

The Miracles Of Jesus

The 2001

POWER



Lectures

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B.J. Clarke
Lectureship Director

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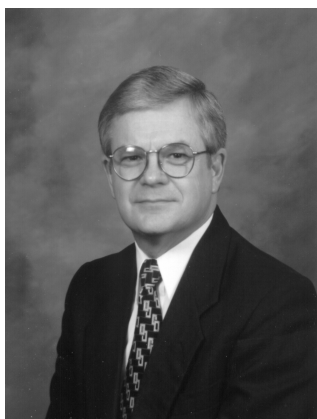
Dedication

The concept of giving honor unto whom honor is due, is exceedingly Biblical (Rom. 13:7). This is particularly true when it comes to the men that we honor with this year's dedication. The apostle Paul wrote Timothy, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17). Of course, there has never been a perfect man on earth, save Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, although no elder on earth can make the claim of perfection, it is a fact that some elders distinguish themselves by "ruling well."

We scarcely have to be reminded that there is a leadership crisis in the Lord's church today. So many of the problems we are battling in the church today can be traced back in their origin to poor, ineffective, and often unscriptural elders. Because the problems are so widespread it is tempting for faithful and godly elders to feel like they are the only ones left who are trying to do what is right. Thankfully, there is still a righteous remnant of godly elders who have not bowed the knee to the compromising forces of our time.

The men to whom this year's book is dedicated are among those elders who "rule well." They would be the first to acknowledge that they are not perfect, but having been privileged to travel a bit, I would place them at the head of the class of those elders who are conscientiously trying to do the Lord's will in the Lord's way. They have always encouraged me to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. They are not afraid to stand up for what is right, even if it does raise the voices of criticism. I have never felt as if I had to lead them by the hand if anything was going to get done. They are self-starters, who take the initiative to seek the wayward sheep of the flock. They are truly worthy of double honor.

Those who know them best find it easy to “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Thus, it is a pure joy, and genuine privilege to dedicate this year’s 2001 lectureship book to the elders of the Southaven church of Christ.



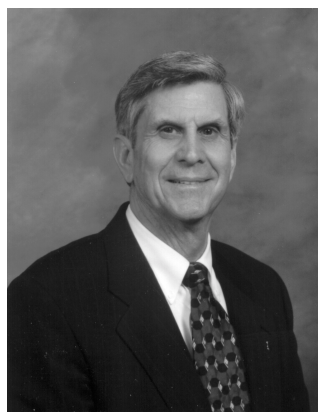
Larry Everson



Con Lambert



Bill Pierce



Coleman Simpson

Acknowledgments

It just would not be appropriate to send this book forth without some mention of appreciation to those who helped it come to fruition. In fact, one of the chapters in this volume discusses the ten lepers, nine of which, after receiving such a great blessing from the Lord, just kept on walking without even stopping to say “Thank you.” I do not want to imitate their spirit.

First of all, I wish to thank each and every speaker who gave of themselves to take time to research, and write the manuscripts that make up this book. I can assure you that, even with trying to pay their expenses, and a small honorarium, we cannot adequately compensate our speakers for the investment of their time.

Secondly, once again I owe a debt of gratitude to my friend and brother in Christ, Robin Smith. This young man has once again contributed immeasurably to this volume by working his schedule around so that he could assist me. I have appreciate his help every year, but even more this year. The countless hours he has spent typesetting the book, often coming in after a full day of work, will always be appreciated by me, and by everyone who profits from reading this volume.

Special thanks to Geraldine Chaney, who has been my secretary for over 10 years now. As always, her efficient and last minute assistance came in handy. Also, thanks to Francis Fairley who deserves far more credit than he gets for all that he does with the electronic side of publishing the lectureship books and materials! Thanks to Karen Oglesby and Shannon Vawter, as well, for putting the finishing touches on the book, and getting it ready to print!

Last, but most certainly not least, I wish to thank my physical family: Tish, Daniel, Holly and Michael. Your help and understanding support is amazing! I love you.

Foreword

We believe that this year's lectureship theme is a perfect complement to last year's study on the Parables of Jesus. In a study of the parables of our Lord we are awed by His words; in a study of the miracles of Jesus we are awed by His works. The words of Jesus were so extraordinary that His hearers knew thereby that Jesus was also extraordinary. When Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount, "the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). His Word was so astonishing because it was with power (Luke 4:32). The officers who were supposed to capture Jesus returned empty-handed, exclaiming "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). The parables of our Lord prove this to be the case.

It is equally true that the miracles of Jesus proved Him to be no ordinary man. In fact, it wasn't just His words that astonished the multitudes--it was also His works. Matthew 13:54 reveals that, after delivering a number of parables, Jesus came into His own country and "He taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, 'Whence hath this man this wisdom, **and these mighty works?**'" (emp. mine, BJC).

The mighty works that Jesus did incited a lively discussion as to His true identity. Some thought Him to be the Messiah; others said he was mad. No one had ever performed the quantity and quality of the miracles which Jesus did. Nicodemus correctly concluded: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Indeed, this book will remind you, or persuade you for the very first time that Jesus is the Christ! (John 20:31). It is so encouraging to serve such a powerful God!

--B. J. Clarke

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CHAPTER 1

Did The Miracles of Jesus Really Happen?

Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

IT IS ONCE AGAIN a great joy to be speaking on the annual **POWER** Lectures. B. J. continues to do a marvelous job in his work here, evidenced in part by planning the great themes and lessons for this event. The elders here at Southaven continue to provide solid, faithful leadership and have added sound men to their number, while the membership here continues to support good works and sound doctrine. This church is well spoken of by elders, preachers, and congregations in our brotherhood who seek to stand in the old paths.

Circumstances the past few months have altered the presentation I had hoped to make on the above topic, but I pray that what you find on these pages will be useful to you in answering the question, "Did the miracles of Jesus really happen?" The lesson will actually deal with the theme of miracles in general, but by extension certainly applies to every miracle of Jesus.

To Believe Or Not Believe

Can people in today's scientific world believe in miracles? If there are examples of extraordinary phenomena that science cannot explain, how can

we distinguish a genuine miracle from a hoax or a legend? Given that miracle stories proliferated in the ancient world, is it not more likely that the Gospel writers were simply portraying Jesus as yet another divine wonder-worker, deifying their heroes as so many Greeks and Romans had done?...Can we really believe in Jesus stilling a storm, multiplying the loaves and fishes, walking on the water, or raising the dead? What about all the similar legends from antiquity associated with other religious figures that no one takes seriously as historical fact?¹

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher who would have answered, “No,” to all the questions in the quote above which relate to the possibility of Jesus’ working miracles. Hume’s arguments against the possibility of the Biblical miracles being true are still among the most quoted today. Some of his arguments are modified or refined by later philosophers, like Anthony Flew,² but one can hardly read a discussion on whether miracles really happened without seeing Hume’s name. Hume began his work with this claim:

I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful for as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies [extraordinary events, TJC] be found in all history, sacred and profane.³

This lesson will deal with Hume’s basic arguments, as well as touch on arguments made by others who deny that miracles are possible. Whether Hume succeeded in his claim to prove that miracles are “superstitious delusion” you will have to judge from a consideration of his arguments.

Are there compelling reasons to study whether miracles are possible, particularly the miracles centered around Jesus Christ? Does it make a difference what we believe about whether Christ performed miracles or was raised from the dead? The simple answer is that it can make an eternal difference!

[T]he whole question of the supernatural has a serious impact on biblical Christians of all stripes. For historic evangelical Christianity is at its heart thoroughly based in the Scripture, which is filled with miraculous events. Indeed, the Bible itself cannot be a supernatural revelation, as it claims to be, unless there are supernatural acts. Neither can we trust the Gospels to provide reliable information about Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith, since they are replete with miraculous events repugnant to the modern mind.

Indeed, since the credibility of Christianity rests on the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:12-19), the whole of the orthodox Christian faith crumbles if miracles do not occur. If historic biblical Christianity is to survive and make sense to the modern mind, it is necessary to provide a reasonable explanation of the supernatural. Apart from the credibility of the biblical account of miracles, we can bid farewell to orthodox Christianity. Such is the challenge before us.⁴

If Biblical miracles are impossible, so is the whole Christian system.

As will become clear, we are not discussing the claims of miracles occurring in our present day. That will be discussed elsewhere in this book. Our concern is (1) to demonstrate if it is reasonable to believe Biblical miracles did happen; (2) to respond to some of the more forceful arguments against miracles; and (3) to clearly delineate the consequences of believing in or disbelieving Biblical miracles.

There is a strong temptation for Christians to dismiss the concern whether Biblical miracles are possible or believable by saying, “I believe in God and I believe the Bible is His inspired Word. Therefore I believe what the Bible says about miracles.” There is a place in our daily lives for setting forth these presuppositions. We do not normally go about telling everyone we meet daily that we believe in God and the Bible and then set forth a detailed logical presentation on why we so believe. The same is true for our faith in Christ and miracles in the Bible. However, if we were challenged about our faith, hopefully we would attempt to seriously set forth why we so believe. Also, we must not be too smug about untested faith. If someone were to come along and challenge us with what appear to be forceful reasons to deny elements of our faith, we might be shaken and let doubts grow into disbelief. We need to know why we believe in events like miracles and be ready always to give a defense of our hope in meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Worldviews, God, And Miracles

A worldview is the way one looks at the whole world and tries to make sense of how we came to exist, our purpose on earth, and what, if anything, lies beyond death. Everyone has a worldview, even if he/she does not often consciously think about it. Our worldview will determine how we think and act out our lives.

The only worldview that totally excludes the concept of a god is Atheism:

Atheism: God does not exist beyond the universe or in it. Atheism says the universe is all there is. No god exists anywhere, either in the universe or beyond it. The universe or cosmos is all there is or ever will be. It is self-sustaining.⁵

Since atheism absolutely excludes the idea of a god, there is no supernatural being to work miracles in the world at any time.

One might think that mere belief in a god would open one's mind to the possibility of miracles, but such is certainly not the case. One reason Hume's writings against miracles received such acclaim in his day was because there were so many people in Europe and England who were Deists in their worldview:

Deism is the belief in a God who made the world but who never interrupts its operations with supernatural events. It is theism minus miracles. God does not interfere with his creation. Rather, he designed it to run independent of him by immutable natural laws. In nature, he has also provided all that his creatures need to live. Deism flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries but began to die in the nineteenth century. Today its tenets live on in antismiraculous denial of miracles, critical views of the Bible, and the practice of those who believe in a supreme being who has little or nothing to do with their lives.⁶

Although Deism claims a belief in a creator god, that god has, since the creation, been a do-nothing god in relation to his creation. Therefore the god of the deist cannot be a miracle-working god, for he does not make himself known in any way outside of the natural order he created. Recently, some scientists who have come to the conclusion that there must be a god of some kind who designed and created the universe have given indications of belief in a deistic god, but not the God of the Bible.

Pantheism is another form of belief in a god which eliminates miracles:

Pantheism: God is the universe. For a pantheist there is no creator beyond the universe. Creator

and creation are two different ways of viewing one reality. God is the universe (or the All) and the universe is God. There is ultimately only one reality, not many different ones. Pantheism is represented by certain forms of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and the New Age movement.⁷

Pantheism's god is not a personal god concerned with mankind's needs. Their god is a tree or a fly and a tree or a fly is god. Pantheism's god cannot be distinguished from its creation; a confusing thought. There is no place for miracles for those who embrace Pantheism, for their god is not separate from creation.

Theism is a worldview of God much different than Deism or Pantheism. The God of Theism is the God of the Bible:

Theism: An infinite God is beyond and in the universe. Theism is the world view that says that the physical universe is not all there is. An infinite, personal God beyond the universe created it, sustains it, and can act within it in a supernatural way. This is the view represented by traditional Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.⁸

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." If one can believe in **that** Creator God, one should have no problem believing that He can do anything He desires with His creation. It is this Being of Whom Paley said, "In a word, once believe that there is a God and miracles are not incredible."⁹ How true! Nothing should seem incredible for a God who created this "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exod. 20:11).

Proofs For God's Existence

Proving that the God of Theism exists allows for the possibility and probability of miracles, given the nature of God's Being. While we cannot adequately detail the proofs

for God's existence in the space allotted for our discussion of miracles, we can sketch the major arguments and encourage you to do further study on the matter.

The Cosmological Argument

The word *cosmos* means the entire universe. This argument says that for every **effect** there must be an adequate **cause**. As you read the quote below, think first of the enormous size of our Milky Way Galaxy, then contemplate the unimaginable immensity of the entire universe.

Our sun belongs to a cluster of two hundred billion stars called the Milky Way Galaxy, which has the shape of a giant spiral. The spiral rotates slowly and majestically in space, with its luminous arms trailing like an enormous Roman candle. The sun, located in one of the arms of the spiral, would complete one turn around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy every two hundred and fifty million years in the course of this rotation:

The size of an average galaxy is 600 thousand trillion miles, and the average distance from one galaxy to another is 20 million trillion miles. In order to avoid writing such awkwardly large numbers, astronomers use a unit of distance called the light-year, which is the distance that light travels in one year at a speed of 186,000 miles per second. A light year is approximately six trillion miles. In these units, the size of a galaxy is 100 thousand light-years and the average distance between galaxies is roughly three million light-years.

Our nearest large galactic neighbor, the Andromeda Galaxy, is two million light-years away. Thousands of galaxies exist within a distance of one hundred million light-years from us, and many billions are within the range of the largest telescopes.¹⁰

Think of it—many billions of galaxies with billions or trillions of stars in them. Imagine the power and energy

in each star and the sheer mass of physical material required to make up the whole universe! To paraphrase David so long ago, “It is awesome to contemplate” (Psm. 8; Psm. 19; Psm. 33).

Carl Sagan, noted Cornell University astronomer and atheist wrote, “The Cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be.”¹¹ For Sagan, now deceased, the universe was one grandiose “effect” with no “cause” behind it. However, remember the cosmological argument for the existence of God states that for every effect there must be an adequate cause. Take a moment from reading and look around the room (or place) where you are reading this chapter. Everything you see is an effect caused by someone. Even this book is an effect, caused by a number of factors. So are you! Everything ultimately can be traced back to a First Cause, beyond which there is no other cause. Briefly, the cosmological argument for the existence of God from the nature of “being” (things that exist) is:

1. Something exists, and
2. owes its existence either to nothing or to something.
3. Nothing cannot cause something.
4. There is, then, a something, which is either one or many.
5. If many, the beings would be mutually dependent for their own existence or dependent on another.
6. They cannot be mutually dependent for their existence. Something cannot exist through a being on which it confers existence.
7. Therefore, there must be one being through which all other beings exist.
8. This being must exist through itself.
9. Whatever exists through itself, exists in the highest degree of all.
10. Therefore, a supremely perfect Being exists in the highest degree.¹²

The apostle Paul set forth the concept of God as the First Cause in Romans 1:19-20. Even though the

cosmological argument does not give a full picture of the nature and attributes of God, it does show that a God Who created everything **could** work miracles within His creation if He chose to do so. As such He is an adequate cause for the miracles set forth in the Bible.

The Teleological Argument

This is the argument for the proof of God from **design**. If you look inside a computer, you see circuit boards, wires, motors, hard drives, and floppy drives, all designed to perform various functions, one of which is to allow me to type this lesson and store it in an electronic form. Computers do not just happen; they are designed by people who have the intelligence to do so. You could not convince anyone that you could put some dirt, rocks, and water into a box and shake it vigorously and it become some unformed pieces of plastic, metal, wires, and rubber; then you shake it again and when you finish you have a working computer. Why? First, because simply shaking unformed parts of different elements is an **inadequate** cause to produce the effect of a computer. Second, there is no design involved in the process: it is simply a random chance movement of those elements. Nothing complex or designed can come of such. Chance is not an intelligent designer!

The universe and our galaxy have multitudes of features that illustrate function and purpose in their design:

Did you ever stop to think why the sun is 93 million miles away? Move it in just 10% and everything on the earth would literally burn up. Move the sun away just 10% and the earth would be at absolute zero (-273 C). The moon is 240,000 miles away. Move it by just 1/5 closer to the earth, and you would have 35-50 feet high tides over the surface of the earth twice a day. The earth is tilted at exactly 23 ½ degrees on its axis.

If the earth were not tilted as it is, water vapor would accumulate around the poles and there would be vast deserts at the equators. Suppose the earth traveled at 35,000 m.p.h. around the sun instead of 70,000. Seasons would be doubled. Summer heat, prolonged, would burn up vegetation. Winter cold would freeze crops. Suppose earth's speed was doubled. Seasons would be halved. No season would be long enough to grow food to feed the earth's population. The earth's troposphere contains 21% oxygen. Suppose you reduce that to only 15%. Man and beast would die for lack of breathable oxygen. Increase it to 30 or 40%. The earth would be continually aflame due to spontaneous combustion. Atmospheric pressure on man is 14.7 pounds per square inch. Suppose you make it 25? We would all be crushed to death. Suppose you reduce it to 7? We would all explode like overinflated balloons! Am I to believe that all of this happened by accident? Or may I agree with Professor Edwin O. Conklin of Princeton when he said, "the probability of life originating from accident is comparable to the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a print shop!"¹³

These things are not the result of some random chance events, but the work of the Ultimate Designer, God.

In addition to these critical elements of the design of the universe to support life, consider the design of life itself in the human body. We haven't the space to consider it fully here, but Wayne Jackson has a marvelous little book detailing how the various body systems are designed to work together.¹⁴ For further study also see **Darwin's Black Box**, by Michael J. Behe, a biochemist who has studied the complexities of the human cell. Behe states that it is impossible that life has come about by any means other than intelligent design, even if we do not know the Designer.¹⁵ The gist of Behe's book is that, even in a cell, the most basic and simplest of life structures, there are

from dozens to thousands of complex interactions occurring in each cell. Even if one of those interactions failed, life would not function:

Biochemistry has pushed Darwin's theory to the limit. It has done so by opening the ultimate black box, the cell, thereby making possible our understanding of how life works. It is the astonishing complexity of subcellular organic structures that has forced the question, How could all this have evolved? Now it's the turn of the fundamental science of life, modern biochemistry, to disturb. The simplicity that was once expected to be the foundation of life has proven to be a phantom; instead, systems of horrendous, irreducible complexity inhabit the cell. The resulting realization that life was designed by an intelligence is a shock to us in the twentieth century who have gotten used to thinking of life as the result of simple natural laws. But other centuries have had their shocks, and there is no reason to suppose that we should escape them.¹⁶

Nearly everything about us depicts design and argues for a Designer far beyond the supposed ability of the "natural selection" of godless Darwinian evolution. A God powerful enough to design all things in creation is a God Who can work miracles in His creation as He wills to do so.

The Moral Argument

Morality, an appeal to a standard of "right" conduct which humans ought to observe, is likewise an argument for God's existence. There is nothing in the argument for evolution which allows for such a concern (moral conduct), but still it is obvious that men everywhere do appeal to what they conceive as proper, objective moral standards. Even the atheistic evolutionist believes **you ought** to try to save his child from drowning, that **you shouldn't** steal his possessions, or that the raping of women is truly **wrong**:

Are the moral judgments we make every day about ourselves and about others emotive outbursts or conditioned patterns of behavior? While we often hear this judgment expressed, it is doubtful that reasonable people really believe it. That the brutal slaughter of children is revolting, horrifying and antisocial but not immoral or wrong is nonsense. To assert that those who pass judgment on the slaughter of the innocent are just being intolerant is ridiculous. The claim is even self-defeating, for tolerance is itself assumed to be an objective, unexceptionable moral value.¹⁷

C. S. Lewis points out that it is not merely a matter of comparing two or more sets of moral laws with each other, but judging all moral viewpoints by a true standard:

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others. Or put it this way. If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something—some Real Morality—for them to be true about.¹⁸

Since morality exists as a part of the personality of the human being, it must have a source other than the mindless, mechanistic, chance combination of material things which characterizes evolution:

Social explanations of moral objectivity do not account for moral value. While it is often asserted that values derive from our society, culture, religion, parents, school and friends, at least two arguments show this to be wrong. First,

we often think it plausible to make evaluative moral judgments about our own peers, as well as other societies. We could not, for example, evaluate Hitler's Germany if this were not so. Second, the fact that as free persons we are all equal makes it impossible for any one finite person to determine value for any other person. No other human person has the moral authority to make decisions about right or wrong for me. This, however, leads to a dilemma. Only persons can be the source of values, yet no finite and socially conditioned person is in a position to determine authoritatively the values appropriate for other persons. So, if there really are objective values, there must be some "ultimate" person who has the moral authority to set the standards of right and wrong. We are thus driven to the following conclusion.

Conclusion: There must be a universal personal authority that is the source of morality. What is crucial about this argument is its implication that the source of this feature of the universe is a personality, at least in the sense required by the capacity to understand value and make free moral judgments. There is, of course, more to the concept of "person," but this is enough to show that there is a transcendent agent capable of moral concerns, decisions and actions that is the third component in providing a basis for miracles as indicated above.¹⁹

These conclusions argue against evolution and a Deist god who cares little about his creation. Conversely, they argue for a God Who cares and is involved in His creation in any way He chooses to be, including miracles at His will.

Conclusion

These proofs for the existence of the God of Theism (an infinite, personal God Who is beyond the universe, Who both created it and sustains it, and can act upon it at His will in supernatural ways) do not completely sustain the

case that miracles have occurred, but they certainly declare the possibility and probability that miracles could happen as the Bible describes them.

Defining A Miracle

David Hume, whose arguments we will principally analyze in what follows, defined a miracle:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.²⁰

Hume's definition of a miracle is critical to the success of his arguments against miracles, for he calls them "**violation[s]** of the laws of nature" (emp. mine, TJC) and then proceeds to argue that "firm and unalterable experience" denies that any such miracle has ever occurred, for no one has ever witnessed such violations of nature.

Some theists define miracles in much broader terms:

I would define a miracle as an extraordinary manifestation of Divine power, operating either independently of the laws and forces of nature, as in the original creation, or in opposition to them, as in the separation of the waters of the Red Sea, or in connection and harmony with them, as in the Noahic deluge. This, of course, implies in all cases the exercise of a power that is superior to the laws and forces of nature.²¹

Another explains a miracle as "an event in which God temporarily makes an **exception** to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting" (emp. mine, TJC).²² Purtill notes that miracles are by definition "temporary exceptions" to natural events. He writes:

Unless we have the idea of the way things ordinarily happen--then the idea of a miracle cannot be made clear...Without the idea of natural law to which miracles are an exception we cannot explain the basic idea of a miracle in this sense.²³

The purpose of a miracle is to show God's power, that He is acting in a significantly different way "to 'create or confirm faith.'"²⁴

Hume, by defining miracles as a "violation" of natural law, elsewhere indicates that he means miracles are "contradictory" to natural law.²⁵ The advantage of making "violations" equal "contradictions" is that it appears to make miracles "lawless" and representative of chaos and confusion, not from a God of supposed order. This has the intended purpose of making the God of theism appear capricious and disorderly. Jerry Gill writes:

It is argued that if the notion of miracles is allowed there can be no such thing as science, since the latter depends upon the assumption of the uniformity of nature. In other words, if it is possible for nature's basic patterns to be interrupted, then it becomes impossible to establish any causal inferences and general laws, since one would never know when a miracle would be in operation. Besides, how would we tell the difference between a supernatural event and a simple freak of nature? In short, the notion of miracle opens the door to scientific chaos, which means no science at all.²⁶

It must be noted that because miracles are other than natural law, "exceptions" and not regularly occurring events, the argument Gill presents is not a forceful one. The natural order opens our way to understanding of supernatural events and assigning adequate causes. Nash concludes, "Because the laws of nature are divine laws, it

is a mistake to regard miracles as violations of God's laws."²⁷ Bube explains that there is merely a difference of perspective in God's view of His own actions and our view of those same actions:

The natural order exists only because God is constantly active in upholding it. God does not use natural processes as if they existed without him. God does not take advantage of natural laws to accomplish his will as if the laws existed without him. We see immediately why the question "Can God intervene in a world ruled by orderly laws?" is meaningless. There is no world ruled by orderly laws except that one constantly maintained in existence by the activity of God.²⁸

A further element in Hume's definition of a miracle is seen in the following:

Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happened in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full **proof**, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.²⁹

One wonders if Hume examined the Biblical accounts of the various miracles in any detail at all, for he dismisses with a wave of his hand both the events and the witnesses to them. His "Part I" of his argument involves a "begging

of the question” in that he assumes without proof that it “has never been observed in any age or country” that “a dead man should come to life.”³⁰ Such a statement argues against the possibility of miracles and against the acceptance of any evidence for miracles. The testimony of Scripture is that such events have occurred on a limited basis. The raising of Lazarus from the dead was public and attested to by enemies of Jesus (John 11). The resurrection of Christ was another such widely attested event involving hundreds of people and proofs exhibited for about six weeks (cf. Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1-2; 1 Cor. 15):

The assumption of uniform experience. Hume speaks of “uniform experience” against miracles, but this seems either to beg the question or else to be special pleading. It begs the question if Hume presumes to know the whole field of experience to be uniform in advance of looking at all the evidence for uniformity. For how can one know that all possible experience will confirm naturalism, unless one has access to all possible experiences, including those in the future? If, on the other hand, Hume simply means by “uniform” experience the select experiences of **some** persons (who either have not or believe they have not encountered a miracle), then this is special pleading. For there are others who claim to have experienced miracles. Why should their testimony be inferior to that of others who report uniformity?...In the final analysis, then, the debate over miracles cannot be settled by supposed “uniform” experience. For this either begs the question in advance of investigation or else opens the door for a factual analysis of whether indeed there is sufficient evidence to believe that a miracle has occurred.³¹

What appears to be doubly strange is that some critics of Hume’s broad range of writings have insisted that he is

not consistent regarding his insistence that experience can be a “full proof” of anything:

Hume’s rejection of miracles in the name of the laws of nature is, to say the least, paradoxical. Both his **Treatise of Human Nature** and his **Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding** contained extensive critiques of the concept of causation. We saw earlier how Hume drew on this in discussing miracles. On Hume’s premise, as Taylor puts it, “Properly speaking, there are no laws of nature to be violated, but there are habits of expectation which any of us, as a fact, finds himself unable to break through.” [A. E. Taylor, “David Hume and the Miraculous,” IN: **Philosophical Studies** (London: Macmillan, 1934), 349]. If Hume’s understanding of causation is correct, two consequences appear to follow. On the one hand, there is no reason to regard any event as more, or for that matter, less miraculous than any other. For on this basis we must confess that all events, so far as we can see, are random and are not governed by any causally related factors outside themselves. On the other hand, to speak of the laws of nature is purely a habit of mind.³²

If Hume did not believe in actual relationship between cause and effect, then how could he insist that uniform experience was a direct and full proof that the laws of nature had never been and could not be “violated”? Whatever horn of the dilemma Hume grabs, he is gored by the solid historical testimony of the Scriptures.

