

He Came to Show Us the Father

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Jesus of Nazareth was the most wondrous man to have ever walked the stage of human history. In reading of him in the New Testament Gospels, one is filled with admiration for him. He was everything we admire in a person. He was a brilliant religious thinker and teacher. His Biblical and theological insights surpassed the greatest scholars of his day, and yet surpass the religious teaching of the world's greatest religions. He possessed an extraordinary amount of moral courage. He would stand in the face of moral malignancy whenever and wherever it confronted him. He was extraordinary beyond the abilities of a normal man. He was a worker of wonders; even the wind and the sea obeyed him. The demonic presence of the powers of darkness feared him and yielded to his authority. He could even bring the dead back to life by the utterance of a command. But the area that captures most of us in admiration is his ability and willingness to invest himself in the lives of others, especially, in the pain and suffering of others.

He was so completely unselfish, so given to compassion and acts of loving kindness in all that he said and all that he did. His existence was nothing less than a paradigm of all that human existence can and should be. He was a being created in the image of God, "one of us," and in him we see who we are supposed to be. This is because in him we also see "God with us" - a very revelation of God himself. In him we not only see ourselves as we are supposed to be, we see God; this is one of the reasons he was here in our midst. He came to show us the Father, he was a very revelation of who God is. This is precisely what John 1:18 tells us: "no one has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him know (i.e., revealed him)."

Jesus came to show us the Father. In him God broke into human history, he entered into our existence. The Creator became one with that which he created; he became "one of us" in order to reveal himself to us. There are glimpses of this truth found throughout the body of revelation contained in the New Testament Scriptures, especially so in the writings of John. In John 14:8ff Jesus was asked by one of his disciples, "Show us the Father." What this disciple, speaking for the other disciples, wanted to know was, "What is God really like? This was not a scholar's question; rather, it was the question of a group of Palestinian fishermen and tradesmen who knew that they were in the presence of one in possession of great supernatural knowledge. What they wanted to know about God was very practical: Is God like the legalistic sectarian Rabbis say? A law-giving, law-loving being who demands absolute law-keeping? Or is he like the apocalyptic seers say? One whose wrath is a burning fire, who is soon to come in fire to destroy the world? Or is God simply an old Ancient of Days figure, seated on a throne somewhere above Jerusalem; just sitting there watching disinterestedly as the human race goes its way? What is God "really" like? This was their question, and the answer they wanted to hear was not some metaphysical treatise; rather, they wanted an answer they could understand, an answer anyone could understand.

Jesus' response to this question is one of the most wonder filled and astonishing teachings of the whole New Testament.

*Philip said to him, "Lord, **show us the Father**, and we shall be satisfied" Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? **He who has seen me has seen the Father**; how can you say, "Show us the Father?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works (John 14:8-10).*

Jesus clearly says that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. How is this to be understood? As he says here in this text, the Father was working through him and the Father was speaking through him. God is seen in the works of Jesus, especially in his

miracles; and God is seen in the teachings of Jesus, especially in his stories or parables.

God Revealed in the Miracles of Jesus

There are no less than thirty-six specific miracles performed by Jesus in the Gospels. This is in addition of those numerous instances where the New Testament text states that multitudes were coming to him and he was healing them all. The record of those specific miracles performed by Jesus is as follows:

The Nature Miracles

There are nine nature miracles: twice he performs miracles involving the multiplication of food (the feeding of 3,000 and 5,000 people), he turns water into fruit of the vine, twice he causes a miraculous draft of fish, produces tribute money in the mouth of a fish, curses the fig tree, stills a storm, and walks upon the water/sea.

The Healing Miracles

There are seventeen healings: the nobleman's son at Capernaum, Peter's mother-in-law, the cleansing of a leper, the cleansing of ten lepers, the healing of the paralytic man at Capernaum, the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, the man with the withered hand, the healing of the palsied servant of the centurion, the woman with the issue of blood, the two blind men, the healing of the deaf and dumb man, the restoration of sight to the blind man outside Bethesda, the healing of the man born blind, the healing of the woman with the spirit of infirmity, and man afflicted with dropsy, the two blind men near Jericho, and the healing of the severed ear of Malachus.

The Miracles of Exorcism

There are seven instances of Jesus performing exorcisms of demonic beings: in the synagogue of Capernaum, the man made blind and dumb by demonic possession, the two demoniacs at Gadara, the dumb man of Matt 9, the daughter of the Syrophenician

woman, and the young man Jesus healed after the transfiguration.

