

## Introduction

A trend that has made great strides in our lifetime is a culture of emotion and entertainment associated with what some call a “dumbing” down of the gospel and a “dumbing” down of worship. In association with this culture, a good deal of attention falls on finding your spiritual gift, speaking in tongues, and seeking miracles. Is this a healthy Christian culture? Do we need to feel the pressure to go down this path in order to have all that God provides, especially in the matter of miracles?

The fact is that in the Bible, miracles are quite rare. They occur in some abundance in three periods: the time of Moses, the time of Elijah, and the time of Christ (and the apostles). Granted, it might appear that the Bible is full of miracles. One reason for this impression is the abundance of miracles recorded in the Gospels, and the four Gospels take up about ½ of the NT. However, there are only about thirty-five miracles recorded in the Gospels, with many of the same ones repeated in more than one Gospel, which multiplies the effect. Thus, if you just think about the Gospel of Matthew, you will find roughly twelve of the thirty-five miracles. Jesus did many more than this, but Matthew is selective.

One of the problems with the emotional-miracle culture is the troubling implication that miracles depend on us, on our faith: if you believe then you will see miracles in your life, and if you do not see miracles in your life, it is because your faith is weak and insufficient. People find support for this implication in the Bible in passages like the one we are looking at today, particularly, verse 58 where the doing of miracles by our Lord is put in relation to faith:

**And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, <sup>54</sup> and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" <sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." <sup>58</sup> And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief (Mat 13.53-58).**

To be precise, the text puts the not doing of miracles in relation to unbelief. Based on this relationship, some Christian thinkers argue that individuals and churches today lack plentiful miracles because of the insufficiency of their faith. In the process of our study this morning, we need to test this view.

The title for this message is “The Reaction of the Hometown Crowd” because this heading seems to capture the gist of what is going on in the narrative. The outline is somewhat uneven as we try to follow the narrative with quotes within it and commentary surrounding it.

- 1A. The Narrator’s Transition, 13.53
  - 2A. The Ministry of Jesus in His Hometown, 13.54a
  - 3A. The Reaction of the Hometown Crowd, 13.54b-57a
  - 4A. The Reply of Jesus, 13.57b
  - 5A. The Narrator’s Commentary, 13.58
- Concluding Remarks

### 1A. The Narrator’s Transition 13.53

Matthew’s transition here uses language similar to other transition points in the book (7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1). As a reading cue, we can try to “outline” the book by these transitions, but it is difficult to be precise because the things in between these transition points seem disconnected. Broadly, we can say this much. The first transition ends the Sermon on the Mount

(7.28), the second moves forward from the Great Commission of chapter 10 (11.1), the third capstones the parables (13.53). At this point, we might wonder what comes between 13.53 and the fourth transition in 19.1. Specifically, 19.1 puts a capstone on some principles regarding sin and forgiveness in the coming church that Jesus based on His death and resurrection (16.18, I will build my church; 16.21 & 17.22, killed but raised; chapter 18, temptation to sin, the feast of forgiveness, church discipline and forgiveness).

In this light, 13.53-58 appears to be a transitional paragraph that speaks about both parables (looking back) and miracles (looking forward). Thus, at the core here is a note about the wise teaching and mighty working of the Lord by which He gave us the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed as He paved the way for the coming church. Accordingly, we could read verse 58 as saying, "He did not gush forth in parables there, because of their unbelief" (of course, parables conceal truth from unrepentant eyes, but so do miracles, cf. Jn 12.36b-41).

Therefore, to focus our thoughts, this transition paragraph has the design of informing us about the place of miracles in the history of redemption as the Lord lays the foundation of the church for the time between His resurrection and second coming.

#### 2A. The ministry of Jesus in His hometown 13.54a

Matthew highlights the ministry of our Lord very briefly in just the first half of verse 54; **coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished.** We learn from the questions that come up that the Lord's teaching brought wisdom and miracle together as it did typically (cf. the bond of teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and affliction, 9.35; 4.23).

#### 3A. The Reaction of the Hometown Crowd 13.54b-57a

We know that they were astonished at the teaching of Jesus, but we have to be even more astonished at their reaction that occurs in the context of this astonishment. Here, the people note His wisdom and His power and express it on their own lips, but then they end up taking offense at Him. Jesus went about doing good deeds, showing compassion, and healing the sick, but His opponents claimed that His works were of the devil.

What is going on here? They acknowledge His wisdom and power but they emphasize His earthly origins and human relationships. Qs: **"Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"**

These questions imply statements. They have biting sentiment that is veiled and that catches the hearer off guard, and then, the cloak is removed and the knife goes directly to the heart.

Thus, pride and envy are at work in some mix deep within their sinful hearts. They do not even ride like a fly on the back of a wagon claiming, "We are making a lot of famous dust." They seek to bring Him down to their own level, while at the same time acknowledging His superiority in His wisdom and works. There is apologetic value in this opposition because the opponents of Christ do not deny His miracles; instead, they take offense at the fact of His miracles in light of their effort to make Him their equal.

#### 4A. The Reply of Jesus 13.57b

**But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."** A number of things come together here.

Jesus experiences the dishonor as something to be expected. He willingly accepts this rejection. Here is an astounding fact: the all-glorious Savior, the Lord of all, and the one to whom belongs all honor and glory, willingly, humbly, and forgivingly accepts dishonor. He has no vengeful spirit. He is like a lamb before His shearers, being cut, sheared, exposed, and shamed without a complaining word.

What does He say in reply to the reaction of the crowds?

It is not that prophets find honor everywhere else and so does Jesus. The prophets were mistreated in general to the extent that the question becomes, which did you not kill?

What is coming into view here is the basic fact that prophets of God do not receive honor from the people that should know the true status of God's representatives best of all. The sinfulness of the hometown crowd represents the sinfulness of the nation. Prophets to the nation of Israel experience rejection where they should find acceptance most readily. They came bearing the marks of their calling and those closest to them ought to see these marks and hear the voice of God on their lips. However, because they honor God with their lips but not in their hearts, they beat, stone, and kill the messengers of the covenant.

Jesus is teaching here that He is a prophet, that He is the long expected prophet. He bears the marks of His calling, and, true to form, the covenant people recite these marks on their lips while they take prideful and foolish offense at Him in their hearts.

Jesus thus says that we should expect such a reaction in light of the sinfulness of the covenant people. Thus, He is the coming Prophet coming to the nation with the blessings of God on His lips, and *further evidence of the truth of His office is the extreme negative reaction of the hometown crowd!*

#### 5A. The Narrator's Commentary 13.58

It is evident that Jesus did some miracles there in His hometown (cf. v. 54 with "not...many" here in v. 58). He did do mighty works there but in a limited way, thus, despite the unbelief, He did perform miracles in conjunction with His teaching.

How should we understand the key verse that seems to be a focal point in this transitory section as a whole?

We need to think about miracles and the accomplishment of salvation.

Jesus performs miracles for the glory of God.

He performed them in public and they naturally draw attention to the one who performs them, but Jesus did them for God's glory and not His own; He did them in as humble a way as possible:

**"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; <sup>20</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; <sup>21</sup> and in his name the Gentiles will hope" (Mat 12.18-21).**

Apparently, His years in His hometown before He left for public ministry were quiet and uneventful giving no indication to the town's people of His true origin. This was part of His humiliation.

That humiliation is to characterize His public ministry is the testimony of our Lord's temptation. We learn that the messianic task involves the subjection of miraculous powers to the Father's will. In the temptation, Satan appeals to hunger (turn this stone to bread), to riches (worship me and inherit the kingdoms of this world), and to the elimination of suffering (call the angels to your aid by casting yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple). When Jesus replies by citing Scripture, He makes it clear that He is willing to endure hunger, poverty, humiliation, and suffering in a cursed creation. He knows that the Father will glorify Him at His appointed time. Therefore, now, even the performance of miracles is under the control of the principle of waiting for the Father's appointment to glory.

It is this control in waiting that explains the tension between obedient public action and a definite reserve in our Lord's ministry regarding miracles. Of course, there is the tension of extraordinary public activity that draws attention to itself and humble limitation and withdrawing from the crowds. Sometimes our Lord withdrew from the cities and went to unpopulated areas to curb miracle activity. He governed His miracle working by something more important in His mission as a whole. He does a miracle and then says, "Tell no one."

How do we explain this tension? We have to explain it in the context of the principle of waiting for the Father's appointment to glory.

According to Matthew 12.15-19, Jesus performed miracles in as humbly as possible. He sought no glory for Himself in His works. His works were subservient to His messianic mission of service waiting on the Father's will.

