

The Story of Hope #15

Prove it!

Luke 5:17-26, John 11:1-54, Matthew 12:22-32

Story of Hope Section 26-28

Phil de Martimprey - 12.31.2017

It is pretty easy to make an incredible claim. Many people do it all time. From Muhammad Ali's "I am the greatest" speech, to the friend who somehow always has that lower golf score when he's not with you. It is not difficult to make these claims, the real challenge comes when a person is called on to prove it. Are they able to backup their claims? We will see in this section that Jesus may take the cake when it comes to incredible claims, but he doesn't leave their validity up in the air, he gave plenty of proof.

By this point in this Story of Hope, Jesus has taken many of the images and aspects of the earlier stories and bound them into himself. He is the rescuer, the one way, the lamb, the one to be raised up and so many more. It is an incredible thing to ponder how this story, God's story, has woven through thousands of years and countless people to come find its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. We will turn our gaze on the miraculous works of Jesus in this section. Not just to be amazed afresh that Jesus had authority over all things, but to be reminded, or maybe consider for the first time, just why Jesus actually performed these miracles, as well as the people's responses. We will see the themes of **God, Man, Sin, Christ, Faith, Life**.

In the very last verse of John's Gospel he writes "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I supposed that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25) Needless to say, even when we compile all four gospel accounts of Jesus' life, there are countless other things that Jesus did, and miracles he performed. Water to wine, multiplying food, healing the sick, casting out demons, calming the sea, even raising the dead are among the list of about 37 miracles that the gospels record for us. These miracles show us many things, and they are provided to us for a number of reasons. Probably the first and most obvious reason is to show us that Jesus has absolute authority over the physical and spiritual world. Food, nature, sickness, demons, and even life itself are all under this rescuer's authority. As incredible as this is, it should not come as a shock to us. After all, Moses, an earlier picture of this rescuer, was used and empowered by God to do some very miraculous things. Water into blood, parting the sea, making water come from a rock. God is able to do incredible things through His servants. But there is another reason for the miracles beyond just revealing Jesus' power and authority. **Jesus performs miracles to validate his claims about who he is.** These miracles were to be seen as proving that the radical things Jesus would claim, were actually true. One of the clearest pictures of this comes in Luke 5:17-26.

This story has so many incredible moments, but let's focus on Jesus' exchange with the religious leaders. Jesus says that the man's sins are forgiven. This paralyzed man was lowered through a roof to be healed, not have his sins forgiven! But Jesus uses this moment to claim something much more incredible and unbelievable than being able to heal. He claims to see this man's faith, and then responds by declaring that this man's sins are forgiven. Why is this such a big deal? We see in the response of the religious leaders, for it is absolutely clear to them, and rightly so, that no one can forgive sins but God. Jesus has claimed to set this man free from his sins which is something only God Himself can do! In their minds this is absolutely impossible and blasphemous, for there is no possible way this man Jesus has that authority. It would mean he was God. Jesus responds to them "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority

on earth to forgive sins- he said to the man who was paralyzed- "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home" And the man was healed. Here Jesus clearly states that this miracle proves that he is able to forgive sins! As crazy and unbelievable as it is, Jesus is claiming to be God and his proof is that he is able to do miraculous things. Some people will believe this, others will not, but one thing is for sure, Jesus cannot be dismissed or ignored. He will continue to teach and validate his teaching with miracles.

Let's look at one more miracle. Later on in his ministry, Lazarus, a very close friend of Jesus' died, and Jesus raised him from the dead. You can read the whole story in John 11. Let's just focus on the responses to this miracle. Many of the Jews believed in Jesus. They saw this incredible miracle and it proved to them that Jesus was who he claimed to be, the rescuer, messiah and God in the flesh. But the religious leaders did not respond with belief. You see, they couldn't deny that Jesus was doing incredible miracles. They couldn't deny that he had supernatural power over the natural and spiritual world. So how did they explain it? We see exactly how they explained Jesus' power and authority in Matthew 12:24. These religious leaders believed that Jesus' authority was from Beelzebul (another name for Lucifer/Satan) rather than God. They weren't going to argue that Jesus wasn't able, or that these miracles were fake. They were going to argue that Jesus was possessed with Satanic power and that is what gave him these abilities. Wow. Talk about two radically different responses. One group of people chose to believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be and followed him, the other group rejected his claims and ramped up their efforts to put an end to his life. We will see as the story unfolds that there really are only two available responses to Jesus and his claims. To accept and believe, or to reject. We have seen these two options time and again through the Story of Hope. God has been asking, and continues to ask for people to trust and have faith in Him and His rescuer.

What is your response to Jesus' claims? The question of what to do about Jesus' claims hits us today in much the same way. We are faced with a picture of Jesus who has power and authority over all things. But how do we respond? Clearly there is only one right response, and that is to have faith in this rescuer. He claims to be the final solution to the problem that began so long ago in our story. The problem of spiritual death and complete separation from God. Jesus is claiming to have the authority to forgive sins for those who have faith. It is when we recognize who Jesus is, and place our faith in Him that we can have true and eternal life. But that initial faith is just the beginning. We clearly see that Jesus didn't just claim to be the rescuer and sacrificial lamb, but he claimed to be our King, to be God in the flesh with us, desiring to change our lives both now and after death. For those of us who have begun this life with Jesus, do we give Jesus complete authority in our lives through the power and direction of His Word? Do we seek to hear and obey or do we simply desire to be rescued from the punishment from our sins? There is an incredible life of freedom available to those who will follow Jesus and his commands. This life begins with faith and is continued in faith, trusting that not only has Jesus rescued us from spiritual death, but he desires to bring true life into our daily routines and decisions. We just need to believe what he says and have faith that he is who he claims to be: The God who loves us more than we can imagine.