



DEVOTIONAL READING

Philip Yancey Devotional

Miracles and Magic

Mark 3

He had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was. (Mark 3:10-12)

Large crowds flocked from far away as word of Jesus’ powers spread. Some people came for healing; others, just to witness the extraordinary phenomena. Who but a messenger from God could perform such works? Yet Jesus himself had an odd ambivalence toward miracles. He never did “tricks” on demand, like a magician. “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign,” he said to those who sought a display of magic (Matthew 12:39).

Jesus seemed not to trust miracles to produce the kind of faith he was interested in. Mark reports that on seven separate occasions he warned a person just healed, “Tell no one!” He was suspicious of the popular acclaim that his miracles stirred up, for he had a hard message of obedience and sacrifice, and miracles tended to attract gawkers and sensation-seekers.

Mainly, Jesus used his powers in compassionate response to human needs. Every time someone asked directly, he healed. When his disciples grew frightened on a stormy lake, he walked to them across the water or calmed the wind. When his audience got hungry he fed them, and when wedding guests grew thirsty he made wine.

Much like people today, Jesus’ contemporaries looked for ways to explain away his powers, even when faced with irrefutable evidence. Here, for instance, the Pharisees seek to credit the miracles to Satan’s power. On another occasion they arranged a formal tribunal, complete with judges and witnesses, to examine a man Jesus had healed. The man’s parents confirmed his story (“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”), but still the doubters hurled insults and threw him out of the court (John 9).

In short, the crowd’s mixed responses bore out Jesus’ suspicions about the limited value of miracles. They rarely created faith, but rather affirmed it in true seekers.

Life Question: Would people be more likely to believe God if miracles were more common today?