

John 5:19,20

Marvel and Astonishment

...*he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel* – v. 20

This statement by Christ shows us very plainly that the intention behind many of Christ's words and deeds was that men may marvel. The term *marvel* means *to be wondered at or to be had in admiration*. You know what it is to marvel at someone when some spectacular feat has been accomplished. We marvel at men in the sports world when a spectacular catch is made. We marvel at men in the music world especially when someone very young is able to perform a complex classical piece. We marvel at men in the business world or in the technology world when something is invented and marketed and a man or woman becomes rich very quickly.

To marvel at someone is to stand in awe of that person. And in the gospels we find numerous accounts of multitudes standing in awe of Christ. I think a text that captures this sentiment of standing in awe is found in Mk. 7:37 *And (they) were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*

Do you see how they stood in awe of Christ not only with reference to the particular miracle He had just performed but with reference to His entire earthly ministry up to that point. *He hath done all thing well* they say. And in this verse we find another term that is used to describe how awe-struck the multitudes were. They were *astonished* the verse says. The word means that they were struck with amazement. And in the gospel of Mark you find on a couple of occasions Mark placing emphasis on just how astonished or amazed they were at Christ.

In this verse it says *they were astonished beyond measure*. If astonishment could be calculated by degrees then the astonishment of this event would have gone off the scale. That's Mark's meaning when he says *they were astonished beyond measure*. In an earlier statement in Mark's gospel in the setting of Christ raising from the dead a young damsel who had died Mark says in Mk. 5:42 *And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was [of the age] of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.* Astonished beyond measure and astonished with a great astonishment – you can certainly see the impact that Christ had on people during the time of His earthly ministry.

There's a sense in which one could argue that our time in heaven will be a time in which we marvel at Christ and we'll be astonished with a great astonishment that is beyond measure. *How is it, we'll say to one another, that we've landed safely in glory? How is it, that we, sinners by nature, who have fallen short of the glory of God, should now be among those that surround the throne of Christ and sing His praises?*

And the answer will come back to us that it is entirely due to Christ – who He is and what He's done in His atoning death that has brought us to the place where we're perfected in glory and able to enjoy God forever. And won't it be our privilege to say what those disciples said when Christ stilled the stormy winds - *What manner of man is this, that even*

the wind and the sea obey him? Or in our case it will be what manner of man is this that He should pay for our sins? Or – what manner of man is this that He was so willing to bear our sins and take our punishment bring us into the very family of God and take us to Himself as an inheritance? And we'll marvel at Him and we'll be astonished to see in our experience that every promise of salvation has proven itself to be true.

I want to focus on this phenomenon this morning – this phenomenon of marvel and astonishment. As I said in my opening statement – the works of Christ that He performed in close connection with what His Father showed Him were and are intended to make men marvel.

He (that is God the Father) will shew him (that is Christ) greater works than these, that ye may marvel – v. 20

I have 3 thoughts based on this text that I'd like to leave with you with the hope that you will come to understand how this phenomenon of marvel and astonishment is to properly function in you and work through you. Consider with me first of all that:

I. Christ Made Men Marvel

This was true of Christ from the very moment He arrived in this world in the form of a man. We're told in Lk. 2:25 of a man named Simeon who waited on the Lord constantly for the consolation of Israel. This man was told that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. And so he was led to the temple by the Holy Ghost and we read beginning in 2:27 *And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,* 28 *Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,* 29 *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:* 30 *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,* 31 *Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;* 32 *A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

It is always good to note when reading this testimony that salvation is found not so much in a plan as in a person. To see Christ with the eye of faith is to see salvation. But what I want you to see in connection with our study is the response of Joseph and Mary to Simeon in the next verse: *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him (2:33).*

Like Joseph and Mary, we too should marvel at the things that have been spoken of Him. We should marvel, for example, when we hear through the word of God and by the Spirit of God John the Baptist speaking of Him. *Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.* This should cause us to marvel. How can such a feat be accomplished? Could this ordinary looking man who had no form or comeliness to make Him stand out from others really be the focus of the ages? How can this man take away the sins of the world?

Or what about when we hear Peter confess Him to be the Christ, the Son of God. This should make us stand in awe although by the time of Peter's confession Christ had vindicated His identity many times over. Still, such a confession, according to Christ cannot be made by flesh and blood. And what this means is that if you're able to confess Christ as the Son of God you have cause to marvel. Flesh and blood has not made such a revelation to you but God Almighty has enabled you by His Spirit to recognize and confess Christ. How such a thing should lead you to marvel in wonder and awe!

And what about that centurion who stood by His cross when Christ died? We don't find the actual word we're considering found in that narrative but we can conclude nevertheless that the centurion marvelled and that he was astonished. We read in Mk. 15:37 *And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.* Two verses later we read in Mr 15:39 *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

This centurion marvelled. He marvelled that one could so cry out at the very point of His death. He saw, in the death of Christ, a powerful and supernatural death – a death that could be accomplished by nobody less than the Son of God. We certainly have cause to marvel when the Spirit of God, through the word of God bears witness to our hearts that this man is truly the Son of God.