In addition to “begging the question,” Hume adopts the posture of circular reasoning:

The question, “Do miracles occur?” and the question, “Is the course of Nature absolutely uniform?” are the same question asked in two different ways. Hume, by sleight of hand, treats them as two different questions. He first answers, “Yes,” to the question whether Nature is absolutely uniform: and then uses this “Yes”

as a ground for answering “No,” to the question, “Do miracles occur?” The single real question which he set out to answer is never discussed at all. He gets the answer to one form of the question by assuming the answer to another form of the same question.³³

Metaphysical Naturalism

Hume’s definition of the natural order, as well as definitions of other skeptic philosophers, shuts him and them up to the concept of metaphysical naturalism.³⁴ Metaphysics is simply the study of being or of what is real. For the naturalist the **only thing** that is real is the material universe:

The naturalistic world view rests upon the belief that the material universe is the sum total of reality. To put it negatively, naturalism holds to the proposition that the supernatural, in any form, does not exist...The naturalistic world view assumes that the matter or stuff which makes up the universe has never been created but has always existed. This is because an act of creation presupposes the existence of some reality outside of, or larger than, the world order—incompatible with the tenet that the material universe is the sum total of reality. Naturalism normally assumes that always-existing matter has developed into the ordered universe which we see by a blind, timeless process of chance...Within the context of the naturalistic world view, miracles, as such, do not exist; they are natural events which have yet to be explained.³⁵

Nash posits the naturalist’s position to be

analogous to a sealed box. Everything that happens inside the box (the natural order) is caused by or is explicable in terms of other things that exist within the box. **Nothing** (including God) exists outside the box; therefore, nothing outside the box that we call the universe or nature can have any causal effect within the box.³⁶

Consequently, in naturalism there is no place for nor possibility of God's breaking into the closed box to work miracles at any time.

For our purpose Purtil's definition of miracle seems to work. "A miracle is an event (1) brought about by the power of God that is (2) a temporary (3) exception (4) to the ordinary course of nature (5) for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history."³⁷ In the Scripture miraculous events are called miracles, signs, wonders, and powers. They are called miracles and signs (Hebrew, *oth* and *mopheth*; Greek, *dunamis* and *semelon*); wonders (Hebrew, *mopheth* and *pele*; Greek, *teras*); powers (Hebrew, *kuah*; Greek, *dunamis*)³⁸:

The word **miracle** declares that a work of supernatural origin occurred... The word **sign** describes the miracle as a signal, mark, token; a visible and readily perceived proof/evidence of God's power, approval or authority... The word **wonder** tells us that a miracle was so out of the ordinary, so amazing, so strange, so inexplicable, defying natural explanation, that it excited the emotions and imaginations, causing the beholder to wonder and marvel.³⁹

The Dimensions Of A Miracle

Biblical miracles are not simply wondrous events out of the ordinary. They have purpose. God's concern for people and proper relationships between Him and them are a part of every miraculous act:

According to the Bible, a miracle has several dimensions. First, it has an unusual character. It is an out-of-the-ordinary event in contrast to the regular pattern of events in the natural world. It is a "wonder" that attracts attention by its uniqueness. A burning bush that is not consumed, fire from heaven, and walking on water are not normal occurrences. Hence, they will by their unusual character draw the interest

of observers. Second, there is a theological dimension. A miracle is an act of God. Hence, it presupposes that there is a God who can act. The view that there is a God beyond the universe who created it, controls it, and can interfere in it is called theism. Miracles, then, imply a theistic view of the universe. Third, miracles have a moral dimension. They bring glory to God. That is, they manifest the moral character of God. Miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God. Technically, there are no evil miracles, then, because God is good. All miracles by nature aim to produce and/or promote good. Fourth, miracles have a doctrinal dimension. Miracles in the Bible are connected directly or indirectly with “truth claims.” They are ways to tell a true prophet from a false prophet (Deut. 18:22). They confirm the truth of God through the servant of God (Heb. 2:3-4). A miracle is the sign that confirms the sermon. Message and miracle go hand-in-hand. Fifth, biblical miracles have a teleological dimension. Unlike magic, they are never performed to entertain (see Luke 23:8). Miracles have a distinctive purpose: to glorify the Creator and to provide evidence for people to believe by accrediting the message of God through the prophet of God.⁴⁰

Natural events are not miracles, although some people regularly call them such. A child being born is a wonderful thing, but not a wonder in the sense of its being miraculous. The birth of a child follows God’s natural laws as established in Genesis 1:28; Genesis 4:1; et. al. Mary’s virgin conception of Jesus was a miracle (Luke 1:26-35). A person avoiding serious injury in an automobile accident, when others had died in similar accidents, may be nothing more than a combination of natural causes. For example, the direction in which he was struck may have caused his head to move away from striking parts of the car that could kill him. Although some would call this a “miracle,” it does not fit the definitions set out by Scripture. It would have

been a miracle if his car had suddenly elevated in midair to miss the head-on collision and then safely settled on the road again after the danger had passed.

Providence involves God's working, but not in the sense of miraculous manifestations of His power:

Not all "acts of God" are miracles. In nature God acts regularly; through miracles he acts rarely. But not all rare acts are miracles. There are also anomalies and special acts of providence. The latter is like an anomaly of nature in that it is an unusual event within nature. That is, it happens only rarely. Likewise, neither anomalies nor special providence involves an exception to any natural laws, such as walking on water, turning water into wine, and raising the dead. God simply uses his knowledge of nature in such a way as to accomplish unusual events for his purposes.

God is active in general providence by his sustenance of the natural world. It is God who sends the rain, makes the grass grow, and feeds his creatures (Psm. 104). General providence is simply a theological way of describing how God works through natural laws. Or, more properly, what we call "natural laws" involve the way God works regularly in his creation.

God also works through special providence, which is different from both general providence and miracles. Unlike general providence, there is something unusual about a special act of providence. It does not happen every day, and when it does it makes us sit up and take notice. On the other hand, a special act of God's providence is not a miracle. The most crucial difference is that a miracle is never the product of a natural law, but special providence is. Special providence simply utilizes natural laws to produce an unusual effect.⁴¹

One example of this special providence is God's promise to Israel that, when the male Jews went up to the central place of worship three times a year, "neither shall any man

desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year” (Exod. 34:23-24). In the absence of the males to protect their homelands they would have been particularly vulnerable to their enemies, but the implication is that Israel’s enemies would not even think about attacking them on these occasions. God acted to secure that promise to Israel, but not in an obviously miraculous manner. Another such example is Acts 27 and the shipwreck of the apostle Paul and others at Melita. All life was saved but there were no openly miraculous acts of God in bringing this to pass, although God did tell Paul that any who abandoned ship before the grounding “cannot be saved.” These events depict God’s working in special events, but in non-miraculous ways, as per our definition above.

Finally, this paper takes the position that Biblical miracles were genuine but that they were provisional (cf. Exod. 4:1-31; Mark 16:17-20; Acts 14:1-3; Heb. 2:1-4) and temporary (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-16). The fact that there are multitudes of false claims for miracles today does not detract from the valid nature of Biblical miracles.

Examining Hume’s Arguments

Much of what has already been presented argues against Hume’s presuppositions to deny the supernatural work of God in performing miracles. We here give attention to some of his specific contentions which, he believed, provided “an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion,” including “the accounts of miracles.”⁴²

Critics of Hume’s arguments have been divided over a “hard” or “soft” interpretation of his position.⁴³ The hard interpretation styles Hume as saying miracles are **impossible**, while the soft view has Hume saying that miracles are **incredible**.⁴⁴ No matter how one views Hume’s writings, the end result is the same. His skepticism

of miracles in general and specific rejection of Biblical miracles destroy faith in Scripture and undermine the basis for the Christian faith, Christ's resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:13-17).

Hume's Basic Proposition

Based on experience, his own, and what he conceives to be the general experiences of everyone else, Hume denies that miracles have ever happened or that they can be proved:

Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors.⁴⁵

Hume admits experience "is not altogether infallible" and "is apt to lead us into errors," but he still posits this as his major argument because of its usual reliability.

Further, Hume relies on uniformitarian assumptions, that the key to the future is the past. If miracles have not occurred in his past experience or the past experiences of the majority, that secures "a full proof" they have never happened and will not happen in the future:

A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full proof of the future existence of that event.⁴⁶

"Experience" and "evidence" are key words in testing the validity of Hume's position. First, we have already noted that Hume's appeal to the necessity of personal experience would exclude any number of things which he rationally believed to be true that were not from his experience but from the testimony of others. Second, Hume contends that

100 uniform experiments against one to the contrary provides superior evidence that the one different event cannot be valid or true.⁴⁷ But is it necessarily true that the occurrence of a single event or the testimony of a single witness against 100 others cannot be true? Suppose a shooting takes place where Jack is the only witness that John shot Bill. Can John summon 100 people to testify in court that they never saw him shoot anyone? If it is an established fact that Bill was shot to death; that fact is no less true because only one man saw it. Geisler seems to properly pinpoint the failure of Hume's reasoning here:

Furthermore, Hume does not really weigh evidence for miracles; he simply adds evidence against them. Since death occurs over and over and over again and resurrection occurs only on rare occasions, he simply adds up all the deaths against the very few alleged resurrections and rejects the latter...[E]ven if a few resurrections actually occurred, according to Hume's principles we should not believe them, since the number of deaths would always outweigh them. Truth is not, however, determined by majority vote. Hume here commits a kind of *consensus gentium* [arguing that something is true because it is believed by most people].⁴⁸

Hume can also be criticized for equating "evidence" and "probability."⁴⁹ This type of argument

says in effect that we should always believe what is most probable, that is, what has the highest "odds." On these grounds we should not believe the dice we rolled shows three sixes if we get them on the first roll, since the odds against this happening are 216 to 1. Or we should not believe we were dealt a perfect bridge hand (which has happened) since the odds against this happening are 1,635,013,559,600 to 1! What Hume overlooks is that wise people base their beliefs on facts, not on odds. Sometimes the "odds" against an event are high (based on past

observation), but the evidence for the event is very good (based on current observation or testimony).⁵⁰

Following Hume's practice of adding normal occurrences instead of weighing evidence for the truthfulness of any event would also be detrimental to the field of science, as well as hindering understanding of the supernatural:

Clearly many propositions have been accounted laws of nature because of an invariable experience in their favor, then exceptions have been observed, and finally these propositions have ceased to be regarded as laws of nature. But the first reported exception was, to anyone who had not personally observed it, in precisely the same position as a story of a miracle, if Hume be right. Those, then, to whom the first exception was reported ought to have rejected it, and gone on believing in the alleged law of nature. Yet, if the report of the first exception makes no difference to their belief in the law, their state of belief will be precisely the same when a second exception is reported as it was on the first occasion. Hence, if the first report ought to make no difference to their belief in the law, neither ought the second. So that it would seem on Hume's theory that if, up to a certain time, I and everyone else have always observed A to be followed by B, then no amount of testimony from the most trustworthy persons that they have observed A not followed by B ought to have the least effect on my belief in the law... If scientists had actually proceeded in this way, some of the most important natural laws would never have been discovered.⁵¹

Another flaw in Hume's reasoning is trying to equate the "probability" of historical events, including miracles, with the scientific experiments conducted to establish the formulation of natural scientific laws:

In the case of scientific laws, probability is tied to the frequency of occurrence; the more times

scientists observe similar occurrences under similar conditions, the greater the probability that their formulation of a law is correct. But historical events including miracles are different; the events of history are unique and nonrepeatable. Therefore, treating historical events including miracles with the same notion of probability the scientist uses in formulating his laws ignores a fundamental difference between the two subject matters.⁵²

Hume further errs in claiming that miracles are only supported by the **direct** evidence of those who claim to have witnessed them.⁵³ No human witnessed the miracle of **creation** itself, but the indirect evidence for its having occurred is overwhelming, as we have previously shown. The parents of the blind man in John 9 apparently did not see Jesus heal him, but their testimony that he was their son and had been blind since birth but now could see was powerful indirect evidence that a miraculous event had taken place. John 9:22 explains that the parents' reluctance to attribute the miracle to Jesus was due to their fear of being put out of the synagogue, but they could not deny that a notable miracle had caused their son to have sight (cf. Acts 3:1-11; Acts 4:16). There must be an adequate **cause** for the **effect** of the blind man seeing or the lame man walking.

Hume contends:

The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior." When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with

myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.⁵⁴

As a matter of fact, **the effect itself** may be such a powerful testimony to a miraculous cause that to deny such and attempt to claim it a “falsehood would be more miraculous” indeed. The creation of the universe is one such effect. The Bible and the Christian system are two more such effects demanding miraculous causes, the falsehood of which would “be more miraculous” than their claims.

Ockham’s Razor is a principle of investigation which is commonly stated, “The simplest explanation is the best explanation.” However, originally William of Ockham affirmed, “causes should not be multiplied without necessity,” meaning, “one should not posit more causes or reasons than are necessary to explain the data”⁵⁵: “Hume’s position, however, is to **discard** or explain away the data necessary to substantiate miracles. His method, therefore, is not really a proper application of Occam’s Razor.”⁵⁶ Neither is Hume’s approach a fair treatment of the evidence available to arrive at the cause(s) adequate to explain phenomena like miracles.

William Lane Craig sums up a response to the principal argument of Hume in the following fashion:

Hume’s principal argument is that testimony to miracles has the experience of the world and the centuries against it. In response, Less argues: (1) Because nature is the freely willed

order of God, a miracle is just as possible as any event. Therefore, it is just as believable as any event. (2) Testimony to an event cannot be refuted by experiences and observations. Otherwise we would never be justified in believing anything outside our present experience; no new discoveries would be possible. (3) There is no contradiction between experience and Christian miracles. Miracles are different events (*contraria*) from experience in general, but not contradictory events (*contradictoria*) to experience in general. The contradiction to the testimony that under the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Jesus raised certain persons from the dead and himself so rose three days after his death must necessarily be the exact opposite of this statement, namely, that Jesus never raised anyone from the dead and never himself so rose. This latter has to be proved to destroy the gospel testimony. It is hardly enough to assert that experience in general says that dead men do not rise, for with this the Christian testimony is in full agreement. Only when the exact opposite is proved to be true can Christian testimony be said to contradict experience.⁵⁷

Hume's Supplemental Points

While Part 1 of Hume's argument against miracles allows little or no possibility for miracles, Part 2 tries to close off any remaining possibility by arguing that the evidence or testimony for any alleged miracle will always be insufficient to establish or justify belief that a miracle has occurred. He sets forth four additional points in an attempt to totally secure his proposition:

For first, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to

have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.⁵⁸

Presumably, Hume thought his requirements for reliable testimony were valid but they place him in a dilemma:

Hume's first criterion would do more than rule out testimonies to miracles, it would also—if applied rigorously—make doubtful most of what we believe about the history of the world, say, prior to the sixteenth century. Hume seems to be engaged in drawing boundaries to fit his prejudices.⁵⁹

Hume's first argument complained of the lack of discerning, competent witnesses. But the qualifications that he demands of such witnesses are such as would preclude the testimony of anyone without a Western university education, who lived outside a major cultural center in Western Europe prior to the sixteenth century, and who was not a public figure. A hostile critic of Hume might be tempted to think that Hume had formulated his qualifications not so much with the need to define qualities desirable in a witness but with the preconceived aim of deliberately excluding any testimony issuing from the ancient world...It is questionable whether Hume would ever have accepted any testimony to the miraculous that met his stringent conditions.⁶⁰

In effect Hume admits that no amount of witnesses could convince him of a miracle. One wonders if Hume thought enough of himself to place himself in the category of a competent witness.

Hume continues:

Secondly, We may observe in human nature a principle which, if strictly examined, will be

found to diminish extremely the assurance, which we might, from human testimony, have, in any kind of prodigy...With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners?

But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority..The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind.⁶¹

It must be admitted that there are perhaps a large number of people who mistakenly believe they should “expect a miracle” and are anxious to be party to falsifying and/or exaggerating accounts of alleged miraculous activity for what they suppose is a holy cause. However, such deception is **never** encouraged or condoned by any teaching of the Scriptures. Neither is such false testimony needed to uphold the Biblical accounts:

But it must also be said that religion can serve as a check on such tendencies. As a general criterion for assessing testimony to the unusual and miraculous, Hume’s point just will not stand. It is irresponsible to brand all religious people as naturally prone to disseminate untruth whether wittingly or unwittingly. He fails to take into account the possibility that some people, including religious people, are by nature skeptics.⁶²

None of the apostles was easily swayed by the testimony of the women who first reported Jesus’ resurrection, and Thomas remained a skeptic until he was convinced by a

face-to-face, empirical encounter with Christ (Luke 24:1-11; John 20:24-28). Still, while we admit great numbers of false reports and exaggerations occur, whether by gullible or lying people, these do not prove the Biblical accounts of the miraculous to be false or embellished. In considering any testimony we have to consider the character and possible motivations of those providing the testimony. There are also a great number of people who hold an unreasonable and unexamined strong bias against Biblical miracles. Shall we therefore contend that there are no honest unbelievers who really want to know the truth about miracles?

Further, Hume avers:

Thirdly, It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions. It is strange, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, that such prodigious events never happen in our days. But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages. You must surely have seen instances enough of that frailty.⁶³

If such reports of miracles “are observed **chiefly**” in ignorant and barbarous nations, it must be that **some** are observed in educated and civilized nations, and Hume’s argument stands for nothing. For if some miracles can occur among educated people, Hume’s argument fails. Brown correctly observes that Hume’s remarks here were “designed to cast aspersions on contemporary belief in the Bible”⁶⁴:

But as a criterion, Hume's point is too wholesale. It is absurd to demand of a witness that he should share the same world view as oneself or have the same level of education and culture. Moreover, Hume's argument does not distinguish between the testimony to any given event and the explanation that a witness to the event may give. We may, or we may not, be competent to give explanations and interpretations in the light of our contemporary understanding. But the validity of the testimony to a claim that something happened depends rather upon the honesty, capacity not to be deceived, and proximity of the witnesses to the alleged event.⁶⁵

Also, even though those who lived in the time that the Bible was written were not as knowledgeable in modern science as in Hume's time or ours, they knew the difference in a dead man and a live one, or between a withered limb on a person and a whole body part (Luke 6:6-10; John 5:3-9).

While there are those who have always faked miracles and were in some degree able to dupe the unsuspecting or confirm prejudice in others against investigating the possibility of genuine miracles, the Bible makes it clear that God's miracles rise above the fakes so that there is no question about them being superior and genuine. See Exodus 4:1-31; Exodus 7-14; Acts 8:5-13; Acts 19:11-20.

It is interesting and powerful in favor of Biblical miracles that the enemies of Jesus could not deny that He did indeed work supernatural marvels, even though they attributed His success to evil spirits (Matt. 9:34; Matt. 12:22-24; John 11:47; cf. Acts 4:16-18; et. al.). This very point is also documented in Jewish literature:

In the **Babylonian Talmud** Sanhedrin 43a we read: "It was taught: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (the Nazarene) was hanged. For forty days

before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'he is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.'" As indicated in these passages the **Talmud** does not deny the miracles of Jesus but attributes them to magic.⁶⁶

None of the references in official Jewish literature say that Jesus did not do wondrous deeds.

Finally, Hume contends that competing claims of miracles cancel out each other so that none are to be considered valid.

I may add as a fourth reason, which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself...Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other.⁶⁷

Although Hume appears confident in his presentation of this argument, he misses the crux of the matter of competing miracles in religion. To **say** that all competing claims for miracles are invalid is an easy way of dismissing the issue, but hardly fair to those making the claims. If two men were arrested for committing a murder and both claim to be innocent, shall we execute both of them, or

turn both of them loose without a rigorous investigation to discover the truth? A person could claim to be the President of the United States against the claim of our present President, George W. Bush. However, those two competing claims do not mean that neither man is the President. Proper evidence can establish whether one of the claimants truly is President. The same approach must be allowed for determining the truth or falsity of competing miracle claims:

Hume's argument amounts to this: if one uses a miracle to confirm a religion, the many miracles reported in other religions act as **rebutting defeaters** that override any warrant the miracle of the one tradition could provide. But we should not conclude too quickly that various stories rebut each other. Rather, like the lawyers, we should seek to distinguish those miracle reports that are well authenticated from those that are discredited by **undercutting defeaters**. All miracle reports are not epistemically equal; rarely, if ever, is there a perfectly balanced evidential standoff between two well-documented miracle claims. Rather, the evidence supporting religious miracle accounts varies greatly in quality, and many reports are subject to a variety of defeaters. Thus, evaluating conflicting miracle accounts demands that we painstakingly examine the details of evidence.⁶⁸

Another response is that Hume's conclusion is true only if the alleged miracles for the "two competing religions provide support for beliefs in those religions that are both incompatible and essential to those faiths"⁶⁹:

What would threaten the argument from miracles for the truth of Christianity would be genuine miracles worked in opposition to Christian claims or in support of incompatible claims. If, for instance, a Moslem holy man raised a man from the dead in order to persuade Christians that Mohammed's revelation had

superseded that of Christ, this would be a case of genuine incompatibility. However, so far from any case of this kind being established, it is hard to show that any case of this kind has even been claimed.⁷⁰

It could not be said, for example, that the miracles claimed to verify Old Testament Judaism cancel out the miracles to substantiate Christianity, although they represent different laws and systems, for they represent different periods of time and different purposes of the same God.

The Bible itself provides the standard by which to judge all claims of present-day miracles supposedly done by the power of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; et al.). Miracles have never been the everyday standard fair in God's work among mankind. There have been four principal periods during which the Bible records significant miracle activity: (1) the creation (Gen. 1-2); (2) the early Mosaic period, during the exodus from Egypt through the taking of the promised land of Palestine, showing God's superior power over the gods of those countries (Exodus – Joshua); (3) the late divided kingdom stage of Israel and Judah to attempts to save them from pagan idolatry, particularly through the ministries of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13); and (4) the first century ministries of Jesus and His apostles to reveal and confirm the New Testament message (Matthew-Acts). The apostle Paul foretold the end of the miraculous period when the "perfect," God's completed and confirmed revelation, had come (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-16). The means by which miracles were performed in the New Testament were through Christ and His apostles. These miraculous gifts were only passed on to others through the laying on of hands by the apostles (Acts 8:14-21). When the apostles died the age of miracles passed with them.

