

February 13, 2011

From Philadelphia — *Miracles*

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. *Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him*, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been
revealed?”

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (John 12:36–43 emphasis added)

Miracles—signs—do not produce belief; do not produce faith. If anything, miracles are *anti-belief*, working against belief. The miracles Jesus did were so “the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled ... ‘He has blinded their eyes’” (John 12:38, 40). The Jewish authorities, Pharisees were *blinded* by the miracles Jesus did.

Without faith, without belief, no one can please God. Faith is belief. Regardless of what a person accepts as true, the person accepts the *truth* by faith, with the person’s faith rooted in experience, in observation, in another person’s experience and observation, in rumor, in hearsay, in divine revelation, in revelation via realization. But faith/belief can only be poorly rooted if rooted at all in miracles ... a sign, a miracle only conforms what the person already believes. The miracles that Jesus did only confirmed to Pharisees that He was of the Adversary, while confirming to His disciples that He was of God. The authorities who believed (John 12:42) lacked faith; for if they truly believed Jesus

was from God, they would not have been concerned about whether they were put out of the temple, with letters from the Qumran Community establishing that those men of principle had separated themselves from the temple and from temple authorities for far less cause than the Son of God being a Galilean.

When John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus to express doubts that John had—apparently John expected the Messiah to then come in might and power—asking Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matt 11:3), Jesus did not answer with a *yes* or *no*, but answered, “Go and 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, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (*vv.* 4–6).

John the Baptist was to believe what he already believed.

Instead of coming with armies of angels to defeat Roman legions, the Messiah came to restore sight to the blind, to heal the lame, to cleanse the defiled, to raise the dead, and to preach the good news [the gospel] to the poor, with *blindness*, *being defiled*, and *death* being spiritual conditions that are corrected through receipt of the spirit; i.e., indwelling eternal life in the form of the breath of God [πνεῦμα θεοῦ] in the breath of Christ [πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ]. Jesus came to continue the work of John the Baptist in preparing the way to the Lord. As the temple would go from being a physical building constructed of hewn stone to being the Body of Christ (the house of God constructed from living stone — 1 Pet 2:4–8 — with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone of this temple), preparing the way to the Lord would go from being the work of a man descended from the first Adam to being the work of a man descended from the Word of God, a man whose Father wasn't a biological descendant of the man of mud but was the Logos [ὁ λόγος] who was God [θεὸς] and who was with the God [τὸν θεόν] in the beginning (John 1:1). As Israel goes from being the outwardly circumcised nation of biological descendants from the patriarchs to being the nation circumcised of heart that descends from Christ Jesus, the work of the last Elijah goes from being the ministry of John the Baptist to being the ministry of Christ Jesus, with Christ Jesus' ministry having a short physical phase equivalent to John the Baptist's ministry, and a longer (much longer) spiritual phase that stretches from the 1st-Century to the 21st-Century.

Preparing the way to the Lord spans two millennia, not a few months, the length of time that John the Baptist preached repentance before he was taken prisoner by Herod Antipas. But neither John nor Jesus' disciples realized that Jesus had not come as *the Lord*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to prepare the way for the coming of *the Lord*, with having to defeat the Adversary on his turf being part of preparing the way, and with construction of the temple as a house built of living stone and with restoration of this temple also being part of preparing the way for the Lord to come as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The miracles Jesus did came as unvocalized aspects of the words of the Most High God that Jesus spoke ... Jesus could not speak in human words by His human breath the words of the Father without miracles occurring: the words of

the Father were simply too *large* to fit into human words without miracles occurring. And the preceding seems like an awkward way of saying that in speaking the Father's words that were conveyed to Jesus by the modulated *breath* of the Father [πνεῦμα θεοῦ], Jesus' conveyance of the Father's words delivered knowledge via Jesus' human breath but also healed those upon whom Jesus directed His words and acts.

But Israel didn't know the Father, or know of the Father. The creation had kept the Father concealed from Israel as well as from humankind (see Eccl 3:11 as an example text). Jesus prayed, "O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these [Jesus' disciples] know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known" (John 17:25–26).

Jesus' miracles continued that concealing of the Father from Israel; for again, Jesus' miracles came as a result of conveying the Father's words to Israel. Until the Father chooses to reveal Himself to individual Israelites, the creation will keep Him concealed from human beings He has not personally drawn from this world to be His firstborn sons (see John 6:44, 65). ... The Father chose not to make Himself known to Israel, or to humankind through having Jesus speak only His words, thereby using the accompanying miracles to prevent belief, with this being a construction of cause-and-effect that defies human logic.

It would seem like miracles would cause those individuals observing the miracles to believe, but that wasn't the case with Israel in Egypt or in the wilderness, or the case of the children of Israel in the wilderness or in the Promised Land. Both the nation of Israel numbered in the census of the second year, and the children of Israel numbered in the census of the new generation (Num chap 26) witnessed miracle after miracle without believing the Lord and putting away their idols; without believing the Lord and walking in His statutes and His rules; without profaning His Sabbaths. Thus, the Lord figuratively quit *the miracle business*: Israel had to swing swords, make forced all night marches, and defeat enemies through brilliant technical maneuvers ... hornets didn't drive out Israel's enemies. Yes, the Lord had promised to use hornets to rout opposing armies, and could have at any time continued the practice, but the Lord chose not-to. Why? Because miracles do not inspire belief, but hinder belief. Hence, in the model of Israel's Passover liberation from slavery, the Lord confirmed that miracles could be used to conceal a matter from a people, and to keep that matter concealed.

John the Baptist did no miracles, no signs (John 10:41); yet John was believed. And by John's testimony about Jesus, many believed in Jesus (v. 42). It can, therefore, be argued that the absence of miracles caused John's testimony about Jesus to be believed; whereas the presence of miracles caused Jesus' testimony about the Father not to be believed. Jesus' disciples didn't come to Him because of the miracles Jesus did:

The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! *This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks*

before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:29-51 emphasis added)

In the movie, *Hunt for Red October*, the character Jack Ryan (played by Alex Baldwin) must convince the unbelieving captain of a U.S. Los Angeles-class attack submarine, the USS *Dallas*, that he knows what the defecting Soviet captain, Marko Ramius (played by Sean Connery) will do, and Jack Ryan tells captain of the *Dallas* that Ramius will turn in a particular direction on the half hour, which Ramius does do. Afterwards, Ryan discloses that he had guessed at

the direction Ramius would turn ... when Jesus told Nathanael that He had seen Nathanael under a fig tree before Philip called to him, the number of fig trees in the region would have made it likely that Nathanael was sitting under a tree, a fig tree, to escape the still-hot autumn temperatures. So by the same sort of educated guess as Jack Ryan made, Jesus could have correctly guessed what Nathanael was doing when his brother called him. But this isn't the case. A *small* miracle—no one was raised from death—was enough to convince Nathanael that Jesus was the King of Israel, the Messiah. No great sign was needed. Really, nothing more was needed than the testimony of John the Baptist, who did no miracles, no signs.

To Pharisees seeking His life, Jesus said,

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. *If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.* Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. *For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.* And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. *I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.* How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? (John 5:30–47 emphasis added)

Again, John the Baptist's words were believed by even the Pharisees who sought to kill Jesus, and if someone else came bearing testimony about God in his (or her) own name and came without working any miracles, the Pharisees would have believed that person. But the miracles prevented the Pharisees from believing Jesus, with the timing of the particular miracle being the alleged cause for the unbelief of the Pharisees. In actuality, when the miracle occurred would

not have affected the unbelief of the Pharisees: a different cause would have been used to justify that unbelief that comes with miracles.

Many *observant Christians* look for miracles to return following the Second Passover liberation of Israel, and certainly the two witnesses will *work* miracles, but these miracles will not result in greater Christendom believing the two witnesses. Rather, the miracles will cause Christians to not believe the two witnesses in the same way that the miracles Jesus did caused temple authorities and Pharisees to not believe Jesus. It is the work being done today—a work without public miracles; a work like that of John the Baptist—that will be believed and that will cause some Christians to believe God and by faith turn to God and begin to keep the commandments.

It was by the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus' disciples came to Him. It will be by the testimony of *Philadelphia* that Jesus' disciples, *observant Christians*, will come to the two witnesses in the Affliction.

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