Now when you trace the word *astonish* through the gospels then you discover that the thing about Christ that is most often mentioned as that which astonished the multitudes was His doctrine.

- Mt 7:28 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*
- Mk. 11:18 *And the scribes and chief priests heard [it], and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.*
- Even as a 12 year old boy we read of Christ in Lu 2:47 *And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.*

You will recall from our studies in the sermon on the mount that Christ's doctrine was the true doctrine of the law and the gospel. He exercised His authority to set right the wrong notions that were prevalent about the law. He showed how high the standard really was by teaching that it applied not merely to the external motions but also the thoughts and intents of the heart. He also said by way of His doctrine that He Himself would fulfill the high standards of that law. And when the time came that His disciples confessed Him to be the Christ He began in His doctrine to teach how He must suffer and die and rise again. It's no wonder, then, that many were astonished at His doctrine. They were astonished by the authority by which He taught His doctrine and they were astonished by the content of His doctrine.

When He spoke of the difficulties that rich men would have entering the kingdom of God, because of their sense of self-sufficiency we read in Mk. 10:26 of His disciples: *And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?*

We know, of course, that He caused men to marvel and He moved them to astonishment by the miracles He performed:

- Mt 8:27 *But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*
- Mt 9:8 *But when the multitudes saw [it], they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*
- Mt 9:33 *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*

I should say here that these testimonies that are so common throughout the gospels should govern the way we read our Bibles. How often we read our Bibles in such a self-centered way. We're looking for a personal word or a word of guidance or a promise to encourage us. And I'm not saying that these are not valid things that the Spirit of God will convey to us through the word of God – what I am saying is that we should be sure to read our Bibles as well with the aim of beholding Christ. And if we read our Bibles with that aim then there will be numerous occasions when Christ will cause us to marvel and bring us to astonishment.

Before I leave this point I should say that there are two types of situations in which we find Christ Himself being amazed at things that He beheld. He marvelled at the faith of the centurion who recognized that He didn't need the physical presence of Christ in order for his servant to be healed. All he needed was for Christ to speak the word. And when Christ became aware of this we find Him in Mt 8:10 *When Jesus heard [it], he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

There are only two occasions when we find Christ acknowledging great faith. In both cases it is the faith of Gentiles that Christ acknowledges to be great. We have this instance of the centurion. And we have that instance when the Syrophonecian woman follows Christ and begs for Him to heal her daughter.

The other situation that shows us Christ marveling is at the other end of the scale, so to speak, when it comes to the matter of faith. When He entered into His own country and taught there we read that they were astonished at His doctrine but that He was amazed by their unbelief. Mk. 6:6 *And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.* Unbelief should be a cause for us to marvel as well. Christ's identity was so readily apparent. He vindicated His identity on countless occasions and yet there were those who didn't believe in Him.

At this point our study should present a challenge to us. We've just discovered that Christ marvels at great faith and He marvels at unbelief. Do you give Christ cause to marvel – and if so, at what end of the scale do you find yourself? Do you give Christ cause

to marvel at your great faith, or do you give Him cause to marvel at your unbelief? Oh that we would utilize the means of grace to increase our faith so that Christ could marvel at us in a positive rather than a negative way.

We see, then, that Christ made men marvel. They marvelled at His doctrine and they marvelled at His miracles. The multitudes marvelled at Him. His own disciples marvelled at Him. You and I should be amazed by Him as well. But would you consider with me next that:

II. Christians Should Move Others to Marvel Also

In Mark 5 we have the account of the demoniac out of whom Christ cast a legion of demons. This man, you may recall, could not be tamed. He could not be bound even with chains. But when Christ crossed His path all that changed. Christ cast out the demons and permitted them to inhabit a herd of swine and that herd, we're told, ran down a hill and over a cliff and were drowned in the sea.

And when the word was circulated in the city and in the countryside of what was done we're told that many came to the scene to see what had taken place. And what should they behold? We read in Mk. 5:15 *And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.* Isn't it interesting that they're more afraid of a convert who is seated and at rest, who has gained his sanity and his modesty – they're more afraid of that apparently than they were afraid of a man possessed with a legion of demons.

The converted demoniac had the desire to go with Christ following his deliverance. But Christ instructed him instead to go home to his friends and tell them what great things the Lord had done and how the Lord had had such great compassion on him. And so we read in Mk. 5:20 *And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all [men] did marvel.*

Christ is still the object of their marvel but Christ, in this case, is not the subject leading them to marvel. It's the healed demoniac, now, that is leading others to marvel at Christ. And in his example we see our mission. We're to lead others to marvel at Christ. Now I'll grant you that not everyone's conversion is as dramatic as this demoniac. The contrast between what he was and what he became certainly was a contributing factor to the astonishment of those who saw and heard him afterwards.