The purpose of miracles was established in Exodus 4:1-31, just before the great outbreak of God's power was

exhibited through Moses. Exodus 4:1 shows the reason God gave this miraculous power, Exodus 4:2-29 talks of the signs, and Exodus 4:30-31 shows the effectiveness of God's plan to confirm Moses and Aaron as His spokesmen and their message as coming from Him. With the coming of the New Testament system of Christ, which was to replace the Law of Moses, the same purpose was behind the miraculous signs. Christ was confirmed as God's Son (John 3:2; John 20:30-31), and His message and the message of the apostles shown to be God-given (Mark 16:17-20; Acts 14:1-3; Heb. 2:2-4).

God's revelation is complete and final (Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Since there is no continuing revelation needing confirmation, there is no need for present-day miracles. We do not need Jesus on earth walking among us to prove His finished work, nor do we need the presence of His apostles. We have their finished work and the confirmation of it in the testimony of the Scriptures (Gal. 3:15). This eliminates the need of having to try to identify actual miracles today, but we do have the obligation to apply this teaching of Scripture to the claims of those who contend for present-day miracles. To do so corrects their false conceptions and also shows the skeptics that there are true distinctions to be recognized between the false claims of today (sincere or not) and the true miracles depicted in Scripture.

Miracles In The World Religions Versus Those In Christianity

David K. Clark states that religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and many New Age cults generally embrace a pantheistic view of god which eliminates the idea of a personal caring God involved in the affairs of His creation:

Since **miracle** is partly defined as an act of a supernatural personal being(s)...any religion that lacks the idea of such a being(s) in its belief structure has no conceptual place for miracle. One could hardly defend the belief structure of such a religion by appealing to stories about events requiring the action of a supernatural being.⁷¹

Although some of the religions **later** developed stories of alleged miracles regarding their founders and principal leaders, those supposed miracles **do not** pretend to validate those religions as true:

The clinching argument for the importance of miracles is that God thought they were important enough to use them to found and perpetuate his church. In fact, all the essential and distinctive elements of Christianity are miracles: creation, revelation (first to the Jews), the giving of the law, prophecies, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Second Coming and Last Judgment. Subtract miracles from Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism, and you have essentially the same religion left. Subtract miracles from Christianity, and you have nothing but the cliches and platitudes most American Christians get weekly (and weakly) from their pulpits. Nothing distinctive, no reason to be a Christian rather than something else.⁷²

Even the Islamic faith, which allows for the kind of God Who could work miracles, plays down their importance in the Muslim belief system. One Surah from their Qu'ran (Koran) says, "And they say: Why are not signs sent down upon him from his Lord? Say: The signs are only with Allah [God], and I am only a plain warner" (Surah 13:50).⁷³ On the other hand, Christianity rests upon Jesus proving Himself to be the Son of God by His miracles (John 20:30-31) and by His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:12-19).

Jewish And Pagan Miracle-Workers

There are accounts of supposed Jewish holy men working miracles, as well as pagans' reports of some of their heroes performing such acts. How can we account for these stories? Space prohibits a thorough discussion of these accounts, but consider the following:

Despite superficial similarities, however, Jesus is quite distinct from all these. As a Jew, Jesus obviously shared much with Jewish holy men. But the stories of Jesus' life do not borrow directly from accounts of Jewish holy men. For one thing, Jesus corrected the teachings of his contemporaries (see Mt. 5-7). He connected with the Old Testament, but he resisted the official Judaism of his day. Further, the written sources that describe the Jewish holy men were written after the completion of the New Testament. Additionally, the New Testament reports about Jesus' miracles are far more reliable than accounts of the Jewish holy men. It is most unlikely these stories shaped the narratives of Jesus' miracles.

One issue is dating. Virtually all ancient miracle stories outside the Bible are described in texts written long after the events they report. But we read the stories of Jesus' works in documents composed within a generation of his life, by people who claimed to see the events, and in a context where friends and foes alike could either confirm or dispute the stories (see Acts 2:22; Acts 26:26). By contrast, the story about the Buddha flying and shooting sparks, for example, is from *Mahavastu* 3.115, a Mahayana-influenced text dating many centuries after the Buddha's life.

Other considerations of quality are important. Consider Apollonius [a Greek hero who reportedly cast out demons and raised a girl from the dead]. Serious errors damage Philostratus's biography of this figure. He has Apollonius trekking to Babylon and to a splendid Nineveh, and speaking at length with their kings. But these cities were in ruins long

before the time of Apollonius. Additionally, Philostratus's patron, Julia Domna, the wife of a Roman emperor, probably commissioned this biography as a propagandistic "counterblast to Jesus." These circumstances betray the nonhistorical, and therefore untrustworthy, character of Philostratus's work.⁷⁴

While Hume gives three supposed examples of miracles outside the Scripture, which he says are as well documented as any miracles could be, they do not pass the rigorous standards we apply to Biblical miracles.⁷⁵ Paley effectively disposes of Hume's alleged parallels to Biblical miracles in his **Evidences of Christianity**. For an investigation of further supposed parallels see Craig Blomberg's **The Historical Reliability of the Gospels**.⁷⁶

Consequences Of Belief Or Unbelief

What difference does it make whether we accept the miracles of the Bible, especially the miracles of Jesus and specifically His resurrection from the dead? While it may seem strange to do so, we will allow the atheist Anthony Flew to pinpoint the difference. Flew explains what he calls "a scandal of particularity":

This consists in the fact that Christianity, alone among the great world religions, centers on what is supposed to have happened during a particular period, in a particular country, and upon this particular planet, Earth. The Christian is, in the words of the Apostles' Creed, defined as one who believes "in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried," and who on "the third day...rose again from the dead."

The scandalous particularity consists here in the fact that one particular alleged miracle, occurring at one particular time and place on

one particular planet, is not just one part of the evidence for identifying Christianity as a revelation of and from God, but is itself the crucial element in the essential content of that putative revelation. For, absent that resurrection, there remains no sufficient reason for accepting either that the man Jesus is to be incomprehensibly identified with “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” or that his actual teachings, whatever they may have been, are thereby revealed to be supremely authoritative. As was so incisively and correctly argued by the apostle Paul, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”⁷⁷

Of course, we realize we are not bound by any supposed Apostles’ Creed, but by Scripture, although what Flew quotes from that creed is indeed the teaching of Scripture. We would also realize that the other miracles of Jesus lend credence to His claim to be God’s Son (cf. John 3:2; John 20:30-31). Still, it is absolutely true that, without the resurrection of Christ from the dead, nothing else miraculous would matter. For while Jesus Christ showed His power over all the elements of nature by stilling the storm, walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, and healing all manner of disease and death in others, His crowning miracle was defeating Satan and His own death by His resurrection and securing that hope for all who believe in Him (John 10:17-18; John 11:25-26).

It simply is the case with Christianity, and not with any other great world religion, that its miracles cause it to either stand or fall:

Christianity is a supernatural system, or it is a fraud. By the word “supernatural” we mean super-human. As a system it claims for itself a divine origin as contradistinguished from all philosophical systems that have originated or can originate with man, or that are or can be the product of the uninspired human mind. There is no claim that is more emphatically or

persistently made by Christianity than this, and if it fails to sustain this contention, it must be regarded as a fraud of the most glaring and inexcusable character and consequently as undeserving of the consideration of honest, thoughtful men.

It is useless to talk of throwing miracles overboard and still holding on to Christianity. As a system it is founded on miracle. If its miracles are genuine, its claim is fully substantiated; if false, its claim is utterly discredited and its foundations are swept away. The essential features of Christianity are based on at least three stupendous miracles—the incarnation, the resurrection and the ascension. Paul said, “If Christ be not risen, your faith is in vain.” If these three miracles be accepted, there should be no difficulty in accepting all the rest of the miracles recorded, on the principle that the greater necessarily includes the less.⁷⁸

While the matter of miracles for Hume is settled by his own lack of experience in regard to one and his assumption that no one else **really** has seen one, the matter is not so simple. One has to account for the recorded testimony in the Old Testament, of the Gospel records, Acts, and letters of the New Testament that they indeed did occur and occasioned large crowds seeking Christ’s healing touch and to hear His great teaching.⁷⁹ One also has to deal with the changes in the apostles’ lives subsequent to their discovery of Christ’s resurrection:

We have testimony to the effect that the disciples were exceedingly depressed at the time of the Crucifixion; that they had extremely little faith in the future; and that, after a certain time, this depression disappeared, and they believed that they had evidence that their Master had risen from the dead. Now none of these alleged facts is in the least odd or improbable, and we have therefore little ground for not accepting them on the testimony offered us. But having done this, we are faced with the problem of accounting

for the facts which we have accepted. What caused the disciples to believe, contrary to their previous conviction, and in spite of their feeling of depression, that Christ had risen from the dead? Clearly, one explanation is that he actually had arisen. And this explanation accounts for the facts so well that we may at least say that the indirect evidence for the miracle is far and away stronger than the direct evidence.⁸⁰

The apostles were not driven by ignorance or a desire for fame, fortune, or power, as Hume would allege. You cannot find hints of those character and moral flaws anywhere in the New Testament. A recent book giving an interview between philosopher/scientist J. P. Moreland and the author Lee Strobel deals with this fact which Hume ignores.

**Exhibit 1: The Disciples
Died For Their Beliefs**

“When Jesus was crucified,” Moreland began, “his followers were discouraged and depressed. They no longer had confidence that Jesus had been sent by God, because they believed anyone crucified was accursed by God. They also had been taught that God would not let his Messiah suffer death. So they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks.

“Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, regathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them.

“And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. It’s not as though there were a mansion awaiting them on the Mediterranean. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways.

“For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead. What you can’t explain is how this particular group of men came up with this particular belief without having had an experience of the resurrected Christ. There’s no other adequate explanation.”

I [Strobel] interrupted with a “Yes, but…” objection, “Yes,” I agreed, “they were willing to die for their beliefs. But,” I added, “so have Muslims and Mormons and followers of Jim Jones and David Koresh. This may show that they were fanatical, but let’s face it: it doesn’t prove that what they believed is true.”

“Wait a minute—think carefully about the difference,” Moreland insisted as he swiveled to face me head-on, planting both of his feet firmly on the floor.

“Muslims might be willing to die for their belief that Allah revealed himself to Muhammad, but this revelation was not done in a publicly observable way. So they could be wrong about it. They may sincerely think it’s true, but they can’t know for a fact, because they didn’t witness it themselves.

“However, the apostles were willing to die for something they had seen with their own eyes and touched with their own hands. They were in a unique position not to just believe Jesus rose from the dead but to know for sure. And when you’ve got eleven credible people with no ulterior motives, with nothing to gain and a lot to lose, who all agree they observed something with their own eyes—now you’ve got some difficulty explaining that away.”⁸¹

Can the Bible accounts of miracles be trusted to accurately convey what happened? F. F. Bruce says, “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”⁸² With nearly 5700 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, some dating within a generation of the apostle John’s life,⁸³ it is far and away the “best attested

ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the documents and the variety of documents to sustain or contradict it.”⁸⁴ If you can believe any historical writing, you can believe the Bible and what it says about the miracles of Jesus.

Conclusion

We have labored to show that, once you admit the God of Theism, the personal God Who cares for and sustains His creation, you have the possibility of miracles being done at God’s will.

The times of these workings of miracles coincide with God’s giving of revelation or His concern to uphold His will before men. The coming of Christ to inaugurate His New Testament certainly qualifies as a period during which God’s power would be shown to confirm His messengers and their message as being from Him.

The miracles of Jesus are evidence of the truthfulness of His being God’s Son and last times messenger (Matt. 17:5; John 20:30-31; Heb. 1:1-3). If Jesus is not the miracle-worker the New Testament claims He was, both it and He are frauds and unworthy of our attention.

Conversely, if the miraculous works Jesus performed “bear witness that the Father hath sent [Him]” (John 5:36), and if He was indeed “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4), then we had better trust and obey Him, for He claims to be the only way to God the Father (John 14:6).

Neither David Hume, nor Anthony Flew, nor any other unbeliever can give sufficient reason to doubt that Jesus’ miracles (and the other Biblical miracles) were genuine. In reflecting on Genesis 1:1, miracles are a great, but minute, exhibition of the awesome power of God over

all His creation. Jesus is that God of Creation and could work His awesome power at will (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:1-3).

Endnotes

1 Craig L. Blomberg, **Jesus and the Gospels** (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), p. 267.

2 Anthony Flew, "Neo-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous," **In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History**, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), pp. 45-57.

3 David Hume, **An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding** (Chicago: The Open Court, 1900), p. 115. **All quotes from Hume are from this volume just cited.** Some contend that Hume does not argue for the impossibility of miracles, but that they are incredible and improbable. See Norman L. Geisler, **Miracles and the Modern Mind** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), pp. 27-28; Ronald H. Nash, **Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 227-232. Hume's arguments are basically epistemological, dealing with whether or not we can ever "know" a miracle has occurred. Note: all text in brackets [] is by TJC.

4 Geisler, **Miracles and the Modern Mind**, pp. 10-11.

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8 Ibid, p. 15.

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10 Robert Jastrow, **God and the Astronomers**, 2nd edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. 10-11.

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18 C. S. Lewis, **Mere Christianity**, (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 25.

19 Beck, p. 161.

20 Hume, p. 120.

21 Robert Milligan, **Scheme of Redemption**, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1868), p. 263, footnote.

22 Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," **In Defense of Miracles**, p. 64.

23 Ibid, pp. 62-63.

24 Ibid, p. 64.

25 Hume, pp. 116, 134.

26 Jerry Gill, **Faith in Dialogue** (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), p. 33, as quoted in Nash, p. 247. Note: Gill does not favor the position he describes here.

27 Nash, **Faith and Reason**, p. 248.

28 Richard H. Bube, **The Human Quest** (Waco, TX: Word, 1971), p. 28, as quoted in Nash, p. 242.

29 Hume, pp. 120-121.

30 Ibid.

31 Norman L. Geisler, "Miracles and the Modern Mind," **In Defense of Miracles**, pp. 77-78.

32 Colin Brown, **Miracles and the Critical Mind** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 93.

33 C. S. Lewis, **Miracles: A Preliminary Study** (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 106.

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- 46 Ibid, p. 116.
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- 52 Nash, **Faith & Reason**, p. 234.
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- 59 Nash, **Faith and Reason**, p. 236.
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CHAPTER 2

An Overview Of The Miracles Of Jesus

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOY papered his bedroom walls with sports clippings of his favorite sports hero. Then at age 14, much to his delight, he actually got to meet him. To his astonishment, and beyond his wildest dreams, this was not a one-time opportunity. His hero took him under his wing and spent quite a bit of time with him. They loved to go fishing together. However, after awhile, the boy began to notice that the more time they spent together the more he saw the difference between the image and the actual man. Upon closer inspection, he learned that his hero was not all that he thought him to be. In fact, years later, as he spoke to an audience of how he got a closer and closer look at the man he once idolized, he confessed, “And the nearer I got, the smaller he became.” He went on to say to that same audience, “Then I learned about Jesus, and have spent the last thirty-five years drawing closer to Him. And you know what I have discovered? I find that the nearer I get, the bigger He becomes!”¹

As one takes a closer look at the miracles of Jesus, he discovers that the closer he looks at these miracles, the bigger Jesus becomes! It is the purpose of this chapter to provide an overview of the miracles of Jesus Christ. Key in on the word “overview.” This chapter does not purport

to be an exhaustive examination of Jesus' miracles. Rather, it is our aim to offer a thumbnail sketch of the mighty works performed by Jesus our Lord. To accomplish this task, we wish to investigate the following areas: (1) The Multiplicity of His Miracles; (2) The Marvel Of His Miracles; (3) The Manner Of His Miracles; and (4) The Motivation Of His Miracles.

The Multiplicity Of His Miracles

Bernard Ramm wrote: "At every step of his life, Jesus Christ confronts us with the supernatural. He was born by a supernatural birth; he was protected by supernatural ministrations of angels; he possessed supernatural knowledge; he could do supernatural things."² Indeed, "the boundaries of Christ's miracles are themselves miracles—the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and His Resurrection and Ascension."³ Simply put, His entrance into the world was miraculous; His departure from the world was miraculous; and His life in the world was miraculous.

Concerning miracles in the life of Jesus, J. W. McGarvey classified them into two categories: (1) those wrought by Christ (healings) and (2) those wrought on Christ (transfiguration, etc.).⁴ As far as the miracles which were wrought by Christ, we have no way of knowing the exact number He performed during His sojourn on earth; the Bible does not provide an exact number. Although there is some debate concerning the exact number of recorded miracles we have in Scripture, most would place the number at 34, perhaps 35 total.

Please observe that this is only the number of miracles about which we have any specific details. In addition to these, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all provide summary statements of large numbers of miracles that Jesus performed in the midst of the thronging multitudes.⁵ The Gospel of John records only seven

miracles of our Lord in any specific detail. However, John concludes his book with the following two passages:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

The following quotation does a good job of painting the picture of the multiplicity of Jesus' miracles. Speaking of the Gospel records, B. L. Blackburn observes:

[T]hey narrate or refer to no less than thirty-four specific miracles (exclusive of parallels) performed by Jesus during his earthly ministry. In addition, there are fifteen texts (again, exclusive of parallels) that narrate or refer to Jesus' miraculous activity (almost always healings and exorcisms) in summary fashion. Beyond this, there are miracles in which Jesus is the object of the miraculous action (including the virginal conception, baptism, Transfiguration, resurrection and ascension and several (at least seven) epiphanies of the risen Christ. When one includes the angelophanies, portents and texts which refer to the disciples' miracles, the degree to which miracles dominate the Gospels becomes apparent.⁶

One should not underestimate the importance of the record of our Lord's miracles to the Gospel accounts. Approximately 20 miracles are recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Accordingly, A. T. Robertson wrote, "If one will take out of Mark's Gospel all the miracles wrought by Jesus and every mention of the miraculous or the supernatural,

he will have only a mutilated fragment. When the miraculous is removed, only a bare skeleton remains.⁷

The Marvel Of His Miracles

The reaction to the miracles of our Lord was striking, to say the least. His miracles were so marvelous that “Great multitudes followed him” (Matt. 14:14; cf. Matt. 19:2). It is probably not possible for us to fully grasp the atmosphere in which Jesus lived His daily life. Ask yourself what atmosphere would be created if Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, the President of the United States, or some big Hollywood celebrity, just went walking around in public all of the time, without anyone to guard or shield them from the masses. They would never have a moment’s peace. Now, take the mental picture you have of the above, intensify it a hundredfold, and you might begin to come close to imagining the situation our Lord faced on a daily basis. The following passages provide a glimpse of just how much the multitudes were drawn to Jesus by the miracles that He did.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. **And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people** that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. **And there followed him great multitudes of people** from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan (Matt. 4:23-25, emp. mine throughout, BJC).

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and

preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. **But when he saw the multitudes,** he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:35-36).

And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, **they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;** And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole (Matt. 14:35-36).

And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: **Insomuch that the multitude wondered,** when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel (Matt. 15:30).

And at even, when the sun did set, **they brought unto him all that were diseased,** and them that were possessed with devils. **And all the city was gathered together at the door.** And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him (Mark 1:32-34).

And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. **For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon**

him for to touch him, as many as had plagues (Mark 3:9-10).

And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, **And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets,** and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole (Mark 6:53-56).

Now when the sun was setting, **all they that had any sick with divers diseases** brought them unto him; and **he laid his hands on every one of them,** and healed them (Luke 4:40).

But so much **the more went there a fame abroad of him:** and **great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed** by him of their infirmities (Luke 5:15).

And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and **a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon,** which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. **And the whole multitude sought to touch him:** for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all (Luke 6:17-19).

To try and gain a greater appreciation of these passages, consider the following scenario. If there were **only one** doctor on earth who knew the cure for cancer, and you had to see him personally in order to be cured, do

you not think that you and masses of other people would be camping out at his doorstep, and tracking him down, just to try and get to him for healing? Now, take that illustration and factor in on top of it the fact that Jesus was able to heal, not just one disease, but all disease. No wonder the multitudes thronged Him so.

In his work, **The Life Of Christ**, author James Stalker paints an eloquent picture of how the miracles of Jesus were so marvelous that they attracted the multitudes:

When, for instance, he first cured leprosy, the most malignant form of bodily disease in Palestine, the amazement of the people know no bounds. It was the same when He first overcame a case of possession; and when he raised to life the widow's son at Nain, there ensued a sort of stupor of fear, followed by delighted wonder and the talk of thousands of tongues...All Galilee was for a time in motion with the crowding of the diseased of every description who could walk or totter to be near Him, and with companies of anxious friends carrying on beds and couches those who could not come themselves. The streets of the villages and towns were lined with the victims of disease as His benignant figure passed by. Sometimes He had so many to attend to that He could not even find time to eat; and at one period He was so absorbed in His benevolent labors, and so carried along with the holy excitement they caused, that His relatives, with indecorous rashness, endeavored to interfere, saying to each other that He was beside Himself.⁸

The miracles of our Lord were so remarkable that “the people feared” (Mark 5:15), the “multitude wondered” and “glorified the God of Israel” (Matt. 15:31), the people were “beyond measure astonished” (Mark 7:37), the multitudes “marveled and glorified God” (Matt. 9:8), and “all the people were amazed” (Matt. 12:23). The following

words, from the book of Luke, also demonstrate how the people marveled as they considered and witnessed the miracles surrounding the life of Jesus: “great things” (*megaleios*, Luke 1:49); “glorious things” (*endoxos*, Luke 13:17); “strange things” (*paradoxos*, Luke 5:26); and “wonderful things” (*thaumasios*, Matt. 21:15).⁹

The Manner Of His Miracles

The miracles of Christ “were wrought in three realms: the human, the cosmic, and the spiritual, and prove Christ’s sovereignty over all realms. In the human realm are all healing miracles; in the cosmic realm are all the miracles involving nature; and in the spiritual realm are the miracles which impinge on other worlds.”¹⁰ In performing His miracles, Jesus demonstrated a variety of powers. John emphasizes that Jesus possessed supernatural knowledge of hidden realities (John 1:47-49; John 2:24-25; John 4:16-19; John 5:6; John 6:64, 70-71; John 13:1; John 21:6). He possessed the power to pass unharmed through the midst of the very crowd who intended to hurl Him to His death (Luke 4:29-30).

As to the methods Jesus used to accomplish His mighty works, “Sometimes He used means, such as a touch, or the laying of moistened clay on the part, or ordering the patient to wash in water. At other times He healed without any means, and occasionally even at a distance.”¹¹

The miraculous power of Jesus was demonstrated in a diversity of ways. He stilled the storm (Matt. 8:23) and walked on the sea (Mark 6:48). He miraculously multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed thousands (Mark 6:30; Mark 8:1). He repeatedly demonstrated His mastery over demons (Luke 8:26; Matt. 9:32; Mark 1:33). He healed a variety of physical infirmities (Matt. 8:14-16; Matt. 9:20; Matt. 15:21; Matt. 17:14; Luke 13:11; Luke 17:11; Luke 22:51). He made the lame to walk (Luke 5:18; Mark 2:1-10; Mark 8:22) and

the blind to see (Matt. 9:27; Matt. 12:22; Matt. 20:30). On three recorded occasions, He even demonstrated His mastery over death (Matt. 9:18, 23; Luke 7:11; John 11:43).

One of the most fascinating aspects of Jesus' miracles is His complete mastery over every area of life and death. In summary, Jesus demonstrated His mastery in the following areas: (1) Power over disease; (2) Power over demons; (3) Power of creation (loaves & fishes); (4) Power over nature¹² (Water to wine, walking on water) and (5) Power over death (Lazarus).

It is important that Jesus demonstrated such a complete mastery because "had Jesus demonstrated power in only one area, suspicion might have arisen regarding its authenticity."¹³ Stalker aptly noted, "Some of His cures of mental disease, if standing by themselves, might be accounted for by His influencing the body through the mind. But such a miracle as walking on the tempestuous sea is utterly beyond the reach of natural explanation."¹⁴ Furthermore, the healings of leprosy did not involve a psychosomatic cure, nor did the congenital diseases such as blindness (John 9) and death (John 11).¹⁵

It is also interesting to note that never did the Lord conduct preliminary interviews with the patients to select only the easiest cases.¹⁶ Franklin Camp draws our attention to another important matter concerning the manner of miracles done by Christ:

One of the strange things in reference to those who were healed by Christ, including the multitudes of people, not a single one ever reported back to him that his malady had not been cured. Compare that with the so-called miracle workers of today. When you consider the opposition that Christ faced in his day, the interest that so many had, like the Pharisees in discrediting him before the people, and the miracles being performed before multitudes, how would you explain that they never found a

single person that they could bring into his midst and say—here is the evidence that you do not perform miracles? What better way could they have found to have discredited Christ and stopped his teaching? This would have been a simple way to save them from finally pushing Pilate until he was crucified. Can any honest person really believe that Christ's enemies did not follow this course except for the one reason: that every miracle he performed was indeed a genuine miracle? Miracles that were purely things of deception would surely, sooner or later, have backfired on him. Not only would these miracles have backfired on him, if not genuine, this very evidence would have been presented in his presence and that would have been the end of Christ.¹⁷

If there had not been a basis in fact concerning the miracles of Jesus, the Gospel writers would not have affirmed such, for it would have been totally opposed to the impression of the Jewish nation regarding Jesus. Besides, in private, even the Pharisees admitted the validity of the miracles of Christ (John 11:47).

