

Miracles and Power Encounters in Mark 4: 35-40 and 5:1-20 in The Context of Deliverance Ministries in Nigerian Churches

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Abstract: Miracles and Power encounters are examined and found to be indispensable in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. His birth, life and ministry are all surrounded, inevitably by miracles and power encounters. The study pondered on two events of miracles and power encounters in the gospel of Mark and assessed the disturbing and worrisome circumstances of misconceptions and their noticeable mutilation in some Nigerian Churches in recent times. Consequently, this paper further examined the attitudes of Nigerian Christians to miracles and deliverance ministries and considered the impacts of miracles and power encounters on the prospects and growth of Christian ministries in Nigeria. The paper; which adopts historical, exegetical and empirical observations as approaches; opined that miracles and power encounters should be preserved and disseminated as vital cultural heritages of the Gospel of Christ which could be sustained and developed as means of encouraging Christian discipleship and not only as means of salvation in the gospel messages. The paper concluded by recommending a broad based scrutiny of their usages to ascertain their proper utilization for the expansion of Christ's kingdom and not for religious propaganda.

Keywords: Miracles, Power, Encounter, Deliverance, Magic, Ministry

INTRODUCTION

One of the common features in most contemporary churches in Nigeria today is the practice of miracles and power manifestations that have become so prevalent, especially among the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches. These phenomena in the contemporary Christian churches include the issues of deliverance sessions or services that are perceived in almost every Nigerian Christian ministry since over a decade ago. Although this practice characterized the ministry of Jesus and his apostles because he demonstrated his authority over natures, sicknesses, powers and principalities of darkness throughout his earthly ministry as tools used for the well-being of the society and for faith development. The synoptic gospels all illustrate Jesus' power in different areas such as power over nature, power over demons, power over infirmities, and power over death. As observed by Oderinde[1], at the center of what Jesus said and did is the kingdom of God which is not only a hope for the future but also God's power at work now, making a new way of being human a reality in the present.

Miracles and power encounters have never at any point in time attracted the fame it now commands among Christian ministries in Nigeria to some as the major evidence of the proof of their calling to prophetic

and evangelistic ministries of the church. The quests for miracles and power encounters by most Nigerian Christians could be termed highly excessive. Therefore, almost every Pastor, Prophet and Reverend even of the mainstream or orthodox churches seek for "powers" and "anointing" to be able to perform miracles and exercise power during religious gatherings. This, perhaps, is responsible for why all emphases are almost on miracles and deliverances in most churches in Nigerian nation. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine miracles and power encounters in the ministry of Jesus as recorded in Mark 4:35-40 and Mark 5:1-10 with the aim of evaluating the challenges of the manifestations of these two spiritual and physical duties to the deliverance ministries in Nigerian churches and the society at large. This paper also seeks to explore their meaningful usages for the development and growth of the Church as a spiritual spectrum.

Miracles and Power Encounters in Mark 4: 35-40 and 5:1-20

Although miracles are hard for people to accept today because of probable distortion or mutilation by some supposed miracle and deliverance ministers in the world in recent times. However, these two passages make it clear that Jesus is Lord not only over his church but also over all creation. Ringe [2]

observed that as Mark tells the story in chapter 4: 35-40 of his gospel, it is more than a simple report of another wondrous deed attributed to Jesus but he typically weaved the story and offers us two theological options that give this story pastoral power no matter our context. Details of the story's place in the Gospel narrative and the specific language of the text provide the foundation for both emphases.

