

October 27, 2019

The Miracles of Jesus
What Is Halloween?
Mark 7:24-30

Miracles were a large part of Jesus's earthly ministry. Webster defines a miracle as a surprising and welcomed event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. The miracles of Jesus are important because they underscored his message. That means, Jesus was not just a teacher or leader. He was God incarnate, who had divine power at his disposal. His miracles exposed God's priorities. The miracles of Jesus are found in all four Gospels. The first miracle Jesus performed was the changing of the water into wine in Cana. The last miracle Jesus performed was when Jesus restored the ear of the arresting soldier in the garden. Only the feeding of the multitude is found in all four Gospels. The miracles of Jesus can be grouped into four categories. The first category is Jesus' authority over nature. The second category is Jesus' exorcisms. The third category is Jesus' resurrections. The fourth category is Jesus' healings. In this sermon series, *The Miracles of Jesus*, we are looking at one miracle from each category.

Rasputin (1869-1916) is one of the most infamous names in Russian history. He was born in a Siberian village and had a religious conversion in 1897. He was called a Monk, but he never held an official office within the Russian Orthodox Church. However, he had powers beyond this world. He had healing powers, which caught the attention of the Russian Tsarina, Alexandra. She was desperate for a healing because her son, Alexei, the heir to the Russian throne, was a hemophiliac. Rasputin used his influence to his own advantage, creating some powerful enemies. On December 30, 1916, those enemies had enough. They laced his food with cyanide, but he was not affected. He drank three glasses of poisoned wine, but he was not affected. Then, Rasputin was shot in the chest. They thought he was dead, but he was not. His conspirators wrapped him in a blanket and dropped him into the Neva River. His body was found on New Year's Day 1917. The autopsy showed, Rasputin was shot three times. Where does a man get such power? It is not from this world. Many believe he was demon possessed. Do you believe in demon possession? That question challenges us. Our scripture reading for today is Mark 7:24-30. Let me call this message *What is Halloween?*

Mark 7:24-30 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."
²⁸ "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

²⁹ Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."
³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

1 John 1:5 says, "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*" That piece of scripture is my response to the dark holiday of Halloween." If you are ready to look at the dark side of Halloween say, "**Amen!**"

His name is Kolya. He was the second of three boys who came to our area for prosthetic legs from Dimtrov, Russia, which is northeast of Moscow. His story was truly a miracle. He came in a wheelchair and he left walking on his new legs. That did not happen in an instant. It took time and, during that period, he stayed at my house. Waiting for the next doctor's appointment took patience. It was a challenge to find things for him to do. One of the things he did was visit American schools in the area. Local teachers were open to his visits. One of the schools he visited was celebrating Halloween. He showed up just in time for the party. The students, and teachers, were dressed in costume. There was a mummy and a ghost. There was a vampire and a zombie. There was a monster and a boy covered in blood holding a plastic ax. The teacher was dressed like a witch. We thought Kolya would love it, but we were wrong. It was one of those cultural problems. Americans love Halloween, but that is not true of the Orthodox world, including Russia. Did you know only 5% of Russians observe Halloween? I tried to explain Halloween, but he didn't understand. His non-verbal communication asked the question, what is Halloween? That is not an easy question to answer. Consider these three sides of Halloween with me.

Halloween is a holiday! The history of Halloween can be traced back 2,000 years to ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. The Celts believed the dead could walk among the living one day annually, October 31. They would wear ghoulish masks so the unwanted visitors could not distinguish between the living and the dead. In North America, where there was a surplus of pumpkins, they carved them with scary faces to ward off spirits. Others offered sweets to appease the spirits. Ghosts, vampires, werewolves, witches and zombies have long been associated with the evil world. Halloween is a holiday.

Halloween is a big holiday in America. Did you know, according to the National Retail Federation, 68% of all Americans plan on celebrating Halloween? The average American will spend \$86.27 on Halloween. As a country we will spend \$3.2 billion on costumes, \$2.6 billion on candy, \$2.7 billion on decorations and \$390 million on greeting cards. 22% of all Americans are planning on visiting a haunted house and 44% of all Americans will carve a pumpkin. It is safe to say, in America, Halloween is not just a holiday. Halloween is a big holiday. Do you know anyone who doesn't pass out candy? If you will admit Halloween is a big holiday in America say, "**Amen!**" What is Halloween?

Halloween is sinister! This is the very sad truth. Halloween is not all fun and games. There is a very dark side to Halloween. Halloween is the most sacred day on the

Satanic calendar. Satanism has been part of our world for centuries. However, the source of modern-day Satanism can be traced back to one man, Anton LaVey (1930-1997). He authored several books to promote his dark world, *The Satanic Bible*, *The Satanic Rituals*, *The Satanic Witch*, *The Devil's Notebook* and *Satan Speaks!* I checked several years ago and at that time, those books were found within the county library system. Those books were vital in the creation of his new church, The Church of Satan.