The Motivation Of His Miracles

John D. Davis offers the following definition of a miracle: "Miracles are events in the external world, wrought by the immediate power of God and intended as a sign or attestation."¹⁸ Whether it be the miracles of the Old Testament, or those performed by Jesus of Nazareth, God has always had a very definite purpose and motivation for His demonstration of the miraculous. W. Graham Scroggie explains:

Miracles were employed—always with a moral and spiritual end—to reveal the sovereignty and power of God, and they were particularly prominent in times of historical crisis. A survey of the miracles of the Bible will show that there

were three such crises: (a) in the time of the Moses, when the Israelites were about to become a nation; (b) in the time of Christ, at the junction of the ages of the Law and the Gospel; and (c) in the time of Elijah and Elisha, as a protest against the prevailing idolatry, and to call attention to the claims of Jehovah upon His people.¹⁹

Jesus did not do miracles just to satisfy people's curiosity (Luke 23:8). He was not putting on a sideshow. So why then did Jesus perform miracles? What was His motivation? Essentially, the miracles of Jesus were designed to serve as manifestations to those who witnessed them. Webster defines a "manifestation" as "an outward or perceptible indication." Therefore, we are affirming that the miracles of Jesus were/are outward and perceptible indications of something.

But what is the something that Jesus' miracles were/are designed to indicate? The answer is found at the close of John's description of the very first recorded miracle that Jesus performed. After telling of how Jesus miraculously, and instantaneously, turned water into wine, John summarizes the episode as follows: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, **and manifested his glory**; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11). To be more specific, we affirm that Jesus intended His miracles to be (1) Manifestations of His Messiahship; (2) Manifestations Of His Mercy; and (3) Manifestations Of His Mission. Let us look at these in order.

Manifestations Of His Messiahship

When Jesus cleansed the temple early in His ministry, the national leaders immediately issued a challenge to Him to work some overpowering miracle to prove His Messiahship (Who else but the Messiah would have the authority to take charge of the temple?): "What

sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?” (John 2:18). In and of itself, this request was not altogether improper. The Messiah was expected to do miracles (Luke 4:16-21; John 7:31). Even the prophets had predicted the miraculous powers the Messiah would demonstrate. Isaiah thus proclaims: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing (Isa. 35:5-6).

With this before us, we can better appreciate Jesus’ answer to the disciples of John when they came to ask, “Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?” The only reply which seemed necessary was, “Go tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:2-5).

One thing is certain: Jesus was not the least bit hesitant to affirm that His miracles were proof positive of His Messianic claims. Consider the following passages:

But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me (John 5:36).

Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me...If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him (John 10:25, 37-38).

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works’ sake (John 14:10-11).

If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father (John 15:24).

Although Jesus knew that He was the Christ, the Son of God, He was also very interested in what people thought concerning Him. Did they embrace His claims? On one occasion, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?” (Matt. 22:42). Determining the true identity of Jesus is a vital matter—so vital that Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matt. 16:13). The disciples’ reply revealed a lack of consensus among the people concerning the identity of Jesus: “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14).

The contrasting attitudes toward the identity of Jesus are well documented in the Gospel of John:

And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people...So there was a division among the people because of him (John 7:12, 43).

Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet (John 9:16-17).

There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? (John 10:19-21).

In each of the three foregoing passages, John observes that there was a division among the people because of Jesus. Some regarded Him as a deceiving, demon-possessed, sabbath-breaking, sinner (John 7:20; John 8:13, 48,52). On the other hand, some esteemed Jesus as a good, miracle working, man, who deserved a hearing. Remarkably, many of the chief rulers mentally acknowledged that Jesus was more than just a good man. They knew He was the Christ, yet they refused to confess it because they did not want to incur the wrath of the Pharisees and suffer expulsion from the synagogue (John 12:42-43).

On the other hand, in so many cases, it was the miracles of Christ that caused people to acknowledge Him as having been sent from God. When Jesus “was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (John 2:23). Furthermore, Nicodemus exclaimed to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well turned out to be an unforgettable occasion for her. As she came to draw water, Jesus asked her for a drink. She was astonished that a Jew would ask for such, considering that Jews did not associate with Samaritans. As the conversation continued, Jesus asked the woman to go and call her husband. She stated that she had no husband, whereupon Jesus said, “Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly” (John 4:17-18). What an astonishing statement! Jesus had never met this woman and had no natural way of knowing what He knew about her. Hence, she said, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (John 4:19).

After Jesus answered her question about true worship, the woman said, "I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25). At this point, Jesus declared, "I that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:26). The woman became so excited that she left her waterpot, scurried into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).

What made this Samaritan woman so sure that Jesus was the Messiah? It was His supernatural ability to know her life and "read her mind" that convinced her. This same power converted Nathanael from skeptic to believer. At his initial introduction to Jesus, Nathanael was astonished that Jesus knew him so well, having never met him. He asked Jesus, "Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John 1:48). Nathanael was so impressed by the miraculous knowledge of Jesus that he said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:49). According to John 2:24-25, Jesus "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." This ability led, not only to the conversion of Nathanael and the Samaritan woman, but also "many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that I ever did" (John 4:39). What other man, claiming to be the Messiah, has ever demonstrated such ability?

Not only did Jesus possess the miraculous ability to know what was in man, He could also accurately predict the future. Shortly after performing His first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the passover. His righteous ire was raised when He found the moneychangers in the temple. As He drove them out, they demanded a sign from Him to verify

His authority to act in such a way (John 2:18). He answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The Jews ridiculed Him, thinking that He had reference to the physical temple, but Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:20-21). He was predicting His bodily resurrection. John records, “When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22).

In addition to accurately predicting His resurrection, Jesus also predicted that Judas would betray Him (John 13:18). In fact, Jesus often explained to His disciples that He was telling them what would happen in advance in order that they might believe in His Deity. Consider the following statements to His disciples:

Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he (John 13:19).

And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe (John 14:29).

But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you (John 16:4).

When the things that Jesus predicted actually came to pass, the faith of the disciples was strengthened. What alleged prophet has ever been able to duplicate such inspiration and confidence with his “prophecies”?

Faith in Jesus as a miracle-worker often led on to a higher faith. So it was in the case of His devoted follower Mary Magdalene, out of whom He cast seven devils (Mark

16:9). In the eyes of our Lord, those who had seen His mighty works and rejected Him were without excuse (Matt. 11:20-24; John 15:22-24).

But what about the terse reply of Jesus to certain scribes and Pharisees who requested a sign from Him in Matthew 12:38? Jesus told them that “an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Matt. 12:39). How do we reconcile the statements of Jesus in John 5 with His statement in Matthew 12? Were miraculous signs important and essential to producing faith in Christ or not? Why, then, did He call the scribes and Pharisees “an evil and adulterous generation” for seeking a sign from Him? Because they were not truly interested in seeing a sign so that they could decide if Jesus was the Christ.

Matthew records a similar occasion to the one recorded in Matthew 12:38. In Matthew 16:1, “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.” It is apparent that their motives were insincere and impure. They were not interested in believing in Christ; they wanted to ensnare Him. Furthermore, Jesus had already performed an ample number of signs to convince any open-minded person that He was heaven-sent. Finally, Jesus **did** promise a sign to the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees who sought to entrap Him. He told them to look for the sign of the prophet Jonas, a reference to His impending resurrection (Matt. 12:39-40; Matt. 16:4). If they sincerely wanted proof of His Sonship, the sign of all signs would be His resurrection (Rom. 1:4).

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter emphasized the truth that the miracles of Jesus attested to His Messianic claims. Peter said,

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, **a man approved of God among**

you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it...Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 36).

In this passage, “Three main words speak of the supernatural works of Christ: *teras* (wonders) speaks of a wonderful act; *semeion*, of a sign symbolizing heavenly truths; and *dunamis* (miracles), of putting forth of Divine power.”²⁰ Regarding these three words (Signs, wonders, and miracles), A. T. Robertson affirms: “It takes all of these words to convey the full conception of a miracle of Jesus as a cause for wonder, as a work wrought by divine power, and as a sign of the truth of Christ’s claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God.”²¹ Josh McDowell insightfully concludes:

The early Christians did not need to prove that Jesus had performed miracles. They simply appealed to the knowledge of their listeners. Less than two months after Jesus’ crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, Simon Peter told a large gathering, “Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.” Peter therefore appeals to the knowledge of hostile witnesses, that they themselves were aware of the miracles of Jesus. That he wasn’t immediately shouted down demonstrates that the wonders Jesus performed were well known.²²

We agree with Stalker, who wrote of Jesus: “All His miracles bore the stamp of His character. They were not

mere exhibitions of power, but also of holiness, wisdom and love. The Jews often sought from Him mere gigantesque prodigies, to gratify their mania for marvels. But he always refused them, working only such miracles as were helps to faith.”²³

Manifestations Of His Mercy

Although the primary aim of Jesus’ miracles was to produce faith in His Deity (John 20:30-31), it is equally true that an umbrella of mercy and compassion surrounds them as well. Stalker eloquently depicts the merciful, miracle-working Messiah:

Think of how surrounded by sin and disease Jesus was, yet His sympathetic heart never grew callous in the least degree...He was in the right place; it suited His great love to be where help was needed. And what a joy it must have been to Him to distribute blessings on every hand and erase the traces of sin; to see health returning beneath His touch; to meet the joyous and grateful glances of the opening eyes; to hear the blessings of mothers and sisters, as He restored their loved ones to their arms; and to see the light of love and welcome in the faces of the poor, as He entered into their towns and villages. He drank deeply of the well at which He would have His followers to be ever drinking—the bliss of doing good.²⁴

Jesus never used His miraculous power for selfish purposes. He never charged for His services. “In contrast, a payment was expected by visitors to the shrines of the Hellenic healing cults.”²⁵ Jesus did not use His powers to retaliate against His enemies, although the disciples suggested it to Him (Luke 9:52-56).

Manifestations Of His Mission

As merciful as our Lord showed Himself to be through His mighty works, we must not forget that behind the

performing of every miracle was a clear vision of His main mission: to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10).

His miracles were symbols of His spiritual and saving work. You have only to consider them for a moment to see that they were, as a whole, triumphs over the misery of the world... This huge mass of physical evil in the lot of mankind is the effect of sin. Not that every disease and misfortune can be traced to special sin, although some of them can. The consequences of past sin are distributed in detail over the whole race. But yet the misery of the world is the shadow of its sin. Material and moral evil, being thus intimately related, mutually illustrate each other. When He healed bodily blindness, it was a type of the healing of the inner eye; when He raised the dead, He meant to suggest that He was the Resurrection and the life in the spiritual world as well; when He cleansed the leper, His triumph spoke of another over the leprosy of sin; when he multiplied the loaves, He followed the miracle with a discourse on the bread of life; when He stilled the storm, it was an assurance that He could speak peace to the troubled conscience.²⁶

It is fascinating to observe how Jesus used His miracles to attract a multitude and once He had them in His presence, He use the opportunity to preach. The use of the miracle had the effect of bringing together throngs of people who were then favorably disposed to listen to the spoken word. For instance, the great multitudes were in position to hear the Sermon on the Mount because they had brought their sick from far and near and he had healed them (Matt. 4:23-25). His words and His works worked in tandem for the one main goal of saving souls. In Matthew chapters 5-7 we have the Saviour's *teaching*. In Matthew 8-9 we have the Saviour's *touch*. Paul says that Christ is the *power* of God, and the *wisdom* of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and Matthew illustrates this fact. The wisdom of Christ is

revealed in Christ's *words* (Matt. 5-7), and His power is displayed in Christ's *works* (Matt. 8-9). ²⁷“The impact of Jesus Christ was made not only through His words, but equally by means of the his works of power. These are the two streams by which his person refreshed the world during the days of his flesh (Acts 1:1).”²⁸ This “one-two punch” of His words and His works is also clearly evidenced in the following passage from the Gospel of Mark:

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And **they were all amazed**, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? **for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him** (Mark 1:22-27).

The motivation for Jesus' miracles was to provide manifestations of His Messiahship, His mercy, and His mission to save the lost.

Conclusion

Commenting on John 20:30-31, brother Franklin Camp observed:

You will note that John ties together the signs with his proposition of life being offered through Christ. Since Christ is the very heart of the gospel, if he is rejected, or left out, it must follow that the offer of life made in the gospel ends in

death. If the miracles of the gospel were not genuine, then Christ was not genuine and therefore, the offer of life is not genuine either. Yet modernists expect to reject the miracles of the gospel, which in the very nature of it would also reject Christ, who is the very heart of the gospel. Modernists are trying to do to the gospel of Christ just what a man's body does whenever another heart is placed in it, that is, reject it. But the gospel that they have left is just like a man's body after it has rejected the transplanted heart. It's dead—without value.²⁹

If anyone should have believed in the Deity of Christ, it should have been the Jews. The story is told of a Jewish soldier who had heard much about Jesus. He went to his rabbi and said, "Rabbi, the Christians say the Christ has already come, but we claim that he is yet to come." "Right," answered the rabbi. "Well," asked the young soldier, "when our Christ comes, what will he have on Jesus Christ?" "That," said the rabbi, "we do not know!"³⁰ What else could he say? This is exactly the same way that some felt during the earthly ministry of *Jesus*. "And many of the people believed on him and said, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" (John 7:31).

The crowning miracle of all miracles in proving the Deity of Christ is His resurrection from the dead. He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection proves that He is by the right hand of God exalted as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:23-37). The empty tomb testifies that Jesus is the living Christ and it elevates Him above all others who have claimed to be the Christ or the prophet of God. Two little boys were slaves to an Arab master. He taught them to believe in Mohammed whose body, they were informed, was preserved in a coffin in the city of Medina in Arabia. One day these lads heard a missionary

tell about the death, burial, AND resurrection of Christ. That night in the darkness of their little hut, they discussed this matter. One boy said, "What do you think? Our master tells us that Mohammed is dead and that his dead body is kept in a coffin; but the missionary tells us that Jesus, the Son of God died, rose again and is alive." The other boy looked at him and said, "I think I'd rather believe in the Living One."³¹

As a missionary finished preaching in a market place in one of the villages of Northern India, a follower of Mohammed stepped to him and said, "You must admit that we have one thing you do not, and it is better than anything you have." "And what is it you have?" "When we go to Mecca we at least find a coffin. But when you Christians go to Jerusalem, your Mecca, you find nothing but an empty grave." The missionary smiled and said, "That is just the difference. Mohammed is dead and in his coffin just like all false prophets of religion. But Christ is risen and all power in heaven and earth is given to him. He is alive forever."³²

Thus, the empty tomb testifies to the Deity of Christ. Moreover, it assures me that just as death has no more dominion over Jesus, that if I will follow Jesus, and obey His Gospel, I will also be raised up at the last day and get to go home with Him and live forevermore (John 5:28-29; John 6:40; John 11:25-26; Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:21-22)! This study of the miracles of Jesus makes Him look all the bigger to me, but I can only imagine how glorious it will be on that day when I look upon the face of the Mighty Jesus!

Endnotes

1 Peter Lewis, **The Glory Of Christ** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), pp. 11-12.

2 Bernard Ramm, **Protestant Christian Evidences** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), p. 173.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, **Know Your Bible: A Guide To The Gospels**, (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1948), p. 555.

4 J. W. McGarvey, **Evidences Of Christianity** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1967), p. 116.

5 The following passages are summary statements found in the Gospel accounts wherein we read of Jesus healing large numbers of people. These verses may sometimes be overlooked in a study of the miracles of Jesus, but they provide us with a fascinating glimpse at the miracles, signs, and wonders performed by our Master (Matt. 4:23-24; Matt. 8:16; Matt. 9:35; Matt. 10:1,8; Matt. 11:4-5; Matt. 11:20-24; Matt. 12:15; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 14:36; Matt. 15:30; Matt. 19:2; Matt. 21:14; Mark 1:32-34; Mark 1:39; Mark 3:9-12; Mark 3:22; Mark 6:2; Mark 6:5; Mark 6:7; Mark 6:13; Mark 6:14; Mark 6:53-56; Luke 4:40f.; Luke 5:15, 17; Luke 6:17-19; Luke 7:21f; Luke 9:11; John 2:23; John 3:2; John 6:2; John 7:31; John 11:47; John 12:37).

6 B. L. Blackburn, "Miracles and Miracle Stories," **Dictionary Of Jesus And The Gospels**, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot Mcknight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 549-550).

7 A. T. Robertson, **Studies In Mark's Gospel** (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), p. 49

8 James Stalker, **Life of Christ** (Atlanta: Jernigan Press, 1981), pp. 62-63.

9 Scroggie, **Guide To The Gospels**, p. 204

10 W. Graham Scroggie, **The Unfolding Drama Of Redemption**, Vol. 1., (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 149.

11 Ibid, p. 63.

12 It is interesting to observe that when demons would begin to announce the Deity of Jesus (Mark 1:23-25; Mark 3:11-12), our Lord rebuked them and commanded them to be silent. Why? I believe that R. C. Foster is on target when he writes: "He desired to reveal Himself and not be revealed by the devil. Nevertheless, as the demons cried out in terror, their cries were heard by the multitudes and must have produced a deep impression (R. C. Foster, **Studies In The Life of Christ**, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 201.

- 13 “Nature” with Christ covers all realms. He is at home everywhere (A. T. Robertson, **Studies In Mark’s Gospel**, p. 49.
- 14 Everett K. Harrison, **A Short Life Of Christ** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 114.
- 15 Stalker, p. 64.
- 16 Paul E. Little, **Know Why You Believe** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 61.
- 17 Waymon D. Miller, **Modern Divine Healing** (Fort Worth: Miller Publishing Co., 1956), p. 101
- 18 Franklin Camp, “Miracles,” **The Church Faces Liberalism**, FHC Lectures, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970), pp. 341-342.
- 19 John D. Davis, **A Dictionary Of The Bible**, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), p. 504.
- 20 Scroggie, **Unfolding Drama Of Redemption**, p. 333.
- 21 Scroggie, **A Guide To The Gospels**, p. 204.
- 22 Robertson, p. 52.
- 23 Josh McDowell & Bill Wilson, **He Walked Among Us**, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 276.
- 24 Stalker, p. 65.
- 25 Ibid, pp. 66-67.
- 26 Harrison, p. 114.
- 27 Stalker, pp. 65-66.
- 28 Scroggie, **Guide To The Gospels**, p. 288.
- 29 Harrison, **A Short Life Of Christ**, p. 109.
- 30 Camp, p. 336.
- 31 Walter B. Knight, **Knight’s Master Book of New Illustrations** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) p. 334.
- 32 Ibid, p. 553.
- 33 Ibid, p. 559.

CHAPTER 3

The Virgin Birth Of Jesus Christ

Garland Elkins

Introduction

WITHOUT THE MIRACLE OF the virgin birth, all other miraculous claims of Jesus would be powerless, because without the virgin birth, He would not have been the Son of God.

Before we specifically address the subject of “The Virgin Birth of Jesus” it is appropriate to briefly discuss “The Mystery of Godliness.”

To the young preacher Timothy, Paul wrote:

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

Much in nature is mysterious. Mystery surrounds us in every direction. In the logical processes and the reproduction of life there is mystery. Like produces like in all the great variety of vegetation, flowers, and animal life. Though we know that all occurs according to the natural laws that God has put into operation, yet it is a mystery how God can do these things, and yet without miracle. The seedtime and harvest we see, know, and believe and accept; yet, who can explain them? Likewise the telephone,

radio, television and the airplane plus the rockets into outer space, are all mysterious. However, we do know that when men follow the laws which God has provided, and which when followed by men in the proper way, all of the above may be done. The reason is that man has discovered the laws God has made. There is nothing miraculous about any of this. Nevertheless, all of this we call a mystery.

Is it strange, then, that in the world of the spiritual there is much that is mysterious? The great facts mentioned by Paul as constituting “the mystery of godliness” could not have been known if God had not explained them to mankind. This mystery God has revealed to us in the Gospel, in order to make us wise and godly. Let us briefly examine these six things mentioned by Paul as constituting “the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16).

1. **“He who was manifested in the flesh.”** That manifestation was made in Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son. Jesus said that He came to make the Father manifest. Before Jesus came men knew much about God; they knew He was powerful and far above men in every way. However, it remained for Christ to come and live among men for them to truly see the Father. When Jesus was asked by Philip to show him the Father, He replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9). This does not mean that the Father and the Son are the same person, but it means that they are alike. Jesus taught us that God is love, and said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus said that He was with the Father at the time of creation. John tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God. The same

was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).

Then John wrote, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). All of this is a mystery but it is revealed to us in the Gospel.

2. "**Justified in the spirit.**" After His condemnation to death, the power of God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus made many claims while He was in this life. Some men doubted. All would not accept Him as the Son of God. Some regarded Him as a mere man. Others said that He was a prophet--a great teacher. Many rejected His claims when He said He would rise from the dead. His own disciples did not understand it. But all of His claims were true. In the Holy Spirit, He was justified. Jesus Christ came, making great claims. They constituted a mystery in the minds of men. He was justified in the claims He made. He was justified in the Spirit.

3. "**Seen of angels.**" An angel is a heavenly being, a messenger of God. Christ was seen of the angelic beings who come from the courts of heaven, and He was seen by the human messengers of God upon the earth. Referring to the angelic beings from above, He was ministered to by angels at the close of the temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:11). Angels were at the tomb when He rose from the dead (John 20:12). Angels sang the night that He was born (Luke 2:10-14). Angels stood by as He ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

4. He was "**Preached among the nations.**" This was an amazing fact in the minds of the Jews, who like Paul for example, were trained to believe that the Gentiles were accursed. When Christ came to earth, and during

His ministry, the Gentiles were in the minds of many of the Jews considered as dogs. It was difficult for the Jew to come to believe that redemption through Christ was for all the world. To the Jew the Great Commission reached no farther than the Jewish people. However, God's purpose was, and is, that "whosoever will may come" (Rev. 22:17).

The first Gentile conversion was that of Cornelius and his household at Caesarea Philippi, when an angel told Cornelius to send to Joppa for a preacher by the name of Peter, who would come and tell him the words whereby he could be saved (Acts 10:1-48). Peter, taking six Jewish Christians with him as witnesses, preached the sermon. To convince those Jewish Christians that the Gentiles had the same privileges as the Jews in obeying Christ, and thus becoming Christians, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household and they spoke with tongues, which gave evidence that God had ratified what Peter had done. Peter then asked the six Jewish Christians:

Can any man forbid the water, that those should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days (Acts 10:47-48).

This was the beginning of salvation being offered to the Gentiles.

5. **"Believed on in the world."** Jesus was born of plain people, whose cradle was a manger, reared in Nazareth, from which no great man had ever come. His legal father was a carpenter, and the boy worked at the carpenter's trade, was subject unto His parents, went to the synagogue to worship every Sabbath day, and, about the age of thirty, unannounced and unheralded, He walked approximately sixty miles to where John the Baptist was preaching and asked to be baptized, saying, "it becometh

us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). As John raised Him from the baptismal waters, the Holy Spirit came upon Him, and God said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was then tempted of the devil (Matt. 4:1-11). He successfully met every temptation, came to Capernaum, and began a ministry of a little more than three years, in which He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Finally, in fulfillment of prophecy, He met death on Calvary. His body was raised by the power of God and His spirit went to be with God (Eccl. 12:7). From time to time He met with His disciples, then ascended to the Father. (Acts 1:1-11). They, ten days later on Pentecost, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, began their ministry, being led by the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth.

Paul calls the fact that Jesus was believed on in the world “a mystery.” Those who have taken the time to count them say that there are three hundred thirty-three distinct messianic prophecies concerning Jesus. Every one of them has been fulfilled. The student of the Old and New Testaments, therefore, when he reads what was predicted, and then beholds the fulfillment, exclaims, “This is he concerning whom the prophets did speak.” The fulfillment of prophecy, the working of miracles, His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven to the Father leave no thoughtful person in doubt as to the Deity of Jesus Christ. People today believe on Him in the world.

