



RESOURCES

Mark



St Philips

CONTENTS

This series is called KINGDOM PEOPLE.

We'll be looking at the first 9 chapters of Mark's gospel and the series will take us on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and who God says we are; we'll see that the Kingdom work of Jesus reveals to us the character of God; we'll think about the enemy's opposition to the Kingdom and our authority in Christ as Kingdom People to rebuke and defeat him; and we'll learn that walking in great authority and power is not about finding a formula but about intimacy and sacrificial love.

Timing: 20-40 minutes, then leading into prayer/ministry

Buzzgroups: Groups of 3-4 work best, there are feedback notes for the speaker

Illustrations: Where relevant, suggestions are made but speaker's own stories are preferable

Approach: Use these resources to curate and steer group discussion, rather than seeing this material as a talk to delivery straight.

Trust the group discussion to create an environment for mutual growth, deepening relationships and intimate encounter with the Spirit. Feel free to tailor and pitch the talk as best suits your group.

"Go Deeper": Suggestions for deeper exploration are noted.

Ministry notes: Follow the Spirit but suggestions are included if desired.

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WEEK 5 MIRACLES FLOW FROM INTIMACY

Last week we focused on how Jesus responded to opposition with truth, wisdom and discernment. We noted that discernment is a fruit of intimacy and results in us walking in wisdom and authority.

Introduction

During this series we have looked at **identity, authority, intimacy, the Kingdom vs the spirit of religion, discernment** and **aligning our hearts with the Father's heart**.

Intimacy has been key to all that we have considered so far. We've been thinking about how the relentless pursuit of intimacy with Abba is foundational to our walk as disciples. We've seen that walking in authority and seeing Kingdom breakthrough is directly connected to how intimate we are with Him. In this session we deepen our understanding of how miracles flow from intimacy. Rest, fear and authority are key themes.

This session has four parts:

1. Miracles flow from intimacy
2. Rest a fruit of intimacy, restlessness is the enemy of the miraculous
3. Faith releases the miraculous
4. Miracles are real not theological theory

Read: Mark 6:30-56

1. Miracles flow from intimacy

We have already noted in our series the importance of intimacy with the Father. In Session 2 we saw that intimacy with Abba was the foundation of Jesus' ministry. Often Jesus is recorded as being in a solitary place or up a mountain - communing with the Father and spending time in His presence. It was from this place that Jesus would operate with power and authority. We also saw this in Session 4. Spiritual discernment flows from intimacy with the Father. The biblical references to Jesus spending time with Abba are not a co-incidence. His ministry was born out of His intimacy with God. In Scripture, the precedent is established that before Jesus did anything, he would spend time with His Father. Intimacy with our heavenly Father is the source of all that we have been looking at this term.

In our passage today we see two more examples of the importance of intimacy and what flows out of it. At vs. 31-32, Jesus invites His discipleship to come away with Him to a quiet place. He is modelling to them the source of His own intimacy with the Father - taking time out to commune with Him. Later, at v. 46, we read that Jesus, yet again, goes up on a mountainside to pray. On both occasions in the passage we see that the **pursuit of intimacy results in a miracle**: Jesus feeds 5,000 people with only 5 loaves and two fish and He walks on water. **Miracles flow from intimacy.**

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Buzzgroup

Discuss in groups of three (5 minutes): In the passage we read of two miracles. Is it the case that Jesus was only able to carry out these miracles because He was God?

Feedback (3 minutes): This question draws on Two Natures theology, i.e. the Christian doctrine that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. The doctrine was established by the early Church in response to heretics who tried to argue that Jesus was not really human but rather was only divine and represented Himself as human. The origin was Greco/Roman religion which sought to preserve deities as totally other and removed from humanity. It was offensive to them to consider that God would become human and suffer as humans suffer, much less that He could be killed by humans. If that were the case, He couldn't be omnipotent. The doctrine of Christ's two natures establishes that He was both fully human and fully God. Only by being fully human could God reconcile the fullness of humanity to Himself. But where does the balance lie when considering miracles?

Steward a discussion to get people thinking about who Jesus was and the basis on which He was able to do what He did. Was it only the God part of Jesus that made miracles possible or did His humanity play a part as well?

Suggest that this is very important to our understanding of what Jesus was doing when He healed the sick and raised the dead and therefore of vital importance to what we are able to do. Let's take a moment to look at two natures doctrine together...

Jesus: a human intimate with His Father in heaven

Christians still debate the relationship between Jesus' two natures. For some, Jesus was able to do the miraculous because He was God. However, others note the significance of His humanity. It was not just because He was God, the argument goes, that He did what He did but because He was human in a fully intimate relationship with His Father. Can you see the implication of this to us?

If Jesus' miraculous power were solely due to His divinity, then the miraculous would not be open to us: we are not divine! No - Jesus was also fully human. In fact, the doctrine of Christ's two natures says that He was the most fully human person who has ever lived. So living a life in the miraculous is actually being more human than you have ever been. The supernatural is a natural part of being the humans we were created to be.