The best way to explain The Church of Satan is that it runs contrary to the church of Jesus Christ. It is like a parallel universe where everything is opposite. Our congregations are called churches; their congregations are called covens. In churches, we strive to know and accept everyone. In covens, fellow members are unknown because their identity is hidden. In churches, we worship in public. In covens, they worship in private. Churches worship during the day. In covens, they worship in the middle of the night. In church, we talk about our eternal reward. In covens, they talk about temporary gain. In church, we sacrifice for strangers. In covens, they sacrifice and misuse strangers and those who are weaker. In church, we encourage and love. In covens, they intimidate and hate. In church, we worship Jesus. In covens, they worship Satan. Satanism is a sinister parallel universe. If you get nothing else out of this message, then accept this fact. Satanism is real and countless people are regularly being victimized. On Halloween, the holiest day on the Satanic calendar, Satan desires a human sacrifice. I believe, that is where some of those missing children have gone. There is a sinister side to Halloween. If the sinister side of Halloween upsets you say, **"Amen!"** What is Halloween?

That takes us to our Gospel reading for today. In find ourselves today in the seventh chapter of Mark. Jesus is in the vicinity of Tyre. That community is in present day Lebanon, north of Galilee. That fact is important for one reason. Jesus was extremely popular in Galilee, not so in other places. The smaller crowds gave Jesus an opportunity to teach the disciples. Demographically, the population seemed to be less Jewish and more Gentile. That is the case with the woman in the story. The author tells us she was Greek, born in Syria Phoenicia. She had heard of Jesus miraculous powers and knew this was an opportunity to save her daughter. Verse 25 says she was possessed by an evil spirit. She locates Jesus and begs the Master to save her daughter. In other words, she begs Jesus for an exorcism. At first, Jesus refuses to heal the daughter because the woman is a Gentile. In the end, Jesus exorcises the demon because of her great faith. Do you believe in demon possession?

The world struggles with this story and all other Biblical stories which deal with demon possession. The reason is we try to read the Bible like a science book. It is a book of faith. How do you translate demon possession in our modern world? Some say demon possession in the Bible is untreated seizures. Some say demon possession in the Bible is untreated anxiety. Some say demon possession in the Bible is untreated depression. Some say demon possession in the Bible is some other untreated mental illness. Some say demon possession is just that, demon possession. I believe demon possession does

exist. Sometimes, there is no other explanation. How do you understand demon possession in our modern world? However, demon possession in the Bible is more. Demon possession in the Bible is a reminder that our world is filled with sad people, who look to Jesus for help. Our world has a dark side where Satan is alive and well. What is Halloween? **Halloween is a reminder!**

On the last Sunday of October 2018, I preached a sermon called *The Dark Side of Halloween*. In that sermon I talked about a young woman I tried to help when I was in the Cleveland area. You may remember her story. Her name was Pat and she lived her life as a victim. As a child she would go to Canada for the annual family vacation. Her parents, both alcoholics, were drunk the entire trip. They entrusted her to an uncle. He wasn't an alcoholic, but he was a Satan worshipper. He exposed Pat to the worst things this world had to offer. She was raped countless times by a variety of men. She was photographed and was subject of child pornography. Years later, he would send those pictures to her in the mail, just to intimidate her. One night, she was even buried alive in a casket, with a small oxygen tube to keep her breathing. She told me on one occasion she saw Satan, himself. The outcome was predictable. Pat fractured in every possible way. She had six or seven different personalities. She came to me by way of her psychologist, who asked me to help her fix her Christian theology. Do you know what I did? Through the years, I went through the confirmation material seven times to help each personality. It was Pat who taught me about the dark side of Halloween. It has been over twenty-five years since I met with Pat, but I still find myself praying for her. I double up my prayers for Pat on Halloween, because Halloween is the holiest day on the Satanic calendar. On that day, they look for a human sacrifice and Pat didn't want to be the victim. Every Halloween she would hide in the Cleveland Mero Park system, alone in the woods.

I closed that message with a challenge, and I will challenge you again, to pray not just for Pat, but for all the victims in our society who are suffering silently, due to Satanism. It is a secret world that seldom gets exposed. It is a secret world, but it exists. I woman came to Jesus and begged for help. Her daughter was demon possessed and without Jesus there was no help. Somethings don't change. Countless victims are living in the dark world of Satanism. Without Jesus, they will remain in the dark. With Jesus, there is hope. 1 John 1:5 says, "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"