6. He was “**Received up in glory.**” Jesus said that He would ascend to the Father on that never-to-be-forgotten day He met with His disciples, gave them the Great Commission, commanded them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). He told them that the Holy Spirit would come upon them to guide them into all the

truth (John 16:13; Acts 1:8). They were told that the Holy Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance (John 14:26). The apostles rejoiced, returned to the upper room in Jerusalem, and waited ten days for the coming of the Holy Spirit when they began their mission (Acts 2:1-4).

Jesus the Christ stands today as the Christian's Advocate, and our High Priest at the right hand of God. When Stephen was stoned to death, he saw Jesus standing on the right of God (Acts 7:55-56). That Christ lives today is not to be doubted. He is now our Savior. At the consummation of all things, He will be our judge. Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He also said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

The Virgin Birth Of Jesus Christ

The Bible teaches much about the Christ. There are, among other great pillars of the Bible teaching about Christ, the following four great truths: (1) The doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ; (2) The doctrine of the vicarious death of Christ; (3) The doctrine of the blood atonement of Christ; (4) The doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

As would be expected these great truths have been denied and attacked by the Devil and his followers. In fact, from the very outset of the proclamation of these cardinal doctrines, there have been those who denied the truthfulness of them. The Jews as a nation denied these great truths, rebelled against them, and persecuted, tortured, and put to death those among them who believed on and accepted Christ. When addressing the Jews that killed him, Stephen said:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did

not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not (Acts 7:51-53).

In the first century, when the inspired apostle John wrote his first and second epistles, there were at least three classes of errorists who vehemently denied the doctrine of the virgin birth--namely, the Ebionites, the Docetics, and the Cerinthians.

Both The Old And New Testaments Teach The Virgin Birth Of Christ

The virgin birth was the first prophetic pronouncement of the Old and New Testament. Adam and Eve believed in the doctrine. Abel believed and presented animal sacrifices in contemplation of it. Noah took clean animals and fowls into the ark that he might sacrifice after the abatement of the flood--as he had done prior to the flood--in contemplation of it. David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah prophesied of it.

In the New Testament, both Matthew and Luke presented the fact of the virgin birth, and Mark and John contemplated the fact of the virgin birth. In the epistles, Peter, Paul, and the Hebrews writer confirmed the fact of the virgin birth.

The New Testament record of the virgin birth is clear and very emphatic and specific. Matthew records that before Joseph and Mary came together--that is, before they had conjugal intercourse--Mary was found with child by the Holy Spirit; that Joseph was minded to put her away privily--that is, break the betrothal; that as he thought on these matters an angel appeared in a dream and said, "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is

conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost”; that “she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Then Matthew states that “Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:18-25).

Luke records how that the angel Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, was sent from God unto Nazareth “to a virgin” whose name was “Mary” who was betrothed to a man who was named Joseph; that the angel greeted her with “Hail, thou art highly favored, the Lord is with thee”; then the angel announced:

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus...Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:31, 34-35).

Mary’s attitude was exemplary. She said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38).

To all who have minds open to the truth, merely to read what Matthew and Luke have written about the virgin birth as they were moved to write by the direction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:21) is adequate.

Some Old Testament Prophecies Regarding The Virgin Birth

After Adam and Eve sinned, God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head,

and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). In setting forth the respite for man, God said to Satan: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). It is very significant that the enmity was to be between the woman and Satan. It is even more significant that the enmity was to be between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan. The “seed” of the woman--the seed or egg that would develop into a child and that without its having been fertilized by a male--would bruise the head of Satan. This is clearly a prophecy of the virgin birth. When Christ was put to death on the cross the seed of Satan--the emissaries of Satan--had bruised his heel, but Christ in His death bruised the head of Satan--i.e., struck Satan a mortal blow by proving Himself to be conqueror of death and of hell.

Jeremiah, centuries later, set forth a prophecy which corroborated Jehovah’s pronouncement of the virgin birth as formerly announced to Satan. Jeremiah asked, “How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22). According to Jeremiah there was to be a new thing in the earth: a woman would encompass a man. The statement means that a woman would house a man in her womb without having had the agency of a male--that would be new! Thus Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the “new thing in the earth” is a corroboration of Jehovah’s pronouncement to Satan that the seed that would come by woman alone would bruise his (Satan’s) head. Jeremiah 31 is definitely messianic:

At that time...watchmen upon the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto Jehovah our God...For Jehovah hath ransomed Jacob...A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping...Behold the

days come, saith Jehovah...they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge...I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know Jehovah (Jer. 31:1, 6, 11, 15, 27, 29, 31, 34).

These passages show without doubt that Jeremiah's prophecy relative to "the new thing in the earth" is one phase of the messianic prophecy which characterizes the entire chapter.

Furthermore, Matthew corroborated Jehovah's judgment against Satan. He wrote an account of Christ in such a way as to meet the needs of the Jews who had embraced Christ and by so doing had suffered the criticism and persecution of unbelieving Jews. Matthew traced the genealogy of the Jews from Abraham to Christ. He moved from one begetting male to another until he came to Joseph. At this point the word "beget" was dropped--the male line was set aside and Matthew stated, "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matt. 1:16). With Joseph the begetting order of the males ceased, and Joseph became the husband of Mary of whom--feminine in gender in the Greek--was born Jesus Who is called Christ. That is to say that Jesus was born of Mary, and that birth was without the begetting agency of a male. In short, Mary conceived in her womb and bore the Christ without the agency of Joseph or any other man. How powerful this is in corroboration of the virgin birth. Also it speaks to the power and foreknowledge of God.

David prophesied that in time animal sacrifices would be rejected and in turn that the body of a select person would be offered in the place of animal sacrifices. The Hebrews writer quoted from David, "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering

thou wouldest not, But a body didst thou prepare for me” (Heb. 10:5; Psm. 40:6). It is very obvious that the “me”--Christ--existed prior to the preparation of the body. Therefore this is a certain reference to the physical body which Christ offered as a sacrifice--a body of flesh and blood --for the sins of all men (Heb. 2:9). The virgin birth was the **how**, the **where** and **when** of the preparation of that body. God prepared that body for His Anointed, and the body was prepared--formed and developed in the womb of Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and that holy thing which was to be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

The prophet Isaiah declared to Ahaz the wicked king of Judah who refused to ask a sign of Jehovah, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Please note that the prophecy explicitly stated that a virgin would bear a child, that the child would be a son, not a daughter, and that the child would be God-man. Matthew corroborated Isaiah’s prophecy relative to this virgin birth. After giving the details of Christ’s birth of the virgin Mary, Matthew wrote:

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (Matt. 1:22-23).

The following quotes contain much important information relative to the virgin birth of our Lord.

Brother Rex A. Turner, Sr. wrote:

Liberals contend that Isaiah knew nothing of a virgin birth, that he merely predicted that a young woman known to both Isaiah and Ahaz—and not necessarily a virgin—would

bear a son and call his name Immanuel, indicating thereby she had faith that Jehovah would deliver Judah from the threat of Israel and Syria; and that Matthew merely took the statement from Isaiah and appropriated it to Christ. The liberals then point out that the common Hebrew word for virgin is *bethulah*; whereas, Isaiah used the Hebrew word *almah* which merely means young woman, and a young woman may, or may not, be a virgin.

True, Isaiah used the Hebrew word *almah* but untrue is the assertion that *almah* merely means a young woman which may or may not be a virgin. The Hebrew word *almah* is used seven times in the Old Testament writings, and each time the word is used a virgin is contemplated. The references and cases are as follows:

The first case—Genesis 24:42-44—has to do with Abraham’s servant who was seeking a wife for Isaac, and the reference reads: “O Jehovah,... behold, I [the servant] am standing by the fountain of water; and let it come to pass, that the maiden (*almah*) that cometh forth to draw, to whom I shall say, Give me I pray thee, a little water from thy pitcher to drink; and she shall say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom Jehovah hath appointed for my master’s son.” Without question Abraham’s servant was seeking a virgin wife for his master’s son.

The second case—Exodus 2:8—has to do with Moses’ sister who stood guard for his safety in the days of his infancy. The reference reads: “And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maiden (*almah*) went and called the child’s mother.” Moses’ sister was no concubine or prostitute. She was a teen-age girl who was caring for her baby brother.

The third case—Psalm 68:25—has to do with a description of how the ark was borne to the sanctuary, and the reference reads: “The singers went before, the minstrels followed after, In the midst of the damsels (*almahs*) playing with timbrels.” Those damsels were virgins not concubines or prostitutes!

The fourth case—Proverbs 30:18—has to do with things too wonderful for Solomon. He said: “There are three things which are too wonderful for me. Yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; The way of a serpent upon a rock; The way of a ship in the midst of the sea; And the way of a man with a maiden (*almah*).” Just as Solomon could not know or determine which direction the eagle, or the serpent, or the ship had taken — no path would be left in either case — he also had no way to know and no sign was available to denote when a maiden or virgin gave up her virginity to the act and device of a cunning and lustful lover. That the maiden here contemplates a virgin is clearly shown by the contrast of the next verse which speaks of the adulterous woman.

The fifth case—Song of Solomon 1:3—contemplates the daughters of Jerusalem. The reading is: “Thine oils have a goodly fragrance; Thy name is as oil poured forth; Therefore do the virgins (*almahs*) love thee.” There can be no doubt that the reference here is to virgins.

The sixth case—Song of Solomon 6:8—contemplates the number of queens, of concubines, and of virgins. The reading is: “There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, And virgins (*almahs*) without number.” Here again there can be no doubt. The virgins, in contrast to the concubines, far outnumbered the others.

The seventh case—Isaiah 7:14—contemplates, as already indicated, the virgin who would give birth to the God-child.

In summary, relative to the references where the Hebrew *almah* appears, the following observations are in order: (1) The Hebrew word *bethulah* contemplates any virgin, whether a child too young for marriage or a woman of extreme age and thus too old for marriage; (2) the Hebrew word *almah* also contemplates a virgin, but it contemplates as a virgin a young maiden or woman of marriageable age, and thus ripe for marriage. Matthew by inspiration interpreted, therefore, the intent or meaning of the Hebrew word *almah* to be a young maiden or woman—but a virgin—of marriageable age.

He did this by quoting Isaiah as having said: “Behold the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel” (Matt. 1:23).¹

Brother B. C. Goodpasture offers additional insight:

The modernists, as a rule, insist that it is really not very important as to whether one accepts the virgin birth or not. If it is such an insignificant matter, why do they leave no stone unturned in their efforts to destroy belief in it? How will they explain his divinity if they reject his miraculous birth? The fact is, those who deny the virgin birth usually doubt the atoning death and skirt the bodily resurrection of Christ. It is very difficult to deny one and hold to the others. The attitude one assumes toward Christ and his mission is largely determined by what one thinks of his birth. No one who accepts the evidence can doubt the virgin birth, for the testimony is all on one side.

The loss of Eden is followed with a promise which seems to involve the virgin birth. “I will,” said Jehovah, “put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). There is something unusual in this prediction. Hebrew usage gives the preeminence to the man and not to the woman in genealogies. But it is the “seed of the woman,” not the “seed of the man,” that will finally “bruise” the serpent’s head. We can neither account for nor understand such language apart from the virgin birth. Isaiah, looking down through seven centuries, saw the maid of Nazareth and foretold the miraculous birth: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Matthew, by inspiration, finds the fulfillment of this prophecy in the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:22-23). There can be no doubt as to the application. However, those who deny the virgin birth try to evade the force of Isaiah’s prediction by saying that the Hebrew word “*almah*,” here translated “virgin,” means merely a young woman of marriageable age,

but not necessarily a virgin. They claim the word “*bethulah*” would have been used if a real virgin had been meant. It is a fact, notwithstanding, that “*bethulah*,” which is said to mean a real virgin, is actually used of a bride lamenting over her husband in Joel 1:8; while the word “*almah*,” which critics say may not mean a real virgin, is used in Isa. 7:14 and in six other places (Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; Psm. 68:26; Prov. 30:19; S. of Sol. 1:3; S. of Sol. 6:8), and always in the sense of an unmarried maiden. Whatever meaning “*almah*” may have elsewhere, it matters not for the present purpose, so long as usage shows that it means an unmarried maiden in the Old Testament. In applying the prophecy of Isaiah to Mary, Matthew shows that he understood “*almah*” to mean a real virgin, inasmuch as he knew the facts in Mary’s case.

Luther said: “If a Jew or Christian can prove to me that in any other passage of Scripture *almah* means ‘married woman,’ I will give him one hundred florins, although God alone knows where I may find them.”²

To the previous words, we add the comments of Wayne Jackson:

The Virgin Birth

One of the most controversial passages of Isaiah has been the Immanuel prophecy of 7:14. The reference to a virgin conceiving might present some interpretative difficulties were it not for the fact that an inspired New Testament apostle has given us the correct meaning of Isaiah 7:14--it was “fulfilled” by the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. It is certainly no surprise that both Jews and modernists reject the Messianic thrust of Isaiah 7:14; the former deny that Jesus is the Messiah and the latter are forever attempting to “de-mythologize” the Bible of its miraculous elements. The disturbing thing is this--**many otherwise conservative scholars (and a number of our own brethren) have allowed the views of unbelievers to influence their own**

convictions as to the meaning of Isaiah 7:14. When will we cease to let infidels interpret the Bible for us?!

During the days of Ahaz, monarch of the southern kingdom of Judah, the kings of Israel and Syria formed a confederation for the purpose of overthrowing Judah. King Ahaz was in a state of deep despair, “his heart trembled,” thus did Jehovah send unto him Isaiah the prophet, who in company with his young son, Shearjashub, came to the king assuring him that these hostile forces would not prevail. Isaiah encouraged the depressed ruler to ask for a sign of Jehovah in order to corroborate the prophecy. When Ahaz refused saying, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah,” Isaiah then turned from the king and to the “house of David” proclaimed, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

Exactly who was this virgin? (1) Some have suggested she was the wife of Ahaz, but this is not possible since Abi, his wife (2 Kings 18:2), was already the mother of Hezekiah at this time. (2) Others have opined that Isaiah’s wife is in view, yet, the prophet’s wife had already given birth to a son (Isa. 7:3) and hence was no longer a virgin. (3) The idea that the “virgin” was a personification of the house of Israel is a ridiculous attempt to escape the obvious meaning of the language. (4) The **double fulfillment** theory, advocated by many, declares that the primary reference is to a girl of Isaiah’s day (then a virgin, but later to marry and conceive a son) who serves as a type of the virgin Mary. Matthew thus sees the virgin birth of Christ as a typological “fulfillment” of that unrecorded Old Testament event (Matt. 1:22). Such a view is simply not satisfactory regardless of the respectable names that may be marshalled in its support. First, if Matthew **correctly applied** Isaiah 7:14, then unquestionably a virgin birth was in the prophet’s prophetic view. This means if Isaiah primarily alluded to a girl of his own day, then there are **two** virgin births of history. If, on the other hand, Isaiah

referred to a girl who was a virgin at the time of his prophecy, but who would later marry and normally conceive a child, an antitypical interpretation regarding Mary could be similarly made and the virgin birth of Christ virtually denied. Allis has forcefully stated that “if the birth of Immanuel in Isaiah’s time was a perfectly natural one, then analogy would clearly favor the rejection of the virgin birth of Jesus.”

A careful examination of Isaiah 7:14 reveals the following details. In the first place, the prophecy of the virgin birth was not made, as is commonly assumed, to Ahaz. He had refused a sign; this was therefore a long-range sign for the benefit of the “house of David” (Isa. 7:13). This is further indicated by the usage of the plural pronoun, “you,” in verse 14.

Secondly, the projected event was to be a “sign.” Though the term “sign” need not imply the miraculous from a strictly etymological viewpoint, surely it will be unnecessary to observe that biblical words derive their meanings from (a) etymology; (b) general usage; and (c) contextual considerations (whether specific, as in Isaiah 7:14, or remote, as in Matthew 1:16-25). A gathering of all the related facts can only lead to the conclusion that Isaiah had a miracle in mind. Ahaz had been challenged to ask for a sign “either in the depth” (perhaps an earthquake--1 Kings 19:11; Matt. 28:2) or “in the height above” (possibly as the sun standing still--Judg. 6:17-21). Since the king refused the sign (his answer--“neither will I tempt Jehovah”--involves his recognition of a suggested miracle), a sign was offered to the house of David. The scholarly Dr. William F. Beck has carefully noted that there is nothing in this context to indicate that the “sign” prophesied by Isaiah was an abrupt, anticlimatic normal pregnancy in vivid contrast to the great sign offered to a weak king. It may be asked, however, how Jesus’ birth to the virgin Mary could serve as a “Sign” to those Israelites who lived seven centuries before its occurrence. “The answer is that the sign had no meaning to them necessarily. Ahaz, in disbelief, had

refused God's offer to fulfill any sign that he might choose which would have had contemporary significance; hence, God would give a sign of His own choosing. Moreover, full or immediate comprehension is not always essential to a prophecy, nor is it necessarily the purpose in a sign. Jonah's experience in the eighth century B.C. was a sign of the death and resurrection of Christ centuries before the events occurred and before anyone knew the inward spiritual significance of Jonah's three days' confinement in the belly of the fish! Nevertheless, Christ speaks of it as a divinely intended **sign** of His own burial three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:38-40)."

Isaiah declares that "the virgin" shall conceive and bear a son. Several interesting points are apparent here. First, "virgin" (Heb. *almah*) is preceded by the definite article. It is "**the** virgin" in the Hebrew text, the Septuagint, and in Matthew 1:23. As Prof. Beck points out, **the** virgin "cannot mean any woman in general. A pregnant woman is not a generality. Only a specific woman conceives and gives birth to a child." It is not without significance that the Revised Standard Version omits the article in the text, the footnote, and in Matthew 1:23! The modernists involved in that production did not believe a specific virgin was in the prophet's view.

Some have contended that the word *almah* is mistranslated "virgin," whereas it really means only "a young woman." The truth is, *almah* is the only word in the Old Testament that is consistently used of a virgin; it never refers to anything else. It is true that another word, *bethulah*, is also rendered virgin, but *bethulah* is used of a married woman in Joel 1:8, and Prof. Solomon Birnbaum declares that *bethulah* is used in Jeremiah 18:13 "in a state of marriage relationship with Jehovah, from whom she had gone astray. Here is a "wife" who has left or lost her husband, and is yet called a *bethulah*." *Almah* is the feminine of *elem* which occurs twice in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 17:56, Saul referred to David as an *elem*. The latter had just returned from fighting

Goliath and was unmarried. After he married Michal, he was never again called *an elem*. *Almah* may derive from the root *lm*, meaning ‘to conceal.’ Robert Lowth, the great exegete of the book of Isaiah, felt it originally came from the practice of keeping virgins hidden from the view of men, while Adam Clarke suggested it denoted a young **woman concealed to man**, i.e., she had not engaged in sexual relations, she was a virgin. Beck says: “I have searched exhaustively for instances in which *almah* might mean a non-virgin or a married woman. There is no passage where *almah* is not a virgin. Nowhere in the Bible or elsewhere does *almah* mean anything but a virgin.” When all has been said about *almah*, though, we ought to let Matthew the apostle settle the matter for us. He makes it perfectly clear (to those who refuse to let unbelievers do their interpreting for them) that Isaiah definitely had a virgin in mind. For a more thorough treatment of Matthew’s use of this verse, see my chapter in **The Living Messages of the Books of the New Testament** (Garland Elkins, Thomas Warren, eds.) pp. 37-39.

Finally, the virgin’s child was to be called “Immanuel.” Those who subscribe to the notion that this passage had an application to some child in Isaiah’s own time, are hard pressed to identify the elusive youngster. The name “Immanuel,” according to Isaiah (Isa. 8:8, 10) and according to Matthew (Matt. 1:23), denotes “God is with us,” and it indicates the divine nature of the child. This is further evidenced by the fact that this child is “Mighty God” according to Isaiah 9:6. Additionally, the land of Palestine is said to be “thy land, O Immanuel” (Isa. 8:8). “Now the question arises, who is Immanuel to whom **the land** belongs? Since this verse views the Assyrian as overflowing the land of Judah, and the land of Judah belongs to God, then it reasonably follows that the Immanuel of Isaiah 8:8 is God; therefore, the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 is **God in the flesh** born of a virgin.” Let us therefore stress again: the collective evidence relating to Isaiah 7:14 leads only to the conclusion that this passage is **exclusively** Messianic in its thrust.³

Consider the brilliant insights of Brother Guy N. Woods:

Isaiah 7:14 And The Word “Virgin”

Among the most objectionable renderings appearing in the RSV is that of Isaiah 7:14, where the familiar words of the older translations, “Behold, a **virgin** shall conceive...” do not appear and are supplanted by the clause, “Behold, a **young woman** shall conceive...” It must at once appear, to the most casual observer, that if this rendering is a valid one, (1) **the virgin birth** is not taught in the Old Testament, and (2) Matthew’s attempt to make it so is in error! Defenders of the RSV among us often assert that we do not give up the virgin birth of our Lord by conceding that the RSV rendering of Isaiah 7:14 is correct, but such an assertion is both illogical and absurd, since Matthew, on whom they affect to rely for the doctrine in the New Testament, cites Isaiah 7:14, in support of his doctrine! If we give up the doctrine in Isaiah, we must logically reject it in Matthew, because Matthew supported it by Isaiah: “Now all of this was done, **that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord **by the prophet**, saying, Behold, a **virgin** shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:18-23). Matthew’s affirmation necessitates the conclusion that the word he uses (*parthenos*) for “virgin” in 1:22-23, is exactly equivalent to the word (*Almah*), which Isaiah used in 7:14, when he said, “Behold, the *Almah* shall conceive...”

Those who support the RSV’s rendering, “young woman,” seek to avoid this obvious difficulty by the allegation that (a) the reference in Isaiah is a “dual” one and (b) *Almah*, translated “virgin” in the older versions, does not necessarily signify a virgin. The “dual reference” theory, now gaining credence among “us,” alleges that there are two mothers and two infants contemplated in Isaiah and Matthew, one mother and child living in the days of Ahaz, contemporary with Isaiah, the other mother and child, being contemporary with Herod, Mary and Jesus!

It is easy to see how this “theory” would be acceptable to those who believe that the scriptures are all things to all men, but it is truly amazing that men assumed to be trained in hermeneutics and who regard the Bible as a factual and straightforward document to be studied by the usual and ordinary rules of exegesis, could entertain such views! The difficulties which beset this view of the matter are both numerous and insuperable. (1) Isaiah’s prophecy contemplates **The Virgin** (so the Hebrew), not a virgin. Were the reference indefinite, it might with some reason be affirmed that no specific woman was contemplated: or there was a primary and secondary fulfilment—the primary in Isaiah’s day, the secondary in the birth of our Lord. This conclusion is precluded in the fact that *The Almah* would conceive and bear a son. How could one possibly assume, in the light of this fact, that “*The Almah*” actually meant two women, one a virgin the other a young woman, one of whom lived in Isaiah’s time and the other in the days of Herod? Moreover, how is it possible for the word *Almah*, as used by Isaiah, to mean no more than a young woman, **excluding** the idea of virgin, and the **same** word, when translated by Matthew, to **include** it? If to this the objection is offered that the idea involved in the word “virgin” is not necessarily excluded in the phrase “young woman,” the obvious answer is that, in this case, there were **two** virgin births, one occurring in the days of Ahaz and the other to Mary. Who was this first virgin? Was the birth miraculous? If yes, then the birth of Jesus was not unique; if no, then how could the **same** language describe the first birth as non-miraculous and the second as miraculous? The “dual reference theory” necessitates the conclusion that the virgin concept is **excluded** from Isaiah’s original statement and **included** in Matthew’s use of it. Words may indeed have typical significance, but any metaphorical usage bears the basic idea of the word used. Those who adopt the “dual reference” view abandon the simple and ordinary rules of interpretation.

Moreover, the son to be born to *The Almah* was to be called **Immanuel**, a word meaning, “God with us.” The manner in which the prophet introduces this is significant: “And shall call his name Immanuel.” In keeping with ordinary Hebraic usage, this does not merely mean that this is to be his proper name, but that he is to be called such **because he is such!** For a similar usage, consider, “And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), designations not simply applied to him, but given him because he was **actually** Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. On the assumption that the “dual reference” theory is the correct one, not only were there **two** mothers and two sons contemplated in Isaiah’s prophecy, there were two **Immanuels**. Who was the Immanuel of Isaiah’s day of whom it might properly be affirmed that he was “God with us?” Isaiah 7:14 is not the only instance of the use of the word by the prophet. It also occurs in Isaiah 8:8, where the reference is to **one** Immanuel, the Lord of the land! Clearly, this was not some unidentified individual, born of an unknown mother, but the Immanuel of whom Matthew wrote in his remarkable identification of Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy which Isaiah received **from the Lord**: “Now all of this came to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken **by the Lord** through the prophet, saying, Behold, **a virgin** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:18-23). It was the Lord who told the prophet that *The Almah* would bear Immanuel. If the woman of Isaiah 7:14 is not the virgin of Matthew 1:23, Matthew erred; if she is, the word *parthenos* (virgin) which he used is exactly equivalent [to] *Almah* which Isaiah used. We thus have an inspired lexicography of the term, if we may assume that Matthew wrote by inspiration!

