

Being Astonished By God

by John Edmiston

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Mark 7:37 ESV *And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

Luke 4:32 ESV *and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.*

Luke 5:9 ESV *For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,*

Luke 9:42-43 ESV *... But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. (43) And all were astonished at the majesty of God...*

Something has gone wrong if we are no longer astonished by God! His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8,9) and our minds cannot comprehend or understand Him (Romans 11:33-36). So His actions should leave us staggered with awe and wonder! A God who simply meets expectations is hardly God at all.

The ministry of Jesus is full of people who were surprised by what Jesus said, did or taught or by the miracles He performed or by the new ideas He brought to them. For instance when the paralyzed man on the pallet was healed (the one let down through the roof) people were astounded that Jesus could forgive sins:

Luke 5:24-26 EMTV *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, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." (25) Immediately he rose up before them, taking up the bed which he had been lying on, he went off to his own house, glorifying God. (26) And amazement gripped them all, and they were glorifying God, and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today!"*

Matthew adds the comment: **Matthew 9:8 EMTV** *Now when the crowds saw, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*

The gospel accounts are littered with words such as: 'marveled', 'surprised', 'astonished', 'perplexed', 'rejoiced' and 'glorified'. Jesus was never routine! The whole thing was extraordinary!

The Kingdom of God is a place of constant surprises – and they are good surprises! Satan ambushes us with evil but God overtakes us with good!

Deuteronomy 28:2 MKJV *And all these blessings shall come on you and overtake you, if you will listen to the voice of Jehovah your God.*

Isaiah 51:11 MKJV *Therefore the redeemed of Jehovah shall return and come with singing into Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their head. Gladness and joy shall overtake them; sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

God is incomprehensibly good! God even blesses sinners and forgives the wicked and covers their iniquities justifying the ungodly without them doing any works:

Romans 4:5-8 MKJV *But to him not working, but believing on Him justifying the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (6) Even as David also says of the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works, (7) saying, "Blessed are those whose lawlessnesses are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; (8) blessed is the man to whom the Lord will in no way impute sin."*

God wants to astonish the angels and other heavenly beings by the sheer magnitude of His grace and forgiveness towards us who were once dead in our trespasses and sins:

Ephesians 2:4-7 ASV *but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), (6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: (7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus:*

God wants to astonish the world with the changes He will make in your life. And God also wants you to be astonished at His grace towards you! Your Christian life is not ordinary, instead it is an extraordinary act of grace! God purchased your salvation at great cost.

If we are bored with God it is our own fault. Like the Israelites in the wilderness we want the presents not the Presence. The mystics are never bored. They may be tormented souls, even agonized souls - but they are not dull souls. The disciples who decided to tag along with Jesus and to find out who He was and who suffered with Him and left all to follow Him – these were precisely the ones who became most delighted with Him and who got to see all the miracles. On the other hand the fickle crowds in John 6 moved elsewhere once they realized that Jesus was not going to give them any more free bread.

Job found God to be dangerous and unpredictable and Job's friends could not figure out what was going on either. Everyone in the book of Job wants an orderly God. But at the end of the book YHWH appears in the whirlwind and forcefully tells Job that He is far beyond human comprehension and will not be neatly contained by

anyone's theology. God may not be predictable but He is just and in the end Job is restored double.

The inclusion of the Gentiles in the Kingdom astonished even Christian Jews: **Acts 10:45 ASV** *And they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

This astonishment soon turned into a controversy that raged for over thirty years (from AD 38 to AD 70) simply because God had done something that was utterly incomprehensible to one section of the Church.

God does not amaze us for our own entertainment. Entertainment implies a sort of comfortable astonishment that fits our personal likes and dislikes. But God has absolutely no intention of leaving our worldly minds intact! He amazes us so that we may learn and grow and appreciate His glory! Jesus constantly confused His disciples – for their own good! They were bewildered by the Cross, disbelieving of the Resurrection and still hoping for a Jewish revolution when Pentecost arrived.

God still astonishes His people today: A drunkard gets saved, the local atheist repents, the cancer patient on her deathbed is suddenly and gloriously healed, the demon is cast out with a word, a revival breaks out in a most unlikely place.

I am also astonished at God's patience and restraint. How He allows this world to continue doing what it does, is quite beyond me! But it was not beyond the apostle Peter who had personally experienced the grace of His Lord:

2 Peter 3:9 MKJV *The Lord is not slow concerning His promise, as some count slowness, but is long-suffering toward us, not purposing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

God wants to do astonishing things in you, with you, around you and for you! But this will require great faith. Sarah having a child in her old age was astonishing – but it took faith. As did the parting of the Red Sea, the collapse of the walls of Jericho, and the victories of Gideon, David and Jehoshaphat. God astonishes when we believe. And if we seldom see the astonishing perhaps it is because we seldom believe God for the impossible!

When Peter, James and John reluctantly obeyed Jesus and set out into the deep and threw their just-washed nets back in the water for a catch they were 'astonished at the size of the catch'. This was the obedience of faith leading to the miracle of God!

Similarly it was when the perplexed disciples obeyed and started breaking the loaves and fishes and handing them out that the astonishing feeding of the five thousand took place.

In both cases their initial expectations, based on reason and deduction, were low - "we caught no fish" and "how can we feed so many.." yet they obeyed and God supplied.

God is powerful! God will do far more than we can ask, think or expect! Let us launch out into the deep and cast our nets in faith so that we may be astonished by the catch!

Ephesians 3:20-21 MKJV *Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.*

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