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So what does this mean for us? Suggesting that Jesus was only able to do miracles because He was God is a downgrading of His humanity. In the same way, to say that we cannot do miracles is also a downgrading of our humanity. A more subtle downgrading of our humanity is to say that even if we are involved in miracles it is never us performing miracles but God through us. Christ's humanity shows us how to be human. And a human in Christ's image is a human who heals the sick and raises the dead. Christ's humanity is the model for us - we too are to heal the sick and raise the dead. As humans we have that power and authority. The enemy is under our feet - bible ref.

BUT NOTE: this is not to say that we do the miracles ourselves. The beauty of two natures doctrine is that Christ's divinity reminds us of the source of the power we get to exercise in relationship with Him. The power is God's not ours and the glory is His. Rather, we are in partnership, in relationship with God, just as Jesus was. It is His power working through us as His adopted children. Adopted children get to do the stuff Jesus did on the same basis that Jesus did it. This is why intimacy is so important to releasing Kingdom miracles. It was the foundation for Jesus' power to operate in the miraculous and it is ours. If we avoid intimacy with the Father, we will never get to partner in His miracles. **Miracles flow from intimacy.**

2. Rest a fruit of intimacy, restlessness an enemy of the miraculous

Did you notice the way in which Jesus invited His apostles to come away with Him at v. 31? "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest". The instruction to take time out is clear. The fact that the invitation is to spend time with Jesus is obvious. The instruction to get rest is often misunderstood – it is more than simply taking time out to recharge the physical batteries.

The context of Jesus' invitation to His disciples to rest is the busyness of their ministry. We've just read that they have come back from doing the work of apostles (v. 30, see what they were up to at vs 3:14-15). They are tired and need to rest. But this is not just a case of taking it easy. We know this from creation theology and the Sabbath. God did not rest on 7th day because He was tired. Rather, He was establishing into our createdness a pattern of communing with the Him.

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Buzzgroup

Discuss in groups of three (3 minutes): Do you take a full Sabbath in the week? Do you see it as more than just a physical break (important though that is)?

Feedback (3 minutes): Steward a short conversation about the group's patterns of rest. Encourage the group to engage with the importance of rest. Try to discover together a deeper understanding of rest from a spiritual perspective. Close the conversation by telling the group that we will now look at the relationship of rest to miracles.

Rest is not just physical but spiritual. It is about communing with God and drawing near to Him: it is about **intimacy**. If we do not invest time in our relationships, those relationships do not deepen, nor do they realise their potential. Jesus' invitation to His apostles at v. 31 is to come away and commune with Him. To invest in their relationship with God. Jesus' is teaching them His own personal pattern: go out to do the Kingdom stuff then return to the Father to receive His love, perspective, authority and power. Go out and return, go out and return. Nothing is to be done separated from the closest possible intimacy with Abba.

So spiritual rest is about intimacy with God but in our passage today the disciples have not quite fully understood this yet. We can see this in the way that they respond to the two situations faced by them in this chapter of Mark. In both the feeding of the 5,000 story and in the moment Jesus walked on water, they are striving in their own strength. In the first instance we see that they look to their own resources to find food. In the second instance, Scripture is even more clear – Jesus looks across the water and sees the disciples "straining at the oars" against a strong head wind.

Buzzgroup

Open question to the whole group (30 secs): Just a quick one – can you identify the source of their striving?

Feedback (30 secs): Suggest that the answer in both situations is FEAR.

Fear – the source of striving and restlessness a barrier to miracles

Fear always results in striving. We see the situation before our eyes and we look to our own resources to fix the problem rather than resting in God's provision. Striving is doing things in our own strength and never results in miracles. It is the opposite of the relationship we have discussed so far - in which the pursuit of intimacy on the basis

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of our humanity imitates the intimacy that Jesus pursued through rest in order to do the miracles we read in Scripture. In our passage today, we see the difference between operating in our own strength and operating as Jesus did.

Take a look at the disciples at vs. 35-37 and 48. Faced with difficult circumstances and in need of a miracle, they respond with fear. They look to the material for the provision of food, arguing that they need to send the people away or go and get the food themselves with more than 8 month's salary. You can feel the fear rising. All these people are going to be getting pretty grumpy if they don't get something to eat! On the water, we find the disciples striving in their own strength, straining at the oars against a head wind. It's a metaphor for restlessness and as they see Jesus on the water, we read that their response was also fear. In fact, they were terrified. They thought they have seen a ghost.

The pattern is clear: the response is fear, the reflex is striving, the problem is a lack of intimacy through a failure to rest and the end result is a total lack of faith.

Rest is a fruit of intimacy and results in faith.

Fear is a lack of faith, a fruit of restlessness and results in striving.

Resting in an intimate relationship with Abba results in same revelation that we have already discussed this term – the revelation that as God's children, we carry the Father's authority and power to do the miraculous. If we want to see miracles the answer is not to strive in our own strength but to rest. Striving is the fruit of fear, comes from restlessness and leaves us lacking in faith. Rest is a fruit of intimacy and results in faith.

Hard heart a barrier to the miraculous

Have you noticed how Mark describes the disciples at v. 52? The reason they have not recognised Jesus on the water is that: ... "they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." The loaves refer to the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. What does Mark mean by "hard heart"? What are the features of a hard heart?

Mark uses "hard heart" to describe a heart that does not understand, that does not recognise who Jesus is or the significance of what He is doing. It is a heart that lacks God's perspective. A heart that is not at rest and is not in intimate communion with Abba. The disciples had seen the feeding of the 5,000 but they had failed to understand what it meant about who Jesus was. According to Mark, the symptoms of a hard heart are doubt and fear. Earlier in Mark (4:35-41) we noted another

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storm...another storm that Jesus calms. In this story, Jesus links their fear to a lack of faith: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v. 40). **Fear and doubt are the enemies of the miraculous.**

Buzzgroup

Discuss in groups of 3 (4 minutes): How do you feel about the dynamic of fear and faith when it comes to miracles? Share stories of when you were involved in a miracle (could be healing or other miracles). Reflect on the roles faith, fear and intimacy with God played. Also share and reflect on disappointments and how this has impacted your faith to pray for more miracles.

Feedback (2 minutes): Curate some feedback before moving on. If fear or doubt are issues in the group, emphasise the difference intimacy makes and suggest that the group prays about this later.

3. Faith releases the miraculous

We have noted that rest results in faith. Now we consider how faith releases the miraculous.

Jesus demonstrates His faith in His Father at v. 41 – He gives Him thanks and trusts in His provision. The result is a miracle. (As a biblical principle of the miraculous, thanksgiving always results in multiplication). Jesus was able to trust out of the intimacy of His relationship with God. He is doing the opposite of the disciples. Later at v. 50, Jesus speaks right to the heart of the disciples' lack of faith: Take courage...Don't be afraid." He sees their fear, He calls out their lack of faith, he speaks to their inability to recognise Him and addresses their fear with a revelation of who He is. **Revelation always accompanies intimacy because intimacy results in knowledge of God.** When God reveals Himself, fear turns to faith.

Note what happens as soon as Jesus steps into the boat at v. 51. Following His self-revelation - "It is I" – the storm dies. In the physical the storm disappears as the disciples recognise Jesus and draw near to Him again. They stop striving in their own strength (the head wind is gone, they put down their oars) and turn to Jesus where they find rest and their faith grows. Jesus is unperturbed by the storm, He brings rest to the whole situation because through His relationship with Abba, He knows that He has authority over the elements to do the miraculous.

Faith releases the miraculous.

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4. Miracles are real not theological theory

We have talked about fear, striving, faith and rest but our passage also shows us that miracles are not theoretical; they are real and we can be involved in the miraculous now. V. 56 tells us that all who touched Jesus were healed. Simply by touching Him, they received a miracle.

This shows us that miraculous power is not a theory but a substance. V. 56 reflects Luke 8:46 - Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has *gone out* from me". Miraculous power goes out from Jesus when He is touched.

All who do this are healed in our passage. The woman in Luke 8 is healed. When Peter meets the lame beggar in Acts 3 he says: "I don't have any money but I will *give you what I have*." He doesn't say: "I don't have any money but I will pray for you." He says he will give the man what he *has*, what he possesses. He knows what he carries and he brings it to bear – spiritual authority to release a Kingdom miracle.

This is perhaps the deepest revelation open to us in our passage today: **when we fail to realise the power we carry, we fail to operate in that power because we can't use what we don't realise we possess.** Jesus said: "YOU give them something to eat". The expectation was that the disciples would do the miracle.

Like the disciples, restlessness and striving stops us from realising what we carry. If we live in ignorance of what we possess, we fail to exercise it and we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storm. But rest is a product of faith and the doorway to intimacy and identity.

These are the things that position us to become aware of the power we carry as children of God, His Kingdom People. When you know what you carry, you can release it, in Jesus name and for His glory.

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Conclusion

Miracles flow from intimacy with our Heavenly Father. It was the foundation of Jesus' ministry and we are meant to live out of that same intimacy. Scripture establishes the precedent that before Jesus did anything, he would spend time with His Father.

Time in the Father's presence always brings us to a place of rest, which is the opposite of striving. There is a link between rest and the miraculous because rest is a fruit of intimacy but striving and restlessness are enemies of the miraculous. Because rest is a fruit of intimacy it results in faith. Faith grows from rest. Fear is a lack of faith, a fruit of restlessness and results in striving. Faith releases the miraculous.

Prayer/ministry

Ministry is most effective when it flows from conversations within the Home Group during the evening and the Spirit's witness. That said, here are some suggestions:

- Take time to welcome a deeper intimacy with the Holy Spirit. Do this by opening your hearts and honouring His presence among you. Don't rush on from this moment. Learn to be still as a group and rest in the presence.
- Ask the Spirit if He wants to minister to fear tonight. Fear and doubt are barriers to the miraculous. You may need to have a time of repentance from fear before faith begins to flow.
- Pray that God would anoint you with a desperate desire for intimacy with Him as befits His Kingdom People.
- Pray for miracles amongst you. Step out. Home groups are the perfect place to grow in faith and learn to walk in the miraculous. Be obedient to the Spirit. Once the miraculous starts to flow in your group, you will feel more confident to take it onto the streets!