(2) Apologists for the RSV are saying that the question is not whether *Almah* may refer to a virgin but whether it

always does so. The effort is irrelevant because the point in issue is not what the word may mean **elsewhere** but what it means in Isaiah 7:14, and we have established by **inspired** testimony that here it means a **virgin!** So ought it to have been rendered, and the translators of the Revised Standard Version are justly liable to the charge of being influenced by liberalism in following the practice of all liberals in their rendering of this historic passage. Their translation, “young woman,” is indefensible on various grounds. Was she married or unmarried? If married, there is no proper relationship between Isaiah’s “young woman,” and Matthew’s “virgin,” the reference thereto is improper, and there is no Messianic significance to the passage whatsoever. If the “young woman” of Isaiah 7:14, was contemporary with Isaiah, and unmarried, the son born to her was illegitimate, and can have no identity with our Lord. If she was pure, and unmarried, she gave birth to Immanuel as a virgin, as Matthew said she did, and so should the word *Almah* have been translated. There can never have been but one virgin birth.

Is there substance to the claim that *Almah* does not necessarily designate a virgin, but may indeed signify no more than a young woman? So some among us now affirm, alleging that “extra-biblical usage,” supports this conclusion. The implication from this is that the word was used in Isaiah’s day in nonbiblical documents merely to signify a “young woman.” The truth is, there are no “extra-biblical” documents available to us from Isaiah’s day, and the implication is disingenuous at best. Talmudic usage hundreds of years removed must not be allowed to oppose an affirmation of inspiration. The effort is identical with that of those who seek to sustain the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship on the ground that *psallo* once contained the idea of plucking or twanging. Such is not its meaning in the New Testament, and neither does the word *Almah* in Isaiah 7:14, mean anything other than a virgin. Its **biblical** usage is conclusive to this point. The word occurs in the following instances and in each obviously designates an unmarried

woman and a true virgin (Psm. 68:15; Exod. 2:8; Prov. 30:19; Gen. 24:43; S. of Sol. 1:3; S. of Sol. 6:8; and Isa. 7:14.) Hence, the RSV rendering of Isaiah 7:14, is an improper one and ought to be rejected. The dangerous character of this “translation” is not only evident here, but elsewhere as other writers in this issue have shown, and we cannot recommend it. The American Standard Version of the Scriptures, a sound, faithful and accurate translation of the Greek New Testament, and the King James’ Version, revered and loved by our fathers and mothers, are translations which recognize the Messianic character of Isa. 7:14, and ought not to be set aside for works so obviously influenced by liberal concepts as was the Revised Standard Version. Our institutions of learning must not fail us in this matter. The Christian schools were established to be, and have long been bastions of truth, set for the defence of the gospel. They must, at all costs, remain so. Schools, like women, are honored and respected only so long as they preserve their reputations--such once lost, can **never be regained**. These institutions ought to have been at the forefront fighting for a pure faith and a faultless practice and when they cease so to do they forfeit their rights to the respect and support of Bible loving people. Liberal-minded professors often talk of **academic freedom**. They must not forget that there is also **academic honesty**, and those who cannot conscientiously teach that which they were entrusted with ought to quit—not corrupt the minds of their students with liberal philosophies with which they were infected by denominational theologians.⁴

Andre Resner Attacks The Virgin Birth

In one of the most blasphemous articles that I have ever read, Andre Resner, a professor at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas, denied, ridiculed, and denigrated the virgin birth of our Lord. Since space does not permit me to quote the entire article some selected sections must suffice. The article appeared in **Wineskins**, Volume One, Number Seven, and is entitled “Christmas at Matthew’s House.”

Andre Resner began his article by saying “I’m at Matthew’s house for Christmas, and Matthew is sneaky. He’s almost too matter-of-fact for me. I need some intonation. I need some exclamation marks. Maybe a couple of winks. A raised eyebrow here and there. A gasp.” Resner continues, “For Matthew it begins in sexual scandal and it ends in political power plays. Before he can tell the scandal of Mary’s immaculate conception he has to subtly remind us of other scandalous women.” Among other women, Andre Resner says about Ruth, “And Ruth . . . dear sweet Ruth”-- well just what was she doing out there at the threshing floor at Boaz’s feet? And why did he want her to stay there all night, yet leave before daylight, and not let anybody see her? Hmmmmm.” One wonders whether Resner did not know what Ruth 3:11 says, or whether he just doesn’t believe it. Boaz said to Ruth, “for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

Andre Resner also wrote:

Though we’re still quite surprised by Matthew’s covert statement “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit,” Matthew has set us up for it. It’s a sort of “Here we go again folks.” Another sexually questionable woman. And what about Joseph’s faith in the face of Mary’s story? For it was he, who after a single dream, went ahead and married her. A dream that was real, yes, but still a dream. Could it have been a message from God? Or, could it have been his own imagination, his wanting to believe her so much that his subconscious produced a nocturnal justification for marrying her, even in the face of such an outlandish excuse? But there’s Joseph, crawling into bed with her every night the rest of his life, relying on a dream, believing in her word, that she really hadn’t slept with another man and used him to cover her shame.

One Does Not Believe The Bible If He Denies The Virgin Birth Of Christ

Now let us simply see what the Bible says about the virgin birth of Christ. The inspired Isaiah wrote: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14), The inspired Matthew discusses the virgin birth of Christ and even quotes Isaiah 7:14 and applies it to the virgin birth of Christ (Matt. 1:18).

One must either believe Andre Resner or Isaiah and Matthew. I believe (and all lovers of the truth also believe) that Isaiah and Matthew reveal to us the truth, i.e., Jesus was virgin born of Mary! Andre Resner should speedily repent for having attacked and denied by implication, the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us simply quote what Matthew wrote regarding the virgin birth of Christ:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is being interpreted, God with us. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25).⁵

Endnotes

1 Rex A. Turner, Sr., "The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ," **Systematic Theology**, pp. 170-171.

2 B. C. Goodpasture, "The Virgin Birth," **Sermons and Lectures** (Nashville), pp. 74-75.

3 Wayne Jackson, "The Living Message of Isaiah," **The Living Message of the Old Testament**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1976), pp. 250-253.

4 Guy N. Woods, "Isaiah 7:14 and the Word 'Virgin,'" **The Living Message of the Old Testament**, pp. 259-262.

5 Previously appeared in Garland Elkins, "The Truth About Authority," **The Stage Road Forum**, ed. Jimmy Ferguson (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), pp. 37-39.

CHAPTER 4

The Miracle Of Turning Water Into Wine

W. D. Jeffcoat

Introduction

IT IS A GREAT privilege and honor to be invited to speak on this the ninth annual **POWER** Lectureship. My assignment is to develop and elucidate the important and greatly misunderstood topic, "The Miracle At Cana of Galilee." The events attached to this miracle have led multitudes to erroneously conclude that Jesus the Christ not only made but sanctioned the imbibing of alcoholic beverages.

Preliminary Thoughts

The Lord delighted to do good and in this, His first miracle, He ably demonstrated His benevolence. In His appropriate commencement of powerful personal acts, He showed the character which He always sustained-- that of a benefactor of mankind. Miracles have a major part in the life of our Lord. Those who deny the miraculous but accept the moral teachings of Jesus might be surprised if they were to delete every passage which refers to the miraculous in the life of the Christ. The miracles He performed are proof of His deity and God's presence in Him.

In addition to the numerous lessons suggested in this miracle, much incidental light is shed on the social aspects

of His life. It reveals the important fact that our Lord was not austere and unfriendly; but that He did, on occasion, enter into gatherings where festivities occurred, and participated in them. Socially, He was polite and genteel, and His presence brought happiness to those about Him. In this miracle it may be seen that (1) Jesus sanctified true earthly joy and gave such His approval. (2) He sanctioned marriage and the various sympathies which attend it. (3) He sanctified social life and friendship, and left a fine example for us. (4) He placed special emphasis on the home, and its important functions. The bride and bridegroom must have been a holy pair, for otherwise they would not likely have had anything to do with Jesus. Although marriage is ever honorable in itself, it is not at all times used honorably. Where the Lord is not invited to bless the union, no good can be expected. Where the devotees of Satan are preferred to the followers of Christ, on such occasions, such is an intimation that so bad a beginning will likely have a bad ending.

The family at Cana may have been of modest circumstances, and thus when their supply of wine was depleted, the situation was likely an exceeding embarrassing one. It has been said that none but those who know how sacred in the East is the duty of lavish hospitality, and how passionately the obligation to exercise it to the utmost is felt, can realize the gloom which the incident would have thrown over the occasion, or the dismay and misery which it would have caused to the bride and bridegroom. These constitute some of the significant lessons to be learned from the Lord's miracle at Cana of Galilee.

Cana was a small city in the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19:28), and by stating this was Cana of Galilee, the apostle John distinguishes it from another Cana, which was in the tribe of Ephraim, in the land of Samaria. (Josh. 16:8;

Josh. 17:9). The miracle at Cana of Galilee gives us a wonderful and valuable insight into the superlative attitude and loving compassion of Jesus the Christ. A faulty analysis of the miracle, however, has led to a spurious or illegitimate claim.

The Claim

It is commonly claimed that Jesus made intoxicating wine when He performed the miracle in Cana of Galilee. From this claim, it is inferred that the use of intoxicating beverages is permissible today. W. J. Wiltenburg expresses the view as follows: “At the very least the story of Cana’s wedding feast indirectly approves the use of alcoholic beverages.”¹ The same can be seen from the following statement of Herschel H. Hobbs:

There is no point in debating whether or not this was real wine. The Greek word *oinos* normally denotes the fermented juice of the grape. The ruler’s appraisal of it in verse ten suggests that it was wine of the best quality.²

The claim is also voiced by James Burton Coffman in the following words:

Also, the opinion of the ruler of the feast that the wine Jesus made was superior in quality to that they had drunk earlier, supports the conclusion that it was not merely pure grape juice.³

Although Coffman correctly states that such wine was far less potent than modern intoxicating beverages, he, along with the others, assumes the very point to be proved. It may be also observed in this connection that frequently those who are opposed to “social” drinking hold the view that Jesus made intoxicating wine at Cana. Such a view, however, is illogical and untenable in light of the context under consideration.

Nature Of The Miracle

It should be noted that Jesus turned “water” to “wine.” There is a process by which nature can do the same. When this process is followed, an intoxicating beverage **can**, not **must**, be the result. If the process of nature has just reached the stage of being ripe in the pod of the grape, the liquid is not intoxicating. Jesus, however, passed over every step through which moisture must pass, according to the laws of nature, to be an intoxicant. Grape juice becomes intoxicating during the natural process in the following manner: (1) Moisture from the earth enters the roots of the grape vine. (2) It travels in the form of sap through the vine into the branches. (3) From there it travels into the pod of the grape where it goes through a maturing and ripening stage. (4) The juice is extracted and allowed to ferment.

The generic term *oinos* is used to describe that which Jesus made. The fact is stated that the water had “now become (*gegenemenon*) wine” (John 2:9, ASV). The expression thus seems to indicate the transformation of the water into the pure juice of the grape in the same manner in which it takes place every year within the cluster of the vine, but differentiated from that by the miraculous rapidity of the process.⁴ In regard to *oinos*, A. B. Rich states, “It simply designates a vinous beverage, but gives no clue to its nature. This must be determined by reference to the context, if at all.”⁵

The word for “taste” in verse nine is *geuo*, meaning “To taste, try the flavor, enjoy, experience, or to take nourishment.”⁶ The verdict of the ruler of the feast was pronounced upon tasting the wine. Flavor would have been immediately evident, but not toxic effects. Scientists have determined that it is in the process of fermentation that alcoholic content develops. When Jesus turned water to wine, however, He passed over the natural process.

The claim based on the miracle at Cana presupposes at least three theories, namely, (1) unfermented grape juice was never known as wine in the first century; (2) there was no way by which vinous fermentation could be prevented; and (3) the phrase “drunk freely” (*methuo*) always denotes intoxication. One has to but consult writers of antiquity to see that the first claim is false. Both Roman and Greek writers, including Aristotle, Athenaeus, and Pliny, attest to the fact that unfermented wine existed in antiquity.⁷ As to the second theory, writers of antiquity indicate at least five ways in which vinous fermentation could be prevented.⁸ The falsity of the third theory shall be demonstrated under the following heading.

Self-Contradictory Theory

In answer to the theory that the phrase “drunk freely” (John 2:10, ASV) always denotes intoxication or drunkenness, it should be noted that there is absolutely nothing in the passage to indicate that the Son of God sanctioned in the least respect the consumption of intoxicating wine as a beverage!

Often persons who attempt to justify “social” drinking condemn drunkenness and cite such texts as 1 Peter 4:3 and Ephesians 5:18 as proof. Those who hold the view that, according to John 2:1-11, Jesus sanctioned “social” drinking but not drunkenness, subscribe to an illogical and self-contradictory theory. All doctrines which are self-contradictory are false. That under consideration is self-contradictory for the following reasons: (1) It is affirmed that excess is wrong, and that drunkenness constitutes excess. (2) Endorsement is given to the view that “drunk freely” always means to “get drunk or become intoxicated.” (3) If such were true in this instance, it follows that Jesus supplied a large quantity⁹ of intoxicating wine to persons who were already drunk. In light of the position that Jesus

contributed to increased drunkenness by supplying intoxicating wine to a crowd of persons who were already drunk, the following dilemma must be faced.

Either (1) such advocates must affirm that Jesus was not guilty of sin (in which case they would be affirming that it is not sinful to contribute to drunkenness) or (2) they must affirm that Jesus was guilty of sin (in which case they place themselves in contradiction to such passages as Hebrews 4:15 and 1 Peter 2:22-24). In either case, they are committed to false doctrine. Since this is the case it is clear that their affirmation is false. The argument may be stated in a deductive form as follows:

(1) If Jesus supplied intoxicating wine to the wedding guests at Cana, then He contributed to their intoxication; and if intoxication is sinful, then Jesus sinned.

(2) Either Jesus did not contribute to their intoxication or He did not sin.

(3) Either Jesus did not supply intoxicating wine to the wedding guests at Cana, or intoxication is not sinful.¹⁰

If the argument is valid and the propositions are true, the conclusion must be true. The argument is stated in valid form, as can be proved by the use of truth tables. The first proposition is true based on the fact that intoxication is a matter of degree or a state of “becoming softened.” If “drunk freely” in John 2:10 means “become intoxicated,” as some persons affirm, then those under consideration were intoxicated. Since additional wine was not supplied until they had “drunk freely,” it follows that Jesus did contribute to intoxication if He supplied intoxicating wine.

The second proposition is true based on such passages as Habakkuk 2:15 and Proverbs 23:31-32.

Since, therefore, the argument is valid and the propositions are true, the conclusion must be true. There is absolutely nothing in the context of John 2:1-11 to indicate that Jesus sanctioned the imbibing of intoxicating

beverages. Persons who accept the previously defined definition of “drunk freely” must face the dilemma. In an effort to escape the force of the argument, various replies are voiced.

First, it is replied that the persons under consideration were not intoxicated. It should be seen however that if “drunk freely” means intoxicated, the statement of the ruler of the feast indicates that they were intoxicated. According to such reasoning, the ruler said, “Every man at the beginning doth set forth intoxicating wine; and when men have gotten drunk, then that which is less potent.” If this were the practice of every man under such conditions, the persons under consideration were drunk, because they had reached the point where additional wine was being supplied.

According to the theory, therefore, the people had already used their best wine, which had brought them to a state of intoxication, not knowing that Jesus would provide an even more potent supply. In order to be consistent, persons who hold this view must take the position that these persons were drunk, because they had reached the point where additional wine was being supplied. The only difference in that situation, according to such reasoning, was that an even more intoxicating wine was provided at the end, and that by Jesus Christ!

If this definition of “drunk freely” were true, according to the ruler of the feast the latter wine was not provided until the persons were drunk. Notice the following: (1) At what point was **additional** wine supplied? (2) It was supplied **after** men had “drunk freely,” which, according to the theory, means intoxicated. (3) Jesus supplied **additional** wine. (4) According to the theory, therefore, these persons were already drunk! When persons accept a proposition, logically they must accept the conclusion that follows. Those who do otherwise act in an inconsistent manner.¹¹

Second, persons may reply by stating, “It is not true.” Such a reply, however, does not adequately answer the argument. By such fashion any argument may be answered or passed over regardless of how conclusive the proof may be.

Third, it may be replied that those who are not linguistic scholars should not discuss the issue. In reference to this it should be observed that if this were true, it would follow that persons must be authorities in every discipline, including Hebrew, Greek, archaeology, geography, logic, and all other Bible-related studies before discussing any Bible topic. Since no person on earth is an authority in every Bible-related discipline, no person could speak or otherwise defend the truth. It does not follow that, because persons do not know everything, they do not know anything. All persons know some things, although no person on earth knows everything.

Fourth, it may be replied that Jesus did not have in mind “social” drinking when He performed the miracle at Cana, and, therefore, since the passage does not apply, it should not be used to promote abstinence. Although it is may be true that Jesus did not have in mind “social” drinking at the time, by the same kind of reasoning, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 could not be employed to denounce mechanical instrumental music in Christian worship. Also, it should be remembered that it is the **advocates of “social” drinking** who use the passage to endeavor to defend their practice. Any passage that is used to attempt support of a false position may be reviewed in defense of truth!

Fifth, it may be replied that since John 2:1-11 is in a first-century setting, it does not apply today. In answer, it may be said that if the passage has only a first-century application because it is in a first-century setting, the same principle would follow with all New Testament passages.

It would follow, therefore, since the entire New Testament is in a first-century setting, no New Testament passage would have application today.

Sixth, it may be replied that logic has no place in such matters. In answer, it should be observed that logic is simply the science of correct reasoning. All persons who understand Bible teaching in regard to this matter or any other Bible matter, have had to correctly employ principles of logic even if they do not realize that fact. Although persons should not subscribe to every view of David Hume, he did correctly hold that no one ever turns against reasoning until reasoning turns against him.

Key Phrase

The key phrase to be considered in the theory is “drunk freely,” or “well drunk” as it is rendered in the King James Version. The claim, as has been previously advanced, is that it always denotes intoxication. In answer, it should be observed that in every one of forty-three versions or translations of the Bible, with eighteen renderings, each of which the writer of this treatise consulted, quantity rather than quality is stressed. Predominant renderings are “drunk freely,” used eighteen times, and “well drunk,” used in seven instances. Each of the four standard translations employs either “drunk freely” or “well drunk,” and each of five Roman Catholic versions consulted indicates quantity.¹²

The term *methuo* is to be understood in the generic sense of being repleted, satiated, or saturated, and not in the restricted and emphatic sense of intoxication. It is a term which conveys or expresses the idea of being drenched with moisture.¹³ That it does not always mean intoxication was recognized by John Wycliffe six centuries ago, when he rendered the expression, “whanne men ben fullid.” On this point Thomas Summers states, “Drunk freely suggests

the idea of drunk largely.”¹⁴ Lexicographers are agreed that the root *methe*, or *methu*, signifies excessive drinking without reference to the kind of liquid used. The verbs *methuo* and *methusko* retain the primary meaning of fullness. In dealing with another text which concerns the same term, S. T. Bloomfield states:

Methuein, from *methu* (probably derived from the Northern word *med* or *meth*), signifies to moisten; and *methuesthai*, “to be moistened with liquor;” and, in a figurative sense (like the Latin *madere vino*), “to be filled with wine.” In Classical use it generally, but not always, implies intoxication. In the Hellenistic writers, however, as Josephus, Philo, and the LXX, it seldom denotes more than “drinking freely,” and the hilarity consequent; which is probably the sense here.¹⁵

Various commentators and lexicographers along with Anstadt view the term as meaning “**well wined**, after they had drank wine, as much as they wished, till they were satisfied with wine, whether it was much or little.”¹⁶ In the Septuagint, *methuo* is repeatedly used in its primary sense of being “filled up.” In Psalm 23:5,¹⁷ *methuskon* is used in the expression “my cup runneth over.” In Song of Solomon 5:1, *methusthete* denotes those who “drink abundantly.” In Jeremiah 31:14, *methuso* is employed in connection with “I will satiate the soul of the priests.”¹⁸ That the wedding guests were not drunk may be seen from the following words of A. T. Robertson: “When men have drunk freely (*hotan methusthosin*). Indefinite temporal clause with *hotan* and first aorist passive subjunctive of *methusko*. The verb does not mean that these guests are now drunk.”¹⁹ On the same point Henry Alford says:

The saying of the ruler of the feast is a general one, not applicable to the company then present. We may be sure that the Lord would not have

sanctioned, nor ministered to actual drunkenness. Only those who can conceive this will find any difficulty here.²⁰

The statement of the ruler of the feast is important to the basic issue. To deny that the wine which Jesus made was intoxicating raises the question as to why the statement was recorded in the Bible. In reply, it may be said that it was because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the serving of the wine. Their best wine and that which proved to be of poorer flavor had been depleted. Jesus then provided a wine which even surpassed their best wine in flavor. The unique feature was that this wine was provided at the end. In order to justify “social” drinking, based on John 2:1-11, it must be proved that the wine under consideration was alcoholic in content. Of the Lord’s miracle at Cana, R. C. Foster states:

If Jesus made intoxicating wine here, then this is the only time He ever used His power to furnish to man that which is destructive of his nature and powers. Why, then, gratuitously accuse Jesus of this when it is not even hinted in the record? The Greek word *oinos* (wine) does not necessarily mean intoxicating wine. The wine of the miracle had a delightful flavor which excelled anything the ruler had experienced, judging by his emphatic comment.²¹

Good Wine

Frequently the theory is advanced that “good wine” in the context denotes intoxicating wine. The phrase no doubt has to do with the taste or flavor of the wine rather than with its potency, as has already been indicated. It should be noted that the adjective used in verse ten to describe the wine made by Jesus is not *agathos*, the simplest meaning of which is “good,” but *kalos*. The term was applied by the Greeks to everything so distinguished in form, excellence, goodness, usefulness, and eminence,

as to be pleasing. At times the term had to do with that which was beautiful to look at, shapely, or magnificent. At other times, it indicated that which was good, excellent in nature and characteristics, and therefore well adapted to its end, or superior to other kinds.²² Obviously in John 2:10, it was used in this sense.

It is beyond contradiction that it was a common thing to preserve wine in an unfermented state in antiquity, and that when thus preserved it was regarded as of a higher and better quality than any other. Wine which was drawn off before pressing was called “free run” and was considered as better than pressed wine. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace each mention that the best wine was that which was harmless or innocent. Pliny indicated that **good wine** was that which was destitute of spirit. The phrase therefore does not mean that it was stronger. Great misunderstanding has developed from imposing upon the ancient Greek text and ancient Jewish habits of food and drink, the entirely modern and northern European conception that the term “wine” always indicated an intoxicating beverage. Among the ancient Orientals and Romans, such an idea was not universally attached to wine. In fact, according to various Roman Classical writers, their best wines were not fermented.

The common beverage of the Romans was grape juice, which they mixed with water, both hot and cold, and often with spices. Ferrar Fenton cites Valerius Maximus and Aulus Gellius as indicating that fermented wine was rare in early Roman times.²³ Fresh grape juice or *mustum* was boiled until it became thick, after which it was stored to be eaten with bread, or mixed with water to make an unfermented beverage. To give variety of flavor, herbs and spices were often boiled in the juice during its preparation. Such was the superior wine of antiquity, the sweetest and nicest flavored, and not the most intoxicating as some

persons have indicated. Many of the wines of antiquity which were alcoholic, were intoxicating only to a small degree. They contained, even diluted, but four or five percent of alcohol. They usually were taken only when largely diluted with water.²⁴

The family at Cana were likely poor people, and therefore could not afford to procure the best and costliest wine for their wedding feast, but used that which was inexpensive, and usually drunk by poor people. It is therefore not necessary to suppose that the wine which Jesus made was better than that which the bridegroom had provided, because it was more intoxicating, but it was better, because it was intrinsically of a superior quality. It was sweeter, more aromatic and pleasant to the taste, like the first free flow from the vat during the treading of the grapes. Such wine, not fermented, and that which all the guests could drink with complete safety, was the **good** wine.²⁵

The quality of wine depends on a number of circumstances. (1) The period in which grapes ripen is significant. Immanuel Benzinger states:

The time when grapes ripen varies with local conditions; in the district of Tiberias and in the valley of the Jordan, some kinds are ripe in June; in the coast plain, the vintage season occurs about the middle of August; in the mountainous country, during September.

(2) The climate in which the grapes were grown is an important factor. Palestine was particularly known for good wines. (3) The quality of wine depends upon the kinds of grapes that are used. Some grapes contain more sugar than others while others contain more gluten. Wine will partake of the quality of the grapes from which it is pressed. (4) There is a difference in the quality of wine grown in different years in the same area. A warm climate will

produce a sweeter and better flavored wine than a cold and moist climate. (5) There is a difference, even from the same kind of grapes, depending on the manner in which they are processed. If grapes are not fully ripe, or green grapes are mixed with ripe grapes, the resulting wine will be acrid and sour. (6) The juice which flows out during the treading, without pressure, is considered the best. It is sweeter and much more finely flavored than that which flows from heavy pressure. The first flow from the vat, therefore, was considered the very best wine.²⁷

Object Of The Miracle

The declared object of the miracle was to manifest the “glory” of Jesus (John 2:11). It was not to place the sanction of His divine approval upon the marriage relation, nor was it for the purpose of contributing to the pleasure of a festive gathering, although both were incidentally accomplished.

The nature of Jesus was such that (1) He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), (2) He was “holy, harmless, undefiled” (Heb. 7:26), and (3) He came “to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). Shame, sorrow, and strife would not have been caused by such a character as Jesus Christ. Such a manifestation would have been diabolic, detrimental, and destructive to mankind.

In manifesting His glory, Jesus demonstrated His identity with God: “he made the water wine” (John 4:46). His example should not be pleaded by the makers, sellers, or imbibers of wine to justify the use of modern intoxicating beverages, of whatever kind, even at a wedding. The view has no weight, unless it can first be proved that the contents of the “six waterpots” were alcoholic and, secondly, that the wine He created was as potent as modern fortified wines. Marcellin Berthelot and Edmund O. Von Lippmann state:

The earliest known use of distillation as a means of producing alcohol is recorded in a twelfth century Latin manuscript, *Mappae Clivicula*, and it is safe to assume that alcohol was first produced by distillation in the wine districts of Italy about A.D. 1200.²⁸

Those who hold the view that all wine was intoxicating in the first century present the character of Jesus Christ in an immoral light at the marriage of Cana. They must assume that the bridegroom had provided, as he thought, a sufficient quantity of intoxicating wine, but before the feast was ended the guests had consumed it all, and as a consequence were drunk. Then the Lord, instead of reproving them for their indulgence, as every faithful servant of the Lord would do, made a large quantity of stronger or still more intoxicating wine for their use on the same occasion. Think of such an event! A faithful servant of the Lord in the present day would not be at ease, if he were at a wedding where intoxicating wine was flowing freely, and if he could not prevent it, he would leave as soon as possible. On the other hand, what would be thought of a Christian who not only approved of such drinking by guests at a wedding, but after they had consumed all that had been provided, on his own accord provided a large amount of an even more intoxicating beverage to be consumed by the same guests?

All faithful servants of the Lord know that such an act would be disgraceful to the cause of Christ! Christians could have no respect for such a person. Yet, this is precisely what those who hold the view that all wine was intoxicating in the first century must assume the Lord did!

Those who believe in the divine nature and sinless character of the Son of God pity those who have no better Christ than this! Christians have a Christ for whom no apology is necessary, and for whose acts they must not blush with shame, but whose example is worthy of supreme

imitation and highest admiration in all ages, by all nations, to the end of time! Let us remember the timely advice of the wise man, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; And whosoever erreth thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

Endnotes

1 W. J. Wiltenburg, "The Bible and the Attitudes of Ministers on Drinking," **Pastoral Psychology**, Volume 9 (April 1958), p. 39.

2 Herschel H. Hobbs, **An Exposition of the Gospel of John** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), p. 64.

3 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on John** (Austin: Firm Foundation, 1974), pp. 61-62.

4 R. C. Trench quotes from Augustine and Chrysostom, who express the view that Jesus made wine in the same way in which it occurred every year, by speeding up the process. Richard Chenevix Trench, **Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord**, 15th edition (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1895), pp. 114-115. H. Olshausen and Daniel D. Whedon hold the same view, as do J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Foundation), p. 118.

5 A. B. Rich, "Do the Scriptures Prohibit the Use of Alcoholic Beverages?," **Bibliotheca Sacra**, Volume 37 (July 1880), p. 403.

6 George Allen Turner, **The Gospel According to John** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans), p. 80.

7 Aristotle, **Meteorologica** 4.9; Athenaeus, **Deipnosophistae** 1. 27; 5. 199.

8 Columella, **De Re Rustica** 12. 37, 39, 41. See also William Ramsay, "Vinum," in **Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities**, ed. William Smith (London: Walton and Maberly, 1849), pp. 1201, 1203; Pliny, **Natural History** 23. 24; Plutarch, **Symposiacs**, 8. 7; Varro **Ap. Non.**, 551. 27.

9 About 160 gallons.

10 By destructive dilemma.

11 See the writer's articles, "Christian, Abstain From Social Drinking!," **The Spiritual Sword**, Volume 4 (January 1973), pp. 20-23, and "The Case Against Social Drinking," **Gospel Advocate**, Volume 119 (3 February 1977), pp. 65, 71-72.

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15 Samuel Thomas Bloomfield, **Greek New Testament with English Notes** (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), p. 532.

16 P. Anstadt, **The Quarterly Review**, p. 29.

17 In the Septuagint, the text is Psalm 22:5.

18 In the Septuagint, the text is Jeremiah 38:14. "Satisfy," which means to satisfy fully, is also included in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 42:34; Psalm 36:8; 75:5, 10; and Proverbs 5:19.

19 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures of the New Testament**, Volume 5 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), pp. 36-37.

20 Henry Alford, **The Greek Testament**, Volume 1 (London: Rivingtons, 1861), p. 707.

21 R. C. Foster, **Studies in the Life of Christ**, Volume 1 (Cincinnati: F. L. Rowe), p. 139.

22 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, p. 322.

23 Ferrar Fenton, "The Bible and Wine," **Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus**, p. 312.

24 William Smith, "Wine," **A Dictionary of the Bible**, eds. Francis Nathan and M. A. Peloubet (Chicago: John C. Winston, 1884), p. 747.

25 P. Anstadt, pp. 30-31.

26 Immanuel Benzinger, "Wine Hebrew," **New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, Volume 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1957), p. 382. See also "Wine," **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Volume 5, p. 3086, and "Vines," **A Dictionary of the Bible**, ed. James Hastings, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1899), p. 32.

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CHAPTER 5

The Healing Of The Leper; The Healing Of The Centurion's Servant

Barry Grider

Introduction

THE HEALINGS OF THE leper and of the centurion's servant follow Jesus' sermon on the mount. That particular sermon is the greatest treatise on Christian living ever recorded. Of course, the words were spoken by the Master Teacher Himself. Sometimes called kingdom pointers, the principles outlined in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 would serve as the foundation upon which all of Jesus' ministry would be built. At the conclusion of His mighty discourse, "the people were **astonished** at his doctrine for he taught them as one having **authority**" and as a result the multitudes were **attracted** to Him (Matt. 7:28-8:1, emp. mine throughout, BG).

While arguably the greatest teacher the world has ever known, the Lord confirmed His message through miracles. A miracle was demonstrated when natural laws were abated for the moment. By performing the miraculous, Jesus could convince the honest, seeking heart that He was Who He claimed to be. John records:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we

know that thou art a teacher come from God:
**for no man can do these miracles that thou
doest, except God be with him** (John 3:1-2).

The healing miracles of Jesus were not only for the confirmation of the message, but also demonstrated His generous compassion. Shame on any Gospel preacher who does not care about his people. Despite one's years of study and ability to communicate from a pulpit, the preacher's words ring hollow if he does not demonstrate the Lord's compassion. Indeed, all of God's children are to follow this precedent established by Christ: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8).

The Text

The account of the healing of the leper is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, while the account of the healing of the centurion's servant is recorded by Matthew and Luke only. While we shall examine every passage concerning these two miracles, Matthew's account is as follows to help prepare our minds for study:

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my

roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour (Matt. 8:1-13).

The Healing Of The Leper

The Appeal Of Christ

Very early in Jesus' ministry, throngs pursued Him for various reasons. Some loved Him and believed He was the promised Messiah. Those who had erroneous views of the nature of Christ's kingdom believed He would be a deliverer from the hands of the mighty Roman Empire. Others followed Jesus with intrigue and still others scorned. Keep in mind, the multitudes who are following Jesus in Matthew 8:1 are doing so because of His remarkable mountaintop sermon. He had taught as one having authority (Matt. 7:29). The interest in Jesus would certainly increase as the people witnessed His miracles.

A Leper Desires To Be Cleansed

“And behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). Leprosy was one of the most dreaded, yet seemingly common, diseases in ancient Bible times (Luke 4:27). With no cure known, the leper would witness his flesh being eaten away:

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, as defined today, is the name for disease processes caused by the microorganism *Mycobacterium leprae*. There are two types: a. The lepromatous type begins with brownish-red spots on the face, ears, forearms, thighs and/or buttocks which later become thickened nodules and, losing their skin covering, become ulcers ("sores") with subsequent loss of tissue and then contraction and deformity. It was apparently the lepromatous type that was chiefly in view in the Biblical cases of true leprosy. b. The tuberculoid type is characterized by numbness of an affected area of skin and deformity such as fingers like claws resulting from paralysis and consequent muscle wasting (atrophy). The advanced forms of leprosy are not described in Leviticus 13, presumably because this chapter is concerned with early diagnosis. Advanced leprosy would only be seen in isolation outside the camp.¹

Leprosy was not only a disease of the flesh, but under the Law of Moses made one ceremonially unclean, as well. Leviticus 13 and 14 describe the procedures followed by the priest concerning one who is defiled by leprosy.

There are several notable examples of lepers in the Bible in addition to the man in Matthew 8. They are as follows:

Miriam. According to Numbers 12, the sister of Moses spake against him, and, along with Aaron her brother sought to override Moses' authority, saying, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" (Num. 12:2). This incurred the wrath of Jehovah and He struck Miriam with leprosy.

Naaman. According to 2 Kings 5, Naaman, a noted military officer, was also a leper. He sought a cure for his disease and in so doing was introduced to Elisha the prophet by his wife's young maid. Though balking at first, he finally complied with the demands of Elisha, and dipped himself in the Jordan River seven times. Upon so doing he

was cleansed of his leprosy. In the account of Naaman, the Bible student learns the value of absolute obedience to God's will, if he desires the blessings of God. Later on in the chapter, Gehazi, the lying, covetous servant of Elisha, sought silver and garments from Naaman, which Elisha had refused. Hence he was struck with the leprosy of which Naaman had been cured.

Azariah (Uzziah). According to 2 Chronicles 26, Uzziah, king of Judah, burned incense upon the altar. Only the priests had the right to do this. For this reason he was smitten with leprosy until the day of his death.

Ten lepers healed. According to Luke 17, Jesus healed 10 lepers. Only one returned to give thanks unto the Lord.

Simon the Leper. No doubt a former leper, Simon hosted Jesus at his home in Bethany (Matt. 26:6). Upon this occasion, the head of Jesus was anointed with costly ointment.

The above lepers who were healed were not the only lepers who were healed (Matt. 10:8). Furthermore, there were different stages of this disease. However, the man Jesus healed in Matthew 8 was "full of leprosy" (Luke 5:12).

Leprosy typifies sin. Just as leprosy defiled the body, sin defiles the soul. With Naaman, there was no cure for leprosy other than through obedience to God. Likewise, only Christ can cure the plague of sin. Leprosy, like sin, is contagious. Leprosy, uncured, will result in death. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death (Jas. 1:13-15).

In November 2000, brother Kevin Beard and I, while visiting veteran missionary Dorsey Traw and his wife, Ola, in Chiangmai, Thailand, had the opportunity to drive through a leper colony. Having witnessed in person the suffering of those enduring this tragic

destruction of the body, my heart is touched with the plight of the leper of Matthew 8. Even more so was the heart of Jesus. This man sought cleansing, and he came to the right source.

The Leper's Attitude

The leper realized his need and believed Jesus could and would relieve him of this disease. His attitude toward Christ is commendable and ought to be imitated. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). One who is poor in spirit recognizes his spiritual poverty and understands that without the Lord he is nothing. Though it is unclear how much this man understood about the mission of Christ and the nature of His kingdom, for sure he understood the power and compassion of Jesus. Notice his attitude:

He was worshipful. When Jesus was tempted of the Devil to fall down and worship before him, Jesus refused and quoted the Law of Moses, saying, "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). Perhaps because of extraordinary power displayed or gracious kindness exhibited one falls down and worships another.

This is seen several times in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 10:25-26, we read, "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." It is interesting that the Roman Catholic pope accepts the worship of others, yet Peter, whom Catholics claim was the first pope, refuses such homage. Peter, who was not a pope, yet more significantly was an inspired apostle, refused to be worshiped because he likewise was a man. On one occasion Paul and Barnabas were worshiped:

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein (Acts 14:11-15).

Again, men are not to be worshiped. Worship belongs only to God. Yet some men, like Herod, accept worship, and, like him, pay with their lives (Acts 12:22-23). Jesus, however, never refused worship (cf. Matt. 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 28:9; Mark 5:6; John 9:38). Why did Jesus, a man, accept worship? Because He was more than a man; He was the Son of God. On two occasions the voice of the Father thundered from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). On the mount of Transfiguration these words were added: "hear ye him." He is worthy to be worshiped because He speaks on behalf of the Father (John 14:9). The Jews understood that Jesus' claim of being God's Son placed Him on an equal plane with God and for this reason He was charged with blasphemy (Matt. 9:3). Yet, Jesus was coequal and coeternal with the Father (John 1:1-3). Paul wrote, "Who [Jesus] being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6). Therefore, all should bow before Him and worship. Edward Perronet wrote the majestic hymn, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name." Upon hearing this song sung or played, Queen Victoria of England would

remove her crown in deference to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Indeed all will bow before Him one day (Phil. 2:9-11). The leper of Matthew 8 was right for worshiping at the feet of Jesus. The word translated “worshipped” is *proskuneo* and means to prostrate oneself in homage. Mark states that this man came beseeching the Lord and kneeling before Him (Mark 1:40). Luke records the man falling on his face in reverence (Luke 5:12). It is sad, but very few people kneel before the Lord in prayer anymore. How long has it been since you fell on your face before the Lord? This man, as each of us, had a very real need, and he worshiped the Lord Who could answer his need.

He was humble. When the leper met Jesus, his first words were, “**if thou wilt**, thou canst make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). It is never right to make demands of God. First, because we have no right to demand anything from our Creator. Second, genuine humility is what pleases God. Arrogance and self-righteousness will never win the favor of God nor anyone else. Jesus taught His disciples to pray as follows, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Jesus not only taught by precept but by example. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ heart is heavy as He contemplates His impending death. Seeing that the sins of the world will be placed upon His shoulders, one cannot begin to fathom the enormous burden He was carrying. Remember His prayer: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: **nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done**” (Luke 22:42). While His humanity cried out to escape the cross, His intense desire to please the Father caused Him to endure whatever pain, and so He humbly submitted. Having submitted to the will of the Father, His decision was then made. He got up from prayer and allowed Himself to be arrested, tried, and crucified. Although His submission required death, it also assured His glorification (Heb. 12:2).

The leper came to Jesus with a request. The Lord asks us to come unto God with our requests: “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). Yet this very sick man did not blame God for his leprosy, nor are we led to believe he would have turned against Jesus if his request had been denied. His humble attitude was **if** the Lord willed he could be healed. If not careful, Christians can charge God foolishly when prayers don’t appear to be answered. But every Christian must pray that the Lord’s will be done. After all, He knows what is best for us (Matt. 6:32). Sometimes He says yes, sometimes no, and sometimes He asks that we wait. Are our prayers answered? Yes! According to His will they are answered. I have always greatly appreciated Christians who end a sentence, “If the Lord wills.” This is entirely Scriptural, since James wrote:

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that (Jas. 4:14-15).

The humble attitude of this leper ought to be emulated.

He was trusting. Notice again the leper’s words, “If thou wilt, **thou canst make me clean.**” This man realized that, if the Lord so willed, He had the power to cleanse even the dreaded disease of leprosy. Since Jesus is God, He is unlimited in His power. In fact, He created all things:

For by him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him (Col. 1:16).

This study of the miracles of Jesus is a study on the power of God. While the age of the miraculous is over, should we not still stand in awe of our Lord's power? We do not need the miraculous to cause us to believe in the power of God: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Psm. 19:1-2). I am still amazed at the power of God when I hear a newborn baby cry, when the earth yields forth its fruit, or when I see a glorious sunset. Yet what is truly remarkable to me is that the same God Who made galaxies of stars cares for me. Peter wrote, "casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Do you trust in the Lord's power, as did this leper?

Jesus' Response

"And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matt. 8:3). Typical of Jesus, He reaches out to the one in need. However, He must be careful, for this one has leprosy. Because lepers were contagious and unclean, others were forbidden to touch them, and understandably so. Yet Jesus does touch the man and, because of Jesus' touch, the man is immediately cleansed. Leprosy would have no power over Jesus. Remember leprosy typifies sin. Some people who associate with sinners become just like them (1 Cor. 15:33). Jesus would often dine with sinners; however, He did not become like them, but was able to transform the lives of those who were willing to be touched by His righteous life. Even today Christ has power to save:

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Sometimes the Lord's healing would accompany the forgiveness of sins. The context does not bear this out in this particular account. However, Jesus' touch can cure leprosy, just as His blood can wash away sins (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 John 1:7).

What motivated Jesus to heal this man? Certainly it was not to be seen of men (Matt. 8:4). Even confirming His message does not seem to be Jesus' priority in this case. Rather, Mark records, "**And Jesus moved with compassion**, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean (Mark 1:41). Jesus always wills to do what is best for another. Because of His marvelous compassion, Jesus went to the cross and it is His desire that all come to Him and be cleansed spiritually (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Why, in verse 4, did Jesus command the former leper not to tell any man what He had done? Most likely, as on other occasions, Jesus did not desire the masses thronging Him just to see the miraculous. His mission was more profound and He was most interested in penetrating the heart of man, rather than stirring emotions and excitement (cf. Matt. 12:16-21). Jesus then commanded the healed leper to show himself unto the priest and present his offering in keeping with the Law of Moses (Deut. 24:8; Lev. 13:2ff). Leviticus 14 gives details pertaining to the cleansed leper going before the priest. The priest, upon his pronouncement that the man was cleansed of leprosy, would bear testimony to the miracle accomplished by Jesus.

The Healing Of The Centurion's Servant

This miracle occurred in Capernaum, which was the home base of Jesus' ministry. Located on the northwest

shore of the sea of Galilee, Jesus performed many miracles and engaged in much teaching there. However, very few repented and followed Him. He pronounced judgment upon them in Matthew 11:23-24.

One who did demonstrate great faith in Jesus was this centurion. It is unusual that a mighty Roman soldier, used to commanding 100 men under him, would be filled with such humility. No doubt his attitude was similar to the lowly centurion Cornelius, who was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house” (Acts 10:2). It appears when reading Matthew’s account that the centurion himself came to Jesus. However, Luke records, “And when he [the centurion] heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant” (Luke 7:3). This is not a discrepancy since the centurion sent someone on his behalf. If the president of the United States sends an ambassador to another country, the ambassador would be speaking on behalf of the president as if the president himself was there.

It is remarkable what we learn about this centurion. Despite his authority and power, he is a compassionate man. Furthermore, his compassion is not for a family member, a commanding officer, or one of his colleagues; rather he is concerned for his servant, who, according to Luke, was very dear to him (Luke 7:2). The servant was sick of the palsy. Like the leper who was full of leprosy, this servant is “grievously tormented.” Palsy or paralysis is described as “a condition characterized by loss of control of movement of muscles through disease or destruction of nerves or nervous tissue.”²

Jesus had to be impressed by the centurion even before he met him. The Jewish elders came praising the man: “And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should

do this: For he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue” (Luke 7:4-5). Jesus no doubt had a desire to show kindness toward a man who likewise had demonstrated kindness toward God’s people and who had expressed more faith in Christ than many of the Jews.

Jesus’ Response

I suppose Jesus’ words in Matthew 8:7 are among the sweetest ever heard: “I will come and heal him.” In times of trouble and dark despair, Jesus always says, “I will come.” When man sinned in the garden and was helpless to save himself, Jesus responded, “I will come.” He is the “Sun of Righteousness” with “healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2). It is amazing that many reject the Savior, Who lovingly invites Himself into our lives. Some would rather cling to the source of their misery instead of inviting Him in. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will make our abode with him” (John 14:23). Again he says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Jesus comes to us today through His Word. He wants to heal us of the malady of the soul — **sin!**

Jesus quickly responds to the request of the centurion and is anxious to heal the servant. However, before He arrives at the soldier’s home, the centurion sends out friends and urges Jesus not to enter. Filled with humility he does not feel worthy for Jesus to enter into his home. Unknown to the centurion, he has the heart wherein Jesus desires to dwell:

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite heart and humble spirit, to revive

the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

The Faith Of The Centurion

The centurion did understand that, just as he had authority over soldiers, Jesus had authority over disease. Like the leper, he believed in the power of Christ. In fact, this man believed Jesus' power was so great that it was not necessary for the Lord to be present to accomplish a miracle. Compare Matthew 8:8 with the Lord's most devoted Jewish followers. In John 11:32, Mary said to Jesus, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." The centurion said the Lord should not come into his home, nor did Jesus have to come into his home for the servant to be healed. Likewise, the centurion recognizes that he himself is under the authority of Christ.

Such faith Jesus had not seen among His Jewish brethren, even among those who claimed to follow Him. To the chagrin of any Pharisees who may have been standing close by, the Lord said, "That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). Thus Jesus opens the door to the Gentile who will put his trust in Him.

Jesus healed the servant of the centurion the same hour. This miracle casts a fatal blow to modern day faith healers who claim some are not healed because of a lack of faith. The servant who received healing received such not because of his faith, but rather because of the faith of the centurion.

Conclusion

Several quick lessons come to mind as we conclude our study of the healing of the leper and the healing of the centurion's servant.

1. Just as the leper sought the Lord, the sin-sick soul should seek Him today.
2. Jesus is worthy of being worshiped.
3. Genuine humility always pleases the Lord and is the only way to approach Him.
4. Just as Jesus cleansed the leper, He will cleanse us of all sin.
5. Jesus will still come to us today during our time of need.

Endnotes

- 1 Merrill C. Tenney, **Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), p. 218.
- 2 Ibid, p. 222.

CHAPTER 6

The Healing Of Two Men At Gadara

Wayne Cox

Introduction

WHAT A WONDERFUL STUDY is that of the miracles of the Bible! These awe-inspiring, faith-building events serve to bolster our conviction that Jesus is indeed our supernatural Savior. Thanks to the Southaven congregation for planning this series of edifying lessons and hosting this wonderful lectureship this week.

At the outset, let's remember that the overall purpose of miracles was to produce faith in Christ (John 20:30-31). Also, miracles were designed to illustrate the truth. On one occasion, Jesus fed multitudes with five loaves and two fish, and, on the next day, He told the people, "I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:41). Additionally, miracles did reveal Jesus' power over sin and Satan (as per our study in this lecture).

One should also keep in mind certain characteristics of miracles. **First, they were genuine.** When Christ and His men performed the supernatural, there was no doubt about it--even His most bitter enemies admitted such. **Second, those miracles were instantaneous.** Never were there long-term treatments; rather, the cure happened immediately. One of Mark's favorite words in his account of the Gospel was "straightway," i.e., immediately--right then and there on the spot the miracle

and its results happened. **Third, these genuine, instantaneous miracles were complete.** No one ever had to return for “follow up” visits; no one had to come back for additional treatments.

Our assignment is to discuss the healing of the wild men at Gadara. This miracle is found in three of the Gospel accounts--Matthew, Mark, and Luke--but since Mark's account is the most detailed, we shall use his for our primary text, giving additional details from the other writers where Mark omits.

In the book of Mark, Jesus is depicted as a Being of action--here, particularly with regard to miracles. In the fifth chapter of Mark, Jesus, the true miracle worker, used His supernatural powers to attain victory over demons (Mark 5:1-20), disease (Mark 5:21-34), and death (Mark 5:35-43).¹ Our study concerns the first. It is a real life account of men who were actually possessed by many demons. And, it is a real life account of our Lord's power over them. Let's begin with a brief discussion of what little we know about demon possession.²

A Discussion Of Demons

Demons (translated “devils,” KJV) were neither funny nor phony!³ What were they? Matthew, Mark and Luke always mention demons as being unclean, that is, wicked. There was no “Casper the Friendly Ghost”--they all were bad. As to their origin, there are three basic theories.⁴ Some believe that demons were evil angels who were released from Tartarus (Jude 6). Others maintain that demons were the spirits of persons who inhabited the earth after the creation of Genesis 1:1 and before the creation of Genesis 1:3. We, of course, must reject this view, as it is derived from the erroneous Gap Theory. We concur with the prevailing view of the Jews of that day:

Demons were evil spirits that took possession of people; that appears to have been the accepted idea among the Jews. With them, demons were the departed spirits of wicked men. There is no evidence that Jesus and his apostles deviated from the Jewish idea of demons. How the spirits of wicked dead men took possession of people we know not.⁵

It was the practice of demons to take possession of living people and control them. A distinct, evil being--foreign to the person possessed--could take control of that individual without his consent.⁶ Whatever these were, Scripture indicates that they were immaterial, intelligent beings, having personalities and desires, the ability to talk, and even possessing knowledge about God and Christ. Apparently, some demons were stronger than others. In one account, Jesus stated that some were so powerful they could not be expelled without prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:21). Demonic possession should not be equated with diseases of the body, mental insanity, or epilepsy, as Christ and His men distinguished between such (Matt. 10:8).

What was their purpose? As Christ could work good, the devil was permitted to work evil. Christ came as our Redeemer; thus, as the Lord began His work, one would expect the devil to begin his most intensive activity to multiply opposition to it:

the devil realized that the Redeemer had come for the salvation of the world and the destruction of his kingdom and that hence he made very determined efforts to counteract the work of Jesus and the apostles, using all means at his command, physical and spiritual, in opposing the coming of the kingdom of God.⁷

Are there cases of demon possession today? The way some people act, it makes you wonder!⁸ Some religions still believe in demon possession, utilizing the rite of exorcism,

performed by the priest.⁹ However, it is our understanding that when the age of the miraculous ended, demonic possession ended as well.¹⁰ Zechariah predicted the time would come when the “unclean spirit [would] pass out of the land” (Zech. 13:2). God simply allowed demon possession to occur for a limited time to reveal His Son’s power over Satan.

Our assigned text is not fiction or make-believe, but concerns an actual case of demon possession, and the subsequent miracle performed by Christ to expel such. Parallel accounts (Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-40) give the complete picture, not conflicting views as some maintain. Let’s look at the account of one who was literally a prisoner of Satan!

An Exposition Of The Text

The Setting (Mark 5:1-5)

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes [Gergesenes (Matt. 8:28)] [which is over against Galilee (Luke 8:26)]” (Mark 5:1). Jesus and His men had had a busy day, and sailed from the heavily populated western side of the Sea of Galilee to the sparsely populated eastern side for the purpose of getting rest. “Gadarenes” was the general area southeast of the lake; it surrounded the important city of Gadara, hence the name.¹¹

“And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit [two possessed with devils (Matt. 8:28)] [had devils long time (Luke 8:27)]” (Mark 5:2). A “demon-possessed man” meets Jesus. Matthew’s account says there were “two,” while Mark and Luke refer to only one. How do we harmonize these accounts? How do we answer those critics who allege fraud, discrepancy, and contradiction? “The

natural explanation is that one was more prominent, more violent and fierce, more notable than the other. Since he acted as the spokesman, the other falls into the background.”¹² Fereday offers an additional possibility:

because one case was more desperate than the other, Mark and Luke concentrate attention on one, but Matthew, who always wrote with Jewish leaders before his mind and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (Deuteronomy 17:6; Deut. 19:15) was careful to record the fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.¹³

Matthew Henry’s quaint explanation may actually be the best of all: “If there were two, there was one.”¹⁴ Since our primary text is from Mark, we shall follow his use of the singular in discussing the demonic, his cure, and the forthcoming results.

Notice some of the characteristics of this poor fellow; his condition and actions would make the Exorcist movie look like a cartoon! He was “[exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way (Matt. 8:28)] Who had his dwelling among the tombs [and wore no clothes (Luke 8:27)]; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains” (Mark 5:3).

The demonic “lived among the tombs.”¹⁵ Then, tombs were cut out of rock in limestone hills where the living could enter as a vault.¹⁶ Most of us do not care to walk in cemeteries at night--much less make them our home! Yet this demented individual actually lived there!

Notice also his superhuman strength: “no man could bind him, no, not with chains.” Further, “he had been often bound with fetters [shackles, NKJV] and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. (Mark 5:4).

Obviously, this was not a case of insanity. One can control an insane person with a straitjacket without resorting to chains!

But, why would they want to bind him? One reason was for their own safety, as this man was a danger to society. For good reason they were afraid of him! Matthew's account adds that he was "exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way" (Matt. 8:28). Some sections of town and some neighborhoods people try to avoid, and his was one of them!

They also wanted to bind him for his own safety: "And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones" (Mark 5:5).

Luke's account adds that he was "from the city," that is, he used to live in town. He also had had demons a "long time," and he "wore no clothes." We have to agree with McGarvey's assessment of this poor man: "It would be hard to imagine a more horrible state."¹⁷

Thus, on the one hand, you pity this poor man and want to help him, but, on the other hand, you're afraid of him and can't--he can't be caught and held! It will take a supernatural event to heal this man.

The Encounter (Mark 5:6-12)

"But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him [fell down before him (Luke 8:28)]" (Mark 5:6). Why would a demon worship Christ? Is this the real man's reaction and not the demon's? Was he at times able to conquer the demon? Or was the demon simply recognizing One clearly superior?

"And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not [art thou come hither to torment us before the time? (Matt. 8:29)]"

(Mark 5:7). Note that these demons: had faith¹⁸--something many do not have; confessed their faith--something many do not do; and they believed in the reality of judgment and torment--something many will not accept. They had more of a correct theology than most people!

“For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many [because many devils were entered into him (Luke 8:30)]” (Mark 5:8-9). “What is thy name?” Was this question directed toward the man or the demon? Though Trench believes Jesus queried the man,¹⁹ others maintain that Jesus addressed the demon.²⁰ Either way, the demon answered, “My name is Legion: for we are many.” The Roman army was divided into units called “centuries” containing one hundred men. Thus, a “centurion” was a man in charge of a century; it took sixty centuries to make one legion, as a legion consisted of about six thousand men.²¹ Were there a literal six thousand demons in this man, or is this a figurative use of the number to indicate a very large amount?²² Literally or figuratively, the case is made that this poor man was afflicted by “many” demons!

“And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country [into the deep (Luke 8:31)]” (Mark 5:10). Even for demons, there’s no place like home! Note their fear of being cast into “the deep.” Was this a reference to the deep waters of the Galilean lake? No, for as Lockyer explains, “The word ‘deep’ means **abyss**, the bottomless pit...and the demons asked for any doom but that.”²³

“Now there was there nigh unto the mountains [a good way off from them (Matt. 8:30)] a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them” (Mark 5:11-12). These demonic forces realize they can’t resist the

command of Christ because He is too powerful for them. They ask to enter into the herd of swine feeding nearby. Why? Perhaps it is best to say we simply do not know. It is worth noting that they are requesting to enter filthy animals, they being filthy themselves.²⁴

The Deliverance (Mark 5:13)

“And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. [And he said unto them, Go. (Matt. 8:32)] And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea [perished in the waters (Matt. 8:32)]” (Mark 5:13). Demons obey Christ even if men do not! The demons enter those two thousand pigs, and, if distributed evenly, that comes to three demons per animal. The frenzied swine rush pell-mell down the cliff into the sea,²⁵ and everyone of them drowned.²⁶ The swine preferred suicide to demon possession.²⁷

Perhaps you are asking the same question most do when studying this passage--**why**? Why did Jesus grant these demons their request and destroy valuable farm property in the process? Animal rights activists have a field day with this passage! In responding to this question, it is best to say we do not know for sure, and any guess is just that. But, here are a few guesses:

1. The pigs would die one day anyway, and they might as well die now. Death by drowning would be more merciful than death at the hands of butcher.²⁸ Response: Would a pig know the difference?

2. Some are of the opinion that since the owners of the swine were Jews, the pigs were destroyed since it was illegal for Jews to possess these under the Law:

Though the Jews did not eat pork, Roman soldiers did, and the Jews had no compunction of conscience in providing forbidden meat for

others. Thus the destruction of the swine was deserved punishment for the violation of God's law. Christ, therefore, had every right to deal with such illicit trading.²⁹

Response: How do we know the owners were Jews?³⁰

3. God owes no explanation of His deeds (Isa. 55:8-9).³¹

4. Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine, but did not command them to. It was they who destroyed the swine, not Jesus.³²

5. Jesus was teaching the owners a lesson: they were selfish, and had felt it better to acquire and keep material possessions than to help a demon-possessed man.³³

Other suggestions have been set forth as possible explanations, but those should suffice. Now, we turn our attention to the following.

The Results (Mark 5:14-20)

As a result of this mighty miracle those many demons were expelled and those two thousand pigs were destroyed, but a far more important outcome was that a man was healed, and how grateful he was!

“And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done” (Mark 5:14). Why did those who fed the swine broadcast this news? Was it because they were overwhelmed with amazement and joy? Or, was it to escape blame for the loss of two thousand swine?³⁴ After all, some explanation had to be given!

“And they [the whole city (Matt. 8:34)] come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting [at the feet of Jesus (Luke 8:35)], and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine”

(Mark 5:15-16). The townspeople find a radical change in the man--he is now Christ-possessed instead of demon-possessed! He was no longer out of control, but sitting calmly; he was no longer naked,³⁵ but clothed; he was no longer acting like a madman, but in his right mind.

Inexplicably, the people were afraid: "And they [the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about (Luke 8:37)] began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:17).

Instead of rejoicing, they were "taken with great fear" (Luke 8:37) and asked Jesus to leave. Of what were they afraid? Afraid that if Jesus stays, more of their prize pigs will die? That more damage will be done to the economy?³⁶

Fortunately, another result was that the good news was spread: "And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him" (Mark 5:18).

As Jesus and the disciples climbed back into the boat to leave, the man started pleading with Jesus again. Only this time the demons were not talking, but the man himself! He begged to stay with Jesus. Was this request out of gratitude for the One who had radically transformed his life for the better?³⁷ Or, out of fear that those demons might return?³⁸ Whatever the motive, Jesus had other purposes for him: "Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5:19).³⁹

Why did the Lord not let him accompany Him? Christ realized it was far better for the man to teach his own family than to go. In this way, he could be a "missionary" to his people. Thus, in one sense, Jesus leaves; in another, He stays: "Jesus departed, but left behind him a witness whose very body was a living monument bearing testimony to Christ's compassion and power."⁴⁰

“And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis⁴¹ how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel” (Mark 5:20). One can only imagine what a great preacher this man must have been! And, is he not an example for each of us? Do we tell others the great things Jesus has done for us in providing forgiveness of sins and the hope of salvation through His spotless sacrifice? Is that not part of our mission in the church?

An Application For Us

Though actual demonic possession as per this text does not occur today, still, we can be in bondage to Satan in much more subtle ways. How can we defeat our adversary--how can we become free from the bondage in which he has so many?

First, expect to do battle with the enemy. Satan has always been and will always be our foe; he is indeed “public enemy number one.” Of him, Paul warns that we are not to be “ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). To defeat the enemy, we must know the enemy--his strategy, his strengths, his weaknesses. The devil is deceptive, and makes sin appealing, alluring, and attractive. He is relentless, refuses to take “no” for an answer, and never gives up.

Second, while the war is raging, we must wear the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18). We can no more defeat Satan minus God than the demon-possessed man could expel the demon minus Christ. Try to tackle the devil on your own and you’ll lose every time!

Third, resist him (Jas. 4:7). Only if we yield to him can he invade our lives and destroy our souls in the process. He is only as powerful in our lives as we let him be, and can’t destroy anyone’s soul without his consent.

Finally, remember that only the faithful are on the winning side.

Conclusion

We close with two final observations. **First, when that demon-possessed man encountered Christ, he underwent a radical transformation.** Is that not what happens to any honest truth seeker today? In fact, Paul says this of those who become God's children: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). There's a difference in your life people can see!

Second, isn't it ironic that the people, having seen the greatness of Christ--His life, His work, His compassion, wanted Him to leave, and wanted nothing to do with Him? Man hasn't changed much in two thousand years, has he? We preach the life, the vicarious death and sacrifice Jesus made for us, as well as His offer of eternal life. What is the typical response? Most, like those Gadarenes of old, reject Him. This they do to the dismay of God and to the detriment of their own souls.

What is your response? Are you in bondage to Satan? Are you in his grip of sin? Do you want to be free? Freedom can be yours, but only by the way of Christ Who said: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Endnotes

1 Warren W. Wiersbe, **The Bible Exposition Commentary**, Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), pp. 125-128.

2 Some prefer the term "demonized" to the phrase "demon possessed," arguing that possession implies ownership, while demons own nothing. C. Fred Dickason, **Demon Possession and the Christian** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 38.

3 There are those skeptics, of course, who attribute the accounts of demon possession in the Bible to Babylonian and Persian beliefs and superstitions that had become part of the belief of the Jews:

Rejectors (sic) of the reality of demonic forces go on to say that Jesus accommodated His language to the idea, rife in those days, and that as a part of His divine mission He assumed the role of a corrector of popular beliefs by commanding the **supposed** spirits to come out of the possessed.

Herbert Lockyer, **All the Miracles of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 187.

4 Summation notes on demons given in a class taught by Curtis A. Cates, "The Life of Christ," Memphis School of Preaching, 1983-1984.

5 R. L. Whiteside, **Annual Lesson Commentary**, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1939), pp. 276-277.

6 Lockyer disagrees, stating "demonic possession... cannot take place without the consent of the human will," and that "moral depravity often precedes demon possession." In the case of the Gadarene demoniac, he suggests "his disease was the result of his own wickedness." Lockyer, p. 187. However, one is hard pressed to find evidence to substantiate his views.

7 William Arndt, **Bible Difficulties & Seeming Contradictions** (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), p. 111.

8 Lockyer writes:

One wonders when he reads of the horrible, sadistic crimes of today whether those who commit them are not demon-inspired and possessed...The horrible nightmares experienced by drunkards when in the D.T.'s may be a form of possession by evil spirits.

Lockyer, p. 188. Indeed, crimes, drunkenness, and the like are the result of Satan's work, but should not be equated with demon possession.

9 Rossell Hope Robbins has a comprehensive volume of alleged accounts of demonism, exorcism, and the like. **The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology** (New York: Bonanza Books, 1981).

10 We agree with McMillon who states, "Demon obsession prevails in our world today rather than demon

possession.” Lynn A. McMillon, **Doctrines of Demons** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1975), p. 101.

11 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cogdill Foundation Publications), p. 344.

12 Lockyer, p.186.

13 Ibid.

14 Matthew Henry, **A Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Volume 5 (Old Tappen, NJ: Fleming H. Revell), p. 476.

15 Places unclean because of the dead men’s bones that were there (Num. 19:11, 16).

16 McGarvey, p. 344.

17 Ibid, p. 345.

18 “They would have been saved if ‘faith only’ saves, but faith only does not--will not--save (James 2:17-24).” W. Gaddys Roy, **Sermon Outlines on the Miracles of Jesus** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1971), p. 88.

19 Richard Chenevix Trench, **Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord** (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 181.

20 It was not that the Lord was asking for information, but to reveal to those standing by of the greatness of the miracle about to be performed.

21 Lockyer, p. 189.

22 Hendricksen leans toward the figurative position. William Hendricksen, **The Gospel of Mark** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), p. 192.

23 Lockyer, p. 190.

24 “The Bible tells us of the powers of darkness entering into only two species of lower animals--the serpent and the swine--the first the symbol of intellectual cunning, and the latter the symbol of gross uncleanness.” Lockyer, p. 190.

25 “The slope is so steep and the ledge at its foot so narrow that a herd rushing down could not check itself before tumbling into the water.” McGarvey, p. 346.

26 In an attempt to discredit this entire account of demon possession, skeptics offer this ridiculous view: the men who were supposed to be tending the swine were drawn by curiosity to the encounter between Christ and the sick man. Being left unattended, the pigs began fighting among themselves and tumbled headlong over the cliff! See Trench, pp. 186-187.

27 Lockyer, p. 189.

28 View set forth, but not held, by Hendricksen, p. 194.

29 Lockyer, pp. 189-190.

30 Though Josephus stated there were Jews living in this area, the population was predominantly Gentile. Trench, p. 185. Josephus called Gadara itself a Greek city. Flavius Josephus, **Antiquities of the Jews**, XVII.11.4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979 reprint), p. 520. "The country east of the lake was largely non-Jewish." **Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 521.

31 Hendriksen, p. 194.

32 McGarvey, p. 347.

33 Hendricksen, pp. 194-195.

34 Wiersbe, p. 126.

35 Lockyer speculates the disciples provided the clothing to hide the man's nakedness. Lockyer, p. 190. People in their right minds wear clothes!

36 McGarvey, p. 348.

37 Wiersbe, p. 126.

38 Trench, p. 190.

39 Others [for instance, the leper and two blind men (Matt. 8:4; 9:30)] had been told not to spread what had happened to them, but here the cured demoniac is given permission to spread the news to all. Why the difference? "In Gadara, he [Jesus] was not as well known as in Galilee where popular political movements to make Him a political king were almost out of hand." Lockyer, pp. 190-191.

40 McGarvey, p. 348.

41 "Decapolis: 'Ten Towns'; ten free Greek cities." **Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible**, p. 504.

CHAPTER 7

The Healing Of Two Blind Men, And A Dumb Man

Lennie Reagan

Introduction

WHAT A PRIVILEGE AND honor it is to participate in the **POWER** lectureship and to be involved with this good work with the fine brethren of the Southaven church of Christ. I have long respected and appreciated the faithfulness of the eldership here and the dedicated preachers who have been and are currently working with the Lord's church here. This congregation is loyally and capably served by B. J. Clarke and Wayne Jones and I love both of these men and I am happy to be in this area to be able to maintain a working and friendly relationship with them. I love and greatly esteem the congregation here.

The text under consideration for this chapter takes place during the Galilean ministry of Christ and, while it contains only eight verses, we are able to behold the majesty and the magnificence of Christ as the Son of God. These verses indelibly declare the Deity of Christ as He demonstrates His domination over disease and demons:

And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your

faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils (Matt. 9:27-34).

The Background Of The Miracles

Matthew presents Christ as the King of the Jews. He is the Messiah Who came in person, Who was clothed in flesh, and, as John declares, “dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Matthew amasses great detail to portray to his readers the precepts and practices of the King. Jesus is not only the promised Messiah; but, He is the King Who was born into the royal family of David and Who sits upon His throne forever. Jesus had a king’s introduction (Matt. 3:17). Jesus had a king’s authority (Matt. 3:17; Matt. 7:29). Jesus had a king’s loyalty (Matt. 12:30). Jesus had a king’s enemies (Matt. 16:21). Jesus had a king’s love (Matt. 20:28). Jesus had a king’s glory (Matt. 25:31ff). Jesus had a king’s sacrifice (Matt. 27). Jesus had a king’s victory (Matt. 28:6).

Christ is the promised seed of Abraham (Heb. 2:16), the offspring of David (Acts 2:29-31), and He is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44). He is the Savior of His people (Matt. 1:21). It was of His authority and healing power that Peter narrates these descriptive words to Cornelius and his household of the Christ: “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Yet, as Matthew records,

in the royal realm of the Kingly authority of Christ we are able to view the great High Priest Who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:14-16).

Matthew rehearses the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), and it is within the stalwart sermon proclaimed by Christ that we find the principles of the kingdom of heaven and the characteristics of her citizens. Now, in the chapters following, and throughout the life of Christ, we see an historical and practical application of what Christ taught. The latter verses of that distinguished discourse discuss the necessity of doing (obedience) and its relationship in view of what we hear. James exhorts: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1:22). In these two miracles (and in the other accounts which record the actions of Christ) we find Christ doing what He taught men ought to do. The Master Teacher did not just talk about how men should live, He lived what He taught. Surely, we should learn a valuable lesson from the Christ.

If we wonder if Jesus was truly merciful, we can behold His mercy to the blind men and to the dumb man. If we wonder if Jesus was in reality persecuted, we are able to discover the attitude and actions of the Pharisees as they denied and disclaimed the power and Deity of Christ. If we question if Christ is indeed “the light of the world,” we are able to perceive the marvel of His authority as the powers of darkness are subject and subservient to His Word.

Matthew is the only Gospel author to record these events as well as the other accounts of this chapter. Brother H. Leo Boles separates this miracle from the blind man at Jericho (Matthew 20: 29-34), and the man born blind (John 9).¹

Jesus Heals In View Of Demonstration (Matthew 9:27-31)

Helen Keller, one of America's beloved authors, who was blind, deaf and dumb, wrote an article, "Three Days To See." In her article, Miss Keller wrote from the perspective as if she had three days' use of her sight and then returned to the darkness of blindness. On the first day she would look into the faces of those whose kindness and companionship have made her life worth living. The second day would be used in visiting historical and art museums. The final day of her sight would be spent studying the city with all of its buildings; but, the focus of that third day would be upon people as she would attempt to understand something of their lives, their smiles, joys, determinations, and even their suffering.²

We do not know what was occupying the hearts of these two blind men; but, it is obvious they understood the tragedy of a neglected opportunity. These men had reasons to impose on Jesus. Could it be they well understood the mission of Christ to "go about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matt. 9:35)? Is it possible they were aware that, if they missed this opportunity, they may never face it again?

As Jesus departed the house of Jairus these blind men followed Jesus. There is no reason to suppose they were the only ones ensuing as the fame of Christ in raising the dead daughter of Jairus back to life had spread into all that land (Matt. 9:26). So, among the possible throng were these two blind men. The challenge of these men was not so much overcoming the hurtfulness of others; but, to overcome their own sense of helplessness and hopelessness in a "normal" society. In the time era which we are investigating, blind men were good for little. For

the most part, they were beggars, dependent upon the goodness of others. After all, these men did not have the availability of Braille, there were no guide dogs, nor were discrimination laws in effect to make life easier.

It is true these two men were physically blind; they were unable to see; but, they could plainly envision what they needed to do to be heard of the Christ. They employed their intelligence, independence, and interdependence. The full range of their senses was exercised as they followed Jesus back to the house. As far as we know, they had no help, except one another. So, we learn they were resourceful in their approach, relentless in their spirit, and rapid in their stride. They followed Christ. They listened to the sounds of others as they followed. They no doubt encouraged each other as they worked together to achieve their goal and to make sure they were not separated from one another nor from the Great Physician. They could not see Him; but, they could see Him!

The text under examination reveals that as Jesus and those following walked, the two blind men upon whom we are focusing our vision cried and said, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us" (Matt. 9:27). The Lord apparently ignored their cries and pleas until He reached His destination as inscribed in Matthew 9:28. Now, we have no indication as to the assistance, if any, these men had to secure the attention of Christ; but, may it be suggested that perhaps they felt as if they needed to stop Christ or at least catch his attention before He departed with their opportunity to receive their sight?

If that were the case, as they cried out, they hurried themselves and followed Christ into the house.

Seemingly uninvited, brazen, and from our standard of hospitality today, they were impolite as they infringed on the time, space, and rest of the Christ. These two sightless men were unflinching, irrepressible, and

desperate; but, they captured, cornered, and caught His complete attention.

Now that we have considered the personal and persistent procedure of the blind men, let us notice their inspiration and motivation in crying out to Jesus with passion, perception, and purpose. They cried out, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on us” (Matt. 9:27).

We all know someone who is very quiet and timid, especially when they speak in a public surrounding; however, these men were the exact opposite. The English word “crying” (Matt. 9:27), is translated from *krazo* (krad’zo), and is defined as “to croak (as a raven), to scream, to call aloud (shriek), to call out.”³ Timid these men were not and they did not limit their plea to once and no more. They continued to scream to gain the attention of the One they believed to be the Messiah, the Son of David.

These blind men, regardless of their education, fulfilled the roles of theologians, historians, and psalmists. They were not guilty of wearing blinders, possessing handicaps, or riding hobbies in their information, interpretation, and insight of the identity of the Christ. The designation “Son of David” is a substantial phrase in the Gospel account of Matthew, where it appears ten times. