$20,000³³ to feed the crowd. Grasping at straws, Andrew related that there was a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus, knowing in advance what to do, instructed that they recline on the grass in groups of fifties. Jesus then gave thanks and had the disciples deliver the loaves and fishes. After all had eaten, there were 12 baskets³⁴ of bread and some fish left over. John alone then narrates that the crowd was so astounded by this miracle that they began to say: *This is of a truth the Prophet³⁵ who is to come into the world³⁶*. Knowing that he could not be made king at this time³⁷, Jesus retreated to a mountain.

If this were all there was to Miracle #19, it would be significant in that it was the only miracle that evoked the cry for kingship. This is where most exegetes terminate this miracle, but there is more and only John relates this in the Lord's discourse (Jn 6:22-40) the following day and in the crowd's reaction to the discourse (Jn 6:41-71).

The Lord's Discourse in Capernaum

After the great miracle, the crowd caught up with Jesus again across the sea in a synagogue in Capernaum. Capernaum was Jesus' headquarters and the home of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Knowing that the people were enthused about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, he taught that they should *not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life³⁸*. He said: *This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.³⁹* When the people then asked for a further sign, which in itself is incredible because he had just worked a miracle that evoked kingship, and when the people further bragged of Moses sending them bread

from Heaven, Jesus replied that it was not Moses that gave them bread from Heaven, but his Father who can give them the true bread from Heaven.

Had Jesus stopped speaking here (or John halted his narration), the greatest miracle would never have crystallized in the pages of Scripture, but he continued on with this very controversial metaphor: *I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*⁴⁰. Jesus then continued with: *All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out*,⁴¹ intimating that he was the Savior who had the power of God and then confirmed that by saying: *For I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but I will raise it up on the last day*.⁴² This confirmed that he as God has the power of the Resurrection.

The People's Reaction

The reaction of the people in the synagogue was immediate. They began grumbling because he said: *I am the Bread that came down out of Heaven*.⁴³ They were amazed that a carpenter's son of known local origin was saying this. He then quoted Isaiah 54:13 saying: *They shall all be taught of God*, meaning himself, and then added that all who follow the Father come to Him. He then explained that this does not mean that those who follow the Father have seen the Father, for only He has seen the Father. He then shocked most Jews by implying that He was greater than Moses by saying that all died after eating the manna in the wilderness, but that *I am the living Bread that came down out of Heaven; if anyone eats of this Bread, he shall live forever; and the Bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh*.⁴⁴ This last metaphor was so incendiary, that Jesus made sure they understood it by giving a further explanation saying: *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*⁴⁵, and *I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*.⁴⁶ With these analogies he pointed out the circumincession⁴⁷ of the Believer with the godhead and the unique meaning of the word "abide"⁴⁸.

The reaction of his disciples and apostles was equally as devastating. After his disciples started to say: *"This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"*,⁴⁹ Jesus then added fuel to the fire by saying: *What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?*,⁵⁰ meaning that he not only came from Heaven as he said earlier, but he would also ascend to Heaven—another amazing and inflammatory statement. Jesus then concluded by saying: *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe*.⁵¹

The grumbling amidst the otherwise profound silence was ominous. Jesus Christ had just said of himself: **Those, who believe in the Father, believe that I was sent from the Father as their Teacher, Savior, and Resurrection. I am the true Bread of Life. That which your fathers ate in the wilderness led to**

death. Only they who eat my flesh, drink my blood, and abide in Me will be saved. I am the only one to have seen the Father. I came from Heaven, and will ascend to Heaven.

The division in the ranks was inevitable and immediate. *Many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.*⁵² Judas Iscariot at that moment began to look for a pretext to leave him.⁵³ So profound was the moment that Jesus asked the twelve: “*You do not want to go away also, do you?*”⁵⁴ Peter replied: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.*⁵⁵

This Jesus’ greatest miracle began at a remote spot on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Gennesaret earlier and Tiberias later), followed him to Capernaum, and continues to follow those who preach his name everywhere in the world today. This message is as divisive today as it was two millennia ago for the people who accept him, but not completely, and do not make him the Lord of their lives. This was and continues to be his great miracle.

Summary of Reasons for Being the Great Miracle

1. It is one of John the Evangelist’s Seven Signs.
2. It is the only one of 35 miracles covered by all four evangelists.
3. After Jesus quieted the winds, Mark remarked that the apostles were in awe of his power over nature because they did not yet understand the meaning of the Great Miracle.
4. The Second Messianic Miracle, #12, resulted in the establishment of the church, but the Great Miracle, #19, defined belief for the church.
5. The most fundamental verse in Scripture, Lv 17:11 (with new testamental explanations in Heb 9:14, 22), tells us paradoxically that spiritually drinking the blood of Messiah saves, while physically drinking the blood of animals kills.
6. This miracle continues today, dividing believer from non-believer.
7. This was the only miracle that evoked a cry for kingship.

¹ Galatians 1:8 and 2 Corinthians 11:4

² C.C. Ryrie, *The Miracles of Jesus*, NAS Study Bible

³ The four faces on the cherubim holding up the throne of God in Ezekiel’s vision are said to apply to the four evangelists. See Ezekiel 1:10.

⁴ The Book of John is for the unsaved (Jn 20:31) and 1 John for the saved (1 Jn 1-4).

⁵ Matthew 22:36-40

⁶ Luke 7:11-15

⁷ Mt 9:18-19; Mk 5:22-24, 35-43; Lk 8:41-42, 49-56

⁸ John 11:17-44. The three signs are 1) the raising of Lazarus, 2) Jesus Christ, and 3) the two witnesses of Revelation 11:11 from the dead.

⁹ Matthew 27:52-53

¹⁰ Lk 5:1-11 and again in Jn 21:1-11

¹¹ Mt 8:18, 23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25

¹² Mt 21:18-19; Mk 11:12-14

¹³ Mt 14:24-33; Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:16-21

¹⁴ John 21:2

¹⁵ Mt 8:2-4; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16

¹⁶ Numbers 12:10-15

¹⁷ 2 Kings 5:1-14

¹⁸ Mt 12:22; Lk 11:14

¹⁹ In Antiquities viii, 2, 5 we learn of Eleazar, an exorcist who performed once in the presence of Vespasian, and cast out demons using the “skill and wisdom” of Solomon.

²⁰ Matthew 12:23

²¹ John 9:1-7

²² John 9:3

²³ The Pool of Siloam, built by Solomon, was the size of two football fields.

²⁴ Figuratively the Jews are the Wife of Jehovah or Yahweh by Ezekiel 16:8 and many other Biblical references. See Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*. Although the divorce came in the days of Jeremiah (Jer 3:6-10), their national sin at Matthew 12:24 added to the punishment.

²⁵ The church is not yet married to Christ, but is figuratively seen as betrothed to Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-27. The future marriage is described in Revelation 19:6-8.

²⁶ In Matthew 14:33 the apostles make this group acknowledgement of Jesus’ deity before Peter makes that statement alone in Matthew 16:16.

²⁷ Mark 6:52

²⁸ John 6:21

²⁹ John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. This is mentioned five times in John’s work: Jn 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, and 21:20.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:16

³¹ Traditionally seven miracles are attributed to John even though an eighth is found in Chapter 21, the sequel, and as has been pointed out earlier, there was a flurry of miracles when Jesus walked on water.

³² All four evangelists considered miracles to be signs, but John’s account of the one Gospel has also been called The Seven Signs.

³³ 200 denarii or 200 days wages for a rural worker

³⁴ The number 12 is symbolic of governmental perfection.

³⁵ Prophet is mentioned in John 1:21 and here refers to the Prophet predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15.

³⁶ John 6:14b

³⁷ Jesus’ kingship would have to wait for his Second Coming.

³⁸ John 6:27a

³⁹ John 6:29b

⁴⁰ John 6:35a

⁴¹ John 6:37

⁴² John 6:38-39

⁴³ John 6:41b

⁴⁴ John 6:51

⁴⁵ Superficially, to eat the bitter-sweet scroll (Rv 10:9) or to drink the cup of wrath (Rv 14:10) implies a perfect assimilation of the message. This figure of speech is used many times in the Bible. Here the message is more profound. In Lv 17:14 we have the injunction not to eat the blood of any flesh because the life of the flesh is its blood. But earlier in Lv 17:11, the most profound verse in Scripture, we are told (with the help of Hebrews 9:14, 22) that Messiah’s blood is life. So the paradox is that physically we are to avoid eating the blood of animals under the Law of Moses because it takes their life, but spiritually to drink the blood of Messiah because it gives us life.

⁴⁶ John 6:54-56

⁴⁷ The Circumincision of believer and godhead is taught by these Biblical verses:

1. *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:11a)
2. *I and the Father are One* (Jn 10:30).
3. *I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you* (Jn 14:20 and Jn 17:21, 23).
4. *...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ* (Romans 12:5)
5. *Receive the Holy Spirit (20:22). Be filled with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 9:17)
6. *...He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever* (Jn 14:16b)
7. *...he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him* (Jn 14:21b)

⁴⁸ Only John uses the word “abide” (*meno*).

⁴⁹ John 6:60

⁵⁰ John 6:62

⁵¹ John 6:63b-64a

⁵² John 6:66. Note the gematria of this verse.

⁵³ John 6:64

⁵⁴ John 6:67b

⁵⁵ John 6:68b-69