



May 10, 2009

Coming To A Rust Stain Near You

On April 30, as a griddle was being cleaned in a restaurant in Calexico, California, a stain was discovered that is said to resemble the virgin Mary. The event was later affirmed, and attested, to as a genuine miracle by a group of masked Mexican wrestlers in the area for another event. While reading about this I did some research and ran across an article stating that the Pope was declaring “Holy War” on fake Mary sightings. Who is able to certify that something like this is genuine? The belief is that once such a sighting is made, the one to whom this has appeared, or the group, town etc., will be blessed. In a related article however there was a notation that with all blessings there is a price to be paid. I suppose my statement that every silver lining has a cloud would fit this. Mary has been sighted in rust stains on a water tower in Fostoria, Ohio, seen in cornflakes, grilled cheese sandwiches and coffee stains on a reporters desk in the Washington D.C. area and has been preserved and sold on E-Bay. Why? The first thing that comes to mind is the reality of the human mind being inclined toward superstition. One of the characteristics of the scriptures is that they make no mystery out of the fact that the miracles that were performed were the work of God. The Lord may have acted through a variety of agents, including humans, but it was God who performed the miracle. Some examples of the superstitious nature of humans can be seen in the scriptures in events such as the worship of the brazen serpent in the days of Hezekiah (**2 Kng 18.4**), carrying the ark of the covenant into battle without being instructed to do so by God (**1 Sam 4.3-11**) and the disciples thinking that Christ was a ghost when he came to them on the water (**Matt 14.25-26**). In each of the cases listed here the superstitious misunderstandings were based on ignorance and sometimes desperation. The Israelites thought that bringing the Ark of the Covenant into their camp would summon the power of God. They failed to see that the Ark was not power of God but was a figure set in place as a reminder of God’s presence and power. The children of Israel mistakenly saw the brazen serpent as a healer because this had been the instrument by which the Lord had healed those who were bitten by fiery serpents that God sent among them (**Num 21.6-9**). The power that healed was the power of God. The condition for that healing was that they had to look on the serpent if they were bitten and they would live. God utilized this as a means of saving those from the punishment that they had brought on themselves but there was a

purpose. The serpent was a figure of Christ and the Lord brings this out several times in the New Testament. **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3.14-15)**. Mortal beings living in a physical world have a hard time grasping the nature of the scriptures and the power of God. The scriptures assure us that God is with us if we are faithful to him (**Heb 13.6**). When times are hard or situations arise that cause us to question what we believe in there is a tendency to become overwhelmed with the cares of the world. Christ warned about this in the parable of the sower (**Luke 8.5-15**). In such times one may search for assurance and confidence. None of us like to face an unknown future. In this country we have been so abundantly blessed that any threat to our lifestyle brings about great fear. World events cause concern and worry and questions about God arise everywhere. So what do we do? We see things that appear to comfort, or scare us. What is the purpose of these things? The miracles that we read about in the scriptures were not common and not performed for just any reason. They were brought about by God for a specific purpose. In the New Testament we find that the miracles were specifically for confirmation of the word that was being spoken by the apostles and inspired teachers and preachers. Without that confirmation there would be little credibility to what was being stated. God did not intend for these things to continue and indicates that there was a time when they would stop. As Paul states, **“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” (1 Cor 13.9-10)**. This statement is made at the end of Paul’s discourse on the misunderstanding of spiritual gifts that the Corinthians had. The real perfection was not in the miracles but in the revelation. Peter tells us that this has been revealed (**2 Pet 1.3**) and Jude indicates that it was done only once (**Jude 3**). In search of knowledge, wisdom, guidance and comfort, many miss the true miracle of God’s word, preserved by the Lord for all time. Instead of searching grilled cheese, coffee and rust stains for answers, open your Bible.

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