

“He Marvelled Because of Their Unbelief”

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Read Mark 6:1-6

In all of our stories from Mark 4:35 and following, there is consistent thread of faith. Faith appears throughout as a precondition to the miraculous. Nonetheless, is faith a precondition to the miraculous or is it a consequence of the miraculous?

Some would argue from the passage that “the miracle does not generate faith; rather, faith must be present for the miracle to occur. This is the negative side of the positive correlation between faith and miracles seen already in Mark: miracles can and do take place in a context of faith (cf. 2:4; 5:43, 36); conversely, **where there is no faith, miracles cannot occur.**” ([emphasis added] *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman [Oxford: University Press, 2001], 897, 898).

Here is my tension with the absoluteness of this statement. If such a conclusion is true, then faith becomes a burden to be born. Faith becomes a tool to be exploited and expanded on. In the absoluteness of this statement, every bad thing you’ve prayed over and had as its outcome nothing can be attributed to your lack of faith. Had you simply believed “enough” disease, death, depression, and dysfunction would have turned out the way you asked. Your child would not have gone astray, your marriage would not have failed, your bills would have been paid out, and your health would have been restored, had you simply believed. Such thinking is truly guilt-forming and bondage-making. **This is not a biblical view of faith.**

We could equally dismiss our unanswered prayers by simply saying, “It was not God’s will.” This statement is true, but it does not sufficiently address the issue of faith. How do we handle the faith factor? I would like to back the discussion up for just a moment and consider the idea of a miracle.

An aspect of prayer is the performing of miracles, either through providential means (which negates to a degree the idea of it being miraculous) or through direct and unexplainable phenomenon. Most miracles are through secondary means. Miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea used a mighty wind, the virgin birth used a human womb, and feeding 5,000+ people from five small loaves and two fish still used two small loaves and five fish. Some miracles bypass secondary means like the resurrection of Jesus Christ or the raising of Lazarus from the dead. However, the point being that when people pray they are asking God to work miracles. What are miracles? “[Miracles are] extraordinary events that manifest divine power, that are wonders to human understanding, and therefore what human beings perceive as signs from God. The manifestation of the divine power may happen with or without human agents of God.” (S.v., “Miracles,” Seung Ai Yang, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Ed. David Noel Freedman, 903).

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Faith and prayer are incapable of being separated. Biblical prayer is indissoluble linked to biblical faith. God works through faith and prayer but is not restricted by faith and prayer. Personally I am relieved and quite happy that God is bigger than my faith and my prayers. Some might assume that I have neither faith nor prayer, but such a conclusion would be false. I have both, but **my inability cannot cancel His sovereignty**. My failure to act in faith or to petition Him through prayers will not stop Him from doing all He desires and wills.

In the outworking of God's purpose, faith and prayer are present. Whether it is a precondition or a consequence, it is there. God works through faith and prayer *and* God works in its absence. Faith does not hold God in bondage. It has never forced God to do something He does not desire or will. Your weak faith or apparent strength of faith is more for your edification than for His working.

And yet God invites us to believe. Through faith mountains are moved (Matt. 17:20) and the fiery darts of persecution are squelched (Heb. 11). The overriding element in all of our miracle stories is for us to believe that God is in control and that He truly cares. Mark 6:1-6 is a fitting contrast to the faith stories in Mark 4:35-5:43. In the city of Nazareth He made faith in Him a prerequisite to His working of miracles. Did He work in Nazareth? Yes, but He would have done more had they simply believed.

Although many might accuse me of muddying the waters that are already significantly agitated, let us not dismiss too quickly the fact that He calls us to faith, to believe, to rest in His control over all things. Are you spiritually depressed? Come to Him in faith. Are you emotionally distraught? Come to Him in faith. Are you financially destroyed? Come to Him in faith. Faith in God is always a proper response to any and all life situations. There is never a condition where faith is an inappropriate response.

Faith finds God as its object and rests in Him. The value of faith is found in the object and not in the outcome or the amendment of the moment. God is enough, and faith finds this true.