The Miracles of Restoring Life to the Dead

There are three instances of Jesus raising the dead back to life: the son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, and the raising of Lazarus.

In all of these miracles performed by Jesus, the power of God is clearly manifested; but divine power is not all that is revealed in these miracles, there is something in each of them that tells us something about God. Not just about what he is capable of doing supernaturally, but something about what he thinks and how he feels about the situations he addresses with his supernatural power. In this we see more of him than his omnipotence. Here we see something who he is, something about his nature as a compassionate being. And all of this is revealed to us in the actions of Jesus of Nazareth, the one who could say, "In that you seen me, you have seen the Father."

He Was Moved with Compassion

This may be seen in the larger part of miracle narratives mentioned above. In Matthew 14:13-14, prior to the feeding of the 5,000, the text tells us that seeing the great throngs of people coming to him, he was moved with compassion and healed their sick. Of great significance here is this expression, "he was moved with compassion." The Greek work for compassion is *splagchnizomai*, which literally means, "to be moved in the inward parts." The work *splagchnos* refers to the internal organs, the location of all emotion in the thinking of the Hebrews and Greeks. This is a very powerful concept, especially as it describes a behavior of one who was God in our midst. He was physically affected by the sufferings of his fellow human beings, and he responded to their pain with his power.

In Matthew 20-30-34, the miracle narrative of the healing of the two blind men, we have a similar insight. The text says:

And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was

passing by, cried out, saying, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" And the multitude sternly told them to be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Lord, have mercy on us. Son of David!" and Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed.

The expression "moved with compassion" is this same Greek word. Here is an insight into the motive for Jesus working this miracle. It is not just to show his power, but to show us something of God. It is out of compassion that this one who is "God with us" responds to the requests of these men. It is not God's will that we be blind; rather, it is his will that all men see the wonders of his creations.

In Mark 1:39-42 we see this expression again:

And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." And moved with compassion, HE stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Jesus' response to the leper's plea was, according to this text, rooted in the emotional reaction he experienced at seeing the condition of this member of the human race. He was "moved with compassion" (*splagchnizomai*), which resulted in his statement, "I am willing," and the response of touching him and healing him. What of "the Father" is revealed in this work of Jesus? What Jesus does, the Father is doing, according to the words of Jesus: "the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves," (John 14:10b-11).

In the miracle narrative of Mark 9:14-29 (the account of Jesus casting out a demon), the father of the boy asked Jesus to have compassion on them and cast the demon out (cf. verse 22). Jesus responded to the man's request by exorcising the demon. So also in Luke 7:11-17, Jesus' is emotionally moved by a widow's grief at the loss of her son. Verse 13 says, "...when the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion on her and said, "Do not weep." He then raised the woman's son out of death. Over and over again Jesus shows us his capacity for feeling the pain of others by the way he reacts to human suffering; but we must not miss the fact that in this he also shows us something of the Father.

God Revealed in the Stories of Jesus

Not only does Jesus show us the Father in his wondrous works, he shows us the Father over and over again in his stories or parables. Many of the parables found in the Gospels may be called autobiographical sketches of God. The reason for this is that so many of these parables are essentially stories about God and his dealings with those he created in his image.

A God Who Cares for His Creation

God's care or compassion for his creation is exemplified throughout the parable collections of the New Testament: in the parables of the lost sheep and coin of Luke 15, in the parable of the great feast of Luke 14, the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matt 20, the parable of two sons in Matt 21, the parable of the vinedresser in Matt 21, the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7, the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus of Luke 16, the parables of petition in Luke 11 and 18, the parable of the two debtors of Luke 7, and in all the parables of the kingdom/reign of God (Matt 13). In all of these we see something of the nature of God in some aspect of the story.

A Father Who Longs for His Lost Child

In no parable of Jesus, however, do we have as grand a glimpse

of the Father as we do in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15.12-32. In this parable one may read "God" or "the Heavenly Father" in every place where we read of the father in the story. Jesus is here, in this story, showing us the Father. All other characters in the story are us, in one way or another. We are either prodigal, i.e., excessively self-indulgent, self-concerned, and self-centered, not to mention greatly wanting in good or moral judgment and intelligence. Or, we are like those helping the foolish son spend his inheritance, or taking advantage of him once he has ruined himself. Many, however, are like the unforgiving brother who felt contempt for his brother because of his behavior, or his resentment of the father for his forgiving attitude.

The most important character in this parable, however, is the father, who is here portrayed by Jesus as a "word-picture" for God "the Father." To the Jews of Jesus day, God was not typically portrayed as a loving Father whose heart could be broken by the behavior of a foolish, selfish and wayward child. Rather, he was an austere, demanding, and wrathful being whose punishment moved swiftly upon those who defied his will.

In the theology of Judaism, there was a conflict between two major moral attributes of God – his holiness and his goodness. Jesus did portray God as a holy God, who because of his holiness was full of righteousness, justice and intolerance of evil. But he also portrayed him as a good God, who because of his goodness was full of love, mercy, and grace. The attitude of "the father" in this story allowed his child to rebel against him, take the inheritance the father had saved for him, run from the presence of his father to a place where he could enjoy the pleasures of sin. Why did the father allow such behavior? Because the father wanted the child to behave as one who had learned moral character from his association with the father. If he could not learn that in the father's house, the father was willing to let him learn it the hard way. He gave him over to his choices and the consequences of his choices.

A God Whose Goodness Is as Great as His Holiness

In this story Jesus shows us a God more concerned with the moral development of his son than a God concerned with punishing all of his children who behaved contrary to his will. The father of this story was very different than the theology of Judaism would have allowed.. What was Jesus trying to show us here? When the son of Jesus' story chose to return to the Father and seek forgiveness, the God Jesus shows us manifests nothing but goodness toward him. His behavior is characterized by love, mercy, and grace. This is the God of Jesus and the God he wanted to show us. Not only was the father in this story willing to receive the son home, he had the whole time his son was gone been looking into the far country longing for his son's return. What kind of God is this? What kind of God treats his children in such a loving and gracious way? The God Jesus came to show us!

Conclusion

In the question of Philip in John 14:8, Jesus had given them some indication as to how he was showing them the Father:

*He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, "Show us the Father?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? **The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works** (John 14:8-10).*

The word he spoke to them revealed the Father to them, and the Father was dwelling in him doing his works. What did he mean by this? As we have endeavored to emphasize throughout this lesson, Jesus' showed us the father in his teaching, his stories, his questions, his debates, his sermons, his sayings. Everything he said and did shows us something of the Father. And so also with all that he did. Every miracle shows us something about the Father. Not only that he is all-powerful, but the why Jesus used the power of God to show us who God was. Every miracle addressed something of the suffering and pain of the people of the vale of soul making. Jesus was moved

with compassion and fed people, healed people, drove demons from their lives, and even returned ones who were entered into death back to the parents and family who loved them.

As wonderful as the word-picture is that Jesus paints for us of the Father from whom we come, a more significant lesson must be learned from Jesus revelation of the Father to the human race. In that he shows us the Father he show us, as beings created in his image, who we are; or, better, who we created to be. The story of God, which is called the gospel in the writings of the New Testament, begins with a beginning as every good story does. That beginning contains the story of God's creation of man in his own image after his likeness. (Gen 1:26-27, 2:7) If man is a very creation of God, created in the image of God, then man must know who God is before he can know who he is, or who he is supposed to be. This is the most significant point of this lesson, it is in seeing Jesus that we see God, and in seeing him we see what we are supposed to be a beings created in the image of God. As our existence has been characterized by the first Adam in his disbelief and disobedience, in the second Adam our existence can now be determined by the belief and obedience of Jesus. Not only has he shown us the father as "God with us," he has show us ourselves as we can be because he was also "one of us."

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Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think that God has shown himself to us throughout history? If so, how?
2. In what way was the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus a revelation of God?
3. Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to come here to show us the Father?
4. Has God not adequately shown himself to us in the Old Testament Scriptures?

5. How do the miracles of Jesus show us the Father?
6. What miracle says the most to you about who God is?
7. In what way do the parables of Jesus teach us about what God is like?
8. What parable says the most to you about who God is?
9. Do you think the portrait of God painted by first century Judaism is unique to them or do you think the same image of God is prevalent today? In what way is the portrait present with us today?
10. How does seeing Jesus help us to see who we are supposed to be? How does he show us what it means to be a being created in the image of God?