This principle of serving in this way while waiting explains the difficult "faith" passages in connection with miracles. He will have neither kingly glory nor radical humiliation in death until the Father's time. Therefore, on many occasions, this was the connection between unbelief and the limitation of miracles. Is He a bread king (Jn 6.15)? No. Is He willing to die at any time? No. He is willing to die at the time of the Father's choosing. He set His head like a flint to that dark hour where the deepest humiliation imaginable will give rise to the highest glory.

Therefore, our text (Mat 13.58) is not about cooperation between man and God in which God's miracle working action depends on man's faith. The larger context is the history of redemption; miracles come to expression in various ways that accord with the will of God in the accomplishment of salvation.

Accordingly, miracles also serve the purpose of defining the gospel.

We need this definition because accomplishment comes in stages, in process, and in a already not yet way. While the people of God wait for the complete realization of accomplished salvation, they have understanding to ground their hope; they have the gospel.

Granted, Jesus did perform miracles according to the faith of those in need. How do we balance this in the picture of His miracle working? We must stress that there is no dependence of God on us, on our faith. Still faith may have, does have, an instrumental quality. It is a means that God uses in carrying out His purposes.

## Concluding Remarks and Implications

### 1) Miracles

Miracles define the gospel for the time between. They give us the content of the gospel that we proclaim to the ends of the earth.

Thus, the Gospels are full to the brim with gospel; the Gospels are gospel. Enacted parables of restoration make up the definition of the gospel that fixes our thoughts on the salvation of the whole batch of dough with unparalleled power. Jesus saves the whole man, ears, eyes, tongues, lame feet, sickness and death.

Restoration of the entire creation is part of the salvation of Christ. This is evident in His rebuke of Satanic hosts (He disarmed principalities and powers) and bound the strong man to plunder him of his goods. It is also evident in His rebuke of the winds and waves demanding peace. The promise is clear: He will restore the groaning creation by His redemptive work. These miracles are not simply testimonies to His deity; they are not just testimonies to guide us through the storms of life. They are these things in part, but more fully, the miracles point us to the new heavens and the new earth as enactments of what is to come. They are real anticipations of the coming reality.

### 2) Focus

Hence, it devaluates the gospel to center attention on miracles. We need the product of the miracles, which is the gospel. That must be our focus; the gospel of the Gospels, the gospel of the miracles is our great resource for our pilgrim journey.

In this passage, our Lord reveals Himself as our prophet-teacher. If we hear and understand, then we keep our goals high in learning from Him. We will do so by prayer (Lord, what does this mean?), by searching (as for gold for something much more valuable than gold), and by conversation (talking over things with husband, wife, and with the family members of the church). This reminds me of Peter's call to love above all else and to do by showing hospitality;

having people in your home is a marvelous opportunity to please the Lord by discipleship-learning oriented conversation.

### 3) Humility

The proud balk at the way God brings in His kingdom. The hometown crowd took offense at Christ seeking to bring Him down to their level. Jesus promises blessing to those who do not stumble at the way He brings in the kingdom with all its unexpectedness and with the humility and submission that He requires of us (cf. Mat 11.6).

Do people sometimes reject you by indifference or even by overt dishonoring actions?

The servant is not above his master. If rejection was our Lord's experience in laying the foundation of the church for our forgiveness and sanctification, then we must face experiences of this kind in a way that pleases Him. We should expect them, brace for them, focus on Christ in them, and do our Lord's bidding with a forgiving heart. He did not complain. He did not seek revenge. He set His heart on the will of God; that was His food and drink.

Thus, we are to wait on the Lord in hopeful submission.

We are also, like our Lord, waiting with much suffering and often without miracle for now is not the foundation-laying time; now we build and live on that foundation. We wait for the Father's appointment to glory. That is why we sing "My Jesus as Thou wilt" (Trinity 572) as we travel calmly on to our heavenly home:

My Jesus as Thou wilt! Though seen through many a tear,  
Let not my star of hope grow dim or disappear.  
Since Thou on earth has wept, And sorrowed oft alone,  
If I must weep with thee, My Lord they will be done

My Jesus as thou wilt! All shall be well for me  
Each changing future scene I gladly trust with thee  
Straight to my home above I travel calmly on  
And sing, in life or death, My Lord thy will be done

**Let us fall down before the majesty of our God in humble recognition of His holiness and our sinfulness, and let us honor Christ as our prophet by how we love one another as fellow pilgrims traveling calmly on to our home above. May we honor Him by showing hospitality because He is the greeter at the gate to glory. To Him be all glory, honor, and power, now and forevermore, Amen.**