This does not take away, however, from the truth that others should find us like this demoniac, at rest as he was, sitting at the feet of Jesus enjoying the peace of God that passes understanding. And we should be found clothed – clothed spiritually with humility and clothed by the righteousness of Christ but also clothed practically in the sense that the Christian practices modesty. The implication in the case of the demoniac is that his clothing was tattered and torn and skimpy at best. But soon after meeting Christ we read that he was clothed as he sat at Christ's feet.

This is an issue that needs to be emphasized in our day when Christian young people in particular are under such pressure to follow the immodest styles of the world. Immodesty and fleshly provocation prevail in clothing styles today but the mark of a true Christian who has had a genuine experience of Christ is that he or she will be at rest and he or she will be clothed.

We should be found also in our right minds. In the case of the demoniac he undoubtedly came across as insane. His wild and unruly lifestyle would have made him appear so. But now before Christ we're told that he was in his right mind. And so the mark of a Christian is that he's in his right mind – i.e. he has gained a new way of thinking. He has gained a new sense of purpose. He has gained a new world-view, as it were in which he now thinks in terms of glorifying Christ and serving Christ the way this demoniac did, by publishing the truth of Christ's power to save.

Oh that we would take the example of the demoniac to heart and make it our aim day by day as we're in this needy world of unsaved sinners to do all that we can to lead men and women to marvel at our Savior. Christ commands us in Mt 5:16 to *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* This is why a Christian should be industrious. This is why a Christian should be dependable. And if you can manifest those two things, initiative and dependability, then I guarantee you that in a day like ours you'll stand out. And if you'll manifest those virtues and speak unashamedly of Christ as the source of your motivation then you too will lead others to marvel.

Before we end this study I need to say a word about the quality or the nature of this phenomenon of marvel and astonishment. We've seen how Christ made men marvel and how we, as Christians, are to lead men to marvel. Consider finally that:

III. The Accomplishments of Marveling and Astonishment

We have seen in the course of this study that a number of classes of people marvelled and were astonished by Christ. We find, for example the classification of the multitudes:

- Mt 9:8 *But when the multitudes saw [it], they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*
- Mt 9:33 *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*

We also find the classification of Christ's disciples:

- Mt 21:20 *And when the disciples saw [it], they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!*
- Mr 10:24 *And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*

We know, of course, that there is a vast difference between the multitudes and Christ's disciples. His disciples believed in Him. His disciples followed Him. His disciples served

Him. The same could not be said about the multitudes. Even though they marvelled at Him and were astonished by Him they nevertheless rejected Him.

And what this teaches us is that marveling at Christ or being astonished by Christ is not the same as having faith in Christ. There's a single verse that I came across in the course of this word study that struck me as tragically ironic. We read in Mt 22:22 that *When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

Marvel and astonishment, then, will accomplish one of two things. It may strengthen your faith. I believe this is what was accomplished in the hearts of the disciples. When they marvelled and said among themselves *Behold what manner of man is this that even the wind and sea obey Him* – their astonishment contributed to their faith. They became all the more convinced that Christ was the Messiah and the Son of God.

This is what the believe wants in his own heart. *O let me see my Savior that I may marvel at who He is and what He's done. Let me behold Him in the sacred page that I may be moved to reverence and awe and that my confidence in Him may grow.*

This is the desirable accomplishment of marvel and astonishment. The other effect or accomplishment of marvel and astonishment will be to add to the weight of the unbeliever's condemnation.

How tragic will it be for those multitudes who marvelled at His words and who were astonished at His miracles who nevertheless left him and went their way? I believe marvel and astonishment will continue for the lost in hell. And especially will it continue for those who were so exposed to Christ and the gospel and yet in the end rejected Christ.

Try to imagine how astonished you'll be with yourself as you say to yourself – *I was so close. I was taught of Christ. I knew the gospel of Christ from the earliest days of my childhood. I had every advantage that so many others didn't have and yet here I am as an outcast from Christ suffering my own punishment for my sins when all along I knew of the One who bore the punishment for sinners.* One of the tortures of hell will be the marvel and astonishment suffered by those who were so near and yet rejected the gospel of Christ.

We have these two possible effects, then. Marvel and astonishment will either serve to increase your faith or will add to the weight of your condemnation. You may not feel that you know anything about marvel and astonishment now. It may be that you're rarely if ever effected by the preaching of Christ. Sadly that will change when you awaken to the reality of your lost condition when it's too late.

Let us, then, stand in awe of Christ to the saving of our souls and to the strengthening of our faith. Our Savior truly is amazing in all that He's done to bring us from an estate of sin and misery into an estate of salvation. May we be moved to solemn reverence before Him as we marvel at such love and grace and mercy that has been freely bestowed on poor, vile, and guilty sinners. And may we, in turn, be so taken up with our Savior that others will find cause in our lives to marvel at Him as well.