The first is that, theologically it shows Jesus possessing the power to overcome evil and danger, coming on the heels of a collection of parables about God's reign or empire in Mark 4:1-34 [2]. This means that every miracle performed by Jesus Christ was a pointer to something; the Kingdom of God, that is the perfect reign of God. It was not a proof of his Sonship because during Jesus' times the act of doing the extraordinary with nature and physical orders were common among magicians. Then, Ringe [2] observed how Mark moves into a series of stories in which Jesus himself mediates that power to overcome the threatening chaos of the sea (4:35-41), demons (5:1-20), illness (5:24b-34) and even death (5:21-24a, 35-43). In each case, Jesus engages in a power struggle with forces that could destroy life. He "rebukes" the wind and orders the sea (4:39). He shouts at the demons (5:8). His "power" is engaged to cure the woman's illness (5:30) and both the wind and the sea obey his commands (4:41). The story of Jesus' power over the storm is the main event of the collection of stories. By mis-labeling the lake as the "sea" *thalassa*, Ringe noted that Mark evokes the memory of God's power that liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea (2009). Furthermore, as God delivered humankind from the threatening chaos symbolized by the sea in some Psalms such as 65:7; 68:22; 89:9; 95:5; 104:7; 106:9; 107:23-29), so now does Jesus [2].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Miracles and power encounters in Christianity is a subject that has caused more arguments and misconceptions than just about other issues in recent times. This paper considers bringing out the many academic opinions and concepts on the subject matter. This research is based on hypotheses such as: what are the relationship and differences between miracle and magic? Why is it that some religions believe that miracles are from God and that magic, even, if it is performing the same feat, is evil? Or how and where can we classify Jesus' many miracles and power encounters in the synoptic gospels? And how can we explain the quests for miracles and power encounters manifestations in some Christian ministries today?

Drunvalo [3] opined that in the outer world of the senses, there is no difference between magic and miracles because both break the laws of physics and influence or change the reality in some manner. He asserts further that the incident or event of Jesus

walking on water as a miracle or magic is a concept that has to do with the individual's relationship to Christianity [3]. To Drunvalo that event was regarded as a miracle by many Christians because it was Jesus who did it and it could be seen as a magic if it was an act performed by just ordinary person. He opined that it is regarded as a miracle because Jesus was involved in it and anybody accepting it as such does so because of his or her relationship with Jesus [3]. To Drunvalo and scholars in this school of thoughts, both magic and miracle possess the potential to alter the outer world through the exercise of the higher consciousness of the performer.

In his assessment of the relationship between miracle and magic, Digger [4] observed four differences. First, he opined that magic can be used just for fun while Miracles are not just "for fun" but for passing an important message about divine presence in the affairs of human beings. Digger [4] said further that miracles are visible signs that a person was acting or speaking on God's behalf (Exodus 3:12-4:14). Second, magic can be used to deceive while Miracles, on the other hand, are never used for deception [4]. Miracles are used to teach important spiritual lessons (like when Elijah asked God to perform a miracle on Mount Carmel to show that Baal was a false god—1 Kings 18:20-40). Miracles also are used to help people (like when Jesus healed a blind man—John 9:1-41). Further more, Digger observed that magic is not "real" because when a magician makes a woman "disappear," she doesn't really disappear into thin air. But miracles are real, for instance, when Moses stretched his rod across the Red Sea and caused the waters to part so the Israelites could walk across on dry land, it was no trick. Moses (through God's power) really did what the Bible says he did (read Exodus 13:14-22). When Pharaoh's army followed the Israelites, and Moses caused the waters to come back together to destroy the Egyptians, the soldiers and horses really died (read Exodus 13:26-28). Fourth, Digger noted that magic is intended to entertain us and show us the magician's talent. That is not true of miracles because the purpose never was to entertain an audience or to demonstrate how talented a person is. They are performed in order to show people the way to heaven.

Jesus' Miracles in the Gospels: A Critical Study

According to Elwell [5], the miracles of Jesus are the supernatural deeds attributed to Jesus Christ in the gospels narratives. Only some of these miracles are recorded in the synoptic gospels and in St. John's Gospel (John 21:25). Henrik Van der Loos [6] grouped these supernatural deeds into four categories as cures, exorcisms, resurrection of the dead and control over nature. During the time of Jesus, miracles were widely believed. This is because there were some Roman gods and demigods such as Heracles, Asclepius and Isis of Egypt who were believed to have healed the sick people

and brought people back to life or have raised the people who died mysteriously (Wendy, 1999). Scholars like Wendy [7] opined that mortal man, if sufficiently famous and virtuous, could do all that Jesus did in the gospel narratives. Wendy and his associates based their arguments on myths about philosophers like Pythagoras and Empedocles who claimed to have calmed the storms at the sea, chased pestilences in their days and who were regarded as gods and supernatural beings[7]. Also, the achievements of the first century Apollonius of Tyana, which occurred after Jesus Christ, were part of examples adopted by some Christians in the third century to oppose Christ's divinity and Sonship[7]. This is why Watson [8] felt that the gospel of John was written against this background of Hellenistic and Jewish belief in miracles and other wondrous acts and simply called them signs which is a term explicitly used by him to describe Jesus' supernatural deeds in the perception of mysterious acts to validate his credentials as a divine wise man.

However, among the traditional Christians, Jesus' miracles were believed to be historical events and they are perceived as miraculous works which are to be seen as important part of his life which attest to his divinity and his dual natures as God and man[9]. Scholars such as Lockyer, Bernard and William who belong to this school of thought see Jesus' experiences of hunger, weariness and death as evidences of his humanity and the miracles he performed as evidences of his divinity[3]. To this school of thought, the miracles of Jesus are not just mere acts of power of omnipotence but they are to be viewed as mighty works of love and expression of mercy performed to show compassion for sinful and suffering humanity and not to be viewed as a means of inflicting fear and awe on the people by the omnipotence. This is why the catholic Encyclopedia quoting John 20:30 states that the miracles of Jesus Christ were performed for two reasons which are: first for the purpose of manifesting God's glory and second for the purpose of presenting evidential values in support of Jesus divinity and divine son ship. This is why the traditional Christian interpretation of Jesus' miracles and power encounters is that they are vehicles for Christ's messages[10].

Though, the liberal Christians place less emphasis on miraculous events associated with Jesus Christ than on his teachings, but they hold firmly to it that they are metaphorical narratives for the understanding of God's power [11]. David Hume [12] a famous Scottish philosopher, argued that any evidence for miracles was outweighed by the possibility that those who described them were deceiving themselves or others. But Ehrman Bart [13] described Jesus' miracles as events that go against the usual way nature works and that historians find it difficult to confirm or refute the reports of Jesus' supernatural deeds.

In his own assertion, Drunvalo [3] believes that magic is when a man goes through some processes already learned and still has his ego to alter the physical worldly order or to make some super natural events come to manifestation. He therefore sees a great danger in magic because the performer (magician) still has his ego and this makes him to be dangerous to himself and also to others because the magic is controlled by a person's ego. Drunvalo [3] however observed that when a performer of a supernatural event passes safely beyond the ego and self-desire or wish but submitting to the wish and desire of the supernatural Being, it becomes a miracle and not a magic. This is because it is an event performed by a person who is devoid of ego or a state of self-realization or consciousness but one who has merged with God in submission to his wish and desire. It is a miracle because the act was done by God and not the performer. This stage is what Drunvalo [3] called a transformation from Polarity consciousness to Unity consciousness. He opined that the big difference is that magic is focused on Will of the performer but miracle comes from the Heart of God. This will enable us to justify the many miracles that Christianity and many Christians live for in our country today. In his own opinion, Beecham [14] believes that there is no clear difference between magic, miracles and power encounters performed by personalities such as were mentioned earlier and the supernatural deeds performed by Jesus in the synoptic gospels.

In the synoptic, the word *dunameis* (Greek) means mighty works, is most frequently used and they are regarded as acts of power which reveal God's purpose in Christ in the world by Christian theologians [15]. Raphael observed further that miracles and power encounters in the synoptic gospels are regarded as signs of the immediate presence of God amongst His people. Like other miracles of healing and raising up the dead, the Birth narrative, Passion and Resurrection narratives can be seen as the mighty works to which the other mighty works complement [15].

The gospels is meant for the deliverance of the oppressed as Jesus' Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:16, reveals. He also commissioned his disciples to go and preach the gospel with "these signs following –to cast out demons, to heal the sick and trample upon scorpions and adders and to drink deadly things unharmed (Matt. 28:19ff; Mk.16:15ff). Hence, without miracles attending the word, Christianity will make no impact in Africa, since the African because of her pre-Christian background cannot conceive of any religion without power [15]. According to Ajayi [16] reiterating Jesus major purpose for coming to the world, stated that Jesus clearly rests everything on deliverance as he read and confirmed the fulfillment of a scripture in the synagogue at Capernaum. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken

hearted, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...” (Luke.4:18-19). In the synoptic gospel Jesus refused to give a miraculous sign to prove his authority. But in Acts 2:22, Luke employs three Greek words to describe Jesus` ministry: “Jesus of Nazareth a man approved of God among you by miracles (*dunamis*) and wonder (*teras*) and signs (*semeion*).....” [15].

The word `wonder` is used only twice in the synoptic, both reporting the same message of Jesus and then only to refer to the miraculous works of the false christ and false prophets who would come towards the of the age (Matt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22). Jesus saw his miracles as signs confirming his divine identity. Right from the outset, he refused to use the spectacular and miraculous deeds to attract followers. Jesus did not want people to flock after him because of his miracles or because they want to get healed. He deliberately commanded people not to tell anyone about their healing [17].

The Rise of Deliverance Ministry in Nigeria

The emergence of new churches and other new Christian Movements in Nigeria is unprecedented. At present Nigeria is being spotlighted as the country with the highest number of churches in Africa. This is more so in the major cities of the southern part of the country. Hence churches, prayer houses and deliverance ministries are said to be a major industry in the geo-political extraction of the country. Churches exist in family houses, uncompleted buildings, warehouses, and in any available space [18]. In the same vein Jibromah [19] opined that the popularity and spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria hinged on some factors among these are the high rate of political position seekers, insecurity, diseases, demonic attacks, corruption and violence. Pentecostals emphasize` `spiritual warfare`` and power to battle demonic influences which has a special meaning in a society where occult, ritual, crimes, killing and kidnapping occupy the News paper headlines along with gang violence. Hence, this brand of Christianity offer many solutions from a “superior God who can deal with demons and witches and by various supernatural beings” [19].

Buttressing this point further, Dada [20,p-99] asserted that the prosperity gospel perhaps was offered as a panacea for the harsh socio-economic condition, quoting Okey and Ndibe, by stating that:

In their promise of deliverance from mundane problems, spiritual sects touch a nerve in the contemporary Nigeria mood. A society stretched on the rack of ignorance, disease and poverty becomes easily seduced by the brandishments of functional

utilitarian religion...They expect to be shielded

From witchcraft, from hunger, from sickness...etc.

The exponents of deliverance ministry in Nigeria claim to have received spiritual powers and experiences. They go ahead to exercise the spiritual powers without recourse to any authority. In other words, the use of the Holy Spirit under different guise in today`s Nigeria takes place without anybody`s discernment and approved of such claims. The desire to attain and remain in power has actually spurred many to engage in “magic”. Miracle done with powers of Satan has reduced the reputation of many churches today. Gone are those days when churches command the respect in the society as a residual custodian of moral values.

Miracle and Power Encounters in Nigerian Churches and Ministries Today: A Theological Assessment

In the synoptic gospels, there are many supernatural deeds or acts performed by Jesus Christ which are called miracles in Christianity. Likewise, this study observes that there is a shift in many Christian ministries from preaching God`s word to the manifestation of supernatural deeds and wondrous acts in recent times. This has got to an alarming stage that scholars begin to wonder whether Christian ministry is all about the manifestation of miracles and power encounters alone. This observation has motivated researches in to this sudden shift and arouse curiosity and desire to know where to classify these supernatural deeds that are manifested and displayed on Television stations either as “miracles” or as “magic”.

Some Neo-Pentecostal movements and Ministries believe majorly in the manifestation of miracles that look forensic in nature using diverse methods such as conjuring through the use of hands, heads, legs and any other part of the leader`s body in the demonstration of the supernatural deeds. It has been observed that less attention is given to biblical exegesis in most Churches in recent times because almost all the time of worship is devoted to the manifestation of miracles and power encounters. The focus and purpose of attending services are on what to receive from God and less attention is given to what is God saying to me through His words.

It has been observed by Marcus Chukwu [21] that miracles are seriously competing with modern medicines in Nigeria. Marcus Chukwu, a Nurse in a hospital owned by an Anglican church in Ibadan, a city in the South western part of Nigeria, observed that When patients are seeking medical help, and they know there is nothing left to do, then the next step is to

introduce to them God; even a Muslim, in that situation, 70 percent of them will go to church.

Some ministers of God in many Christian ministries today are not paying much attention to the miracle of Christ's salvation of the souls of their followers. Miracles and power encounters are used mostly to de-emphasize the importance of salvation in many Christian gatherings. Repentance from sin is gradually becoming a rare topic and purpose of having a personal contact with Jesus Christ in some Christian assemblies. This is why Terry [22], sharing his experiences in one of his gospel crusades in Nigeria, observed that;

"..... as a "Spirit filled" pastor I believe that when people encountered the glory, experienced miracles, received prophetically, and were touched by the Father's love, they would have changed lives... and we would see revival.

But it hasn't happened in Nigerian Churches! People have regular, real, power encounters with God, but never change their ways! In fact, some go deeper into sin! (I won't tell the stories here, but they are astonishing!)

In the last few years I would go home from our "power church" utterly unsatisfied (and I was the preacher). I know many of you experience exactly the same thing! We've had it all! Miracles, prophetic worship, anointing, glory and signs! What is this deep dissatisfaction, and even sorrow, in the midst of an awesome works of God?"

Prophet Isaiah gives a clue by saying that:

"Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of assemblies... I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly...Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your evil doings from before my eyes...."(Isaiah1:13&14KJV).

This paper believes that scholars may apply Isaiah 1:13&13 to the quest for the understanding of miracles and power encounters displayed in churches and ministries in Nigeria because this passage was written to a group of people who were immersed in their uncontrollable desire for signs and wonders like Nigerian Christians but without been conscious of the need for holiness and righteousness. This is why Terry observed that Lord of the Church; which is Jesus Christ; is growing weary of worship and iniquity mixed together. It is time for a total change in the church! In the New Testament, healing, miracles and preaching the good news of the Kingdom always ended in a call to

repentance. Across Nigeria there are churches and ministries everywhere! Signs and wonders advertised by power ministries, churches, assemblies and religious camps. It is observed that everywhere in Nigeria there are more signs, wonders and power encounters advertised as Christian events than any product in Radio and Television stations. Christians are everywhere, miracles and power encounters are everywhere, and corruption is everywhere! They said many times "the church of Nigeria is a power church" and the people are not living as salt and light. It is also observed that 70% of the government officials are Christians living on miracles and power encounters in their worship assemblies but the society is filled with injustice, misuse of political power, kidnapping of innocent citizens bribery and scandal. All these made a deep impact on this study and therefore asserts that the need of the church in Nigeria is not more miracles and power encounters, but honest repentance as the highest miracle.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that if we can enlarge our churches in Nigeria the way they are; have Christians in positions in government at all levels, and experience more of the miracles and power of God, have revival accompanied with miracles and power encounters, there is the need for holiness and righteousness as the reflection of the real purpose of Christian worship. The realization that we in the "power filled, Spirit anointed, apostolic, prophetic, miracle working church" have had spiritual power without repentance negates the purposes of Jesus' miracles and power encounters in the synoptic gospels.

At this stage of nation building when the products of Nigerian society manifest abysmally strange characters ranging from crimes to moral deficiency and conflicts in all spheres of our life as a nation, Nigerian religious leaders should employ the use of these miracles and power encounters to bring people to honest and sincere repentance. There is a total collapse of our value system in Nigeria today. Religious, political and traditional leaders and institutions, which are primary custodians of values, have all been compromised. No thanks to military incursion which made corruption as a state policy. Most of our political office holders have proved themselves to be chronic looters. Our educational system turns out junks due to neglect. Even the last resort, Churches and Mosques, have not felt better due to these apparent reasons. Salvation messages that touch people's life and cause them to repent are rare commodities in our churches today. Miracles done with questionable powers have reduced the reputation of many churches. Gone were those days when churches command the respect in the society as a residual custodian of moral virtues. However, real heaven backed, salvation-laded, heart-touching miracles, still happen. This paper therefore

submits that salvation is the highest and most cherished miracle that Nigerian churches and ministries should embrace and not an exercise of boosted ego by some performers of mysterious deeds that are devoid of God's approval. This paper submits that churches in Nigeria have a unique contribution to make to the society; part of which is to release God's power into life situations of their members through genuine miracles and power encounters. The paper is aware of the slogan amongst Nigerian Christians that "miracles are for today" but cautions the exercise of the mysterious power of God to express joy of being in the presence of God and not for the display of personal ability or desire. Among the list of Spirit gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul included healing, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, discernment of spirits and the working of miracles. These are gifts given to the church for the purpose of ministry. They are given freely by the Spirit to whoever will desire them.

Power evangelism, power encounter or signs and wonders are not the latest fads in church growth principles. They are biblical models demonstrated by God who proves His words by His deeds. Chia [23] was correct in affirming that experiencing God's power may be both pleasant and impressive, but only a commitment to God through Christ really saves. This study therefore, does not encourage people to chase after signs and miss God in the process. Neither does it want to deprive people of experiencing the miracle working power of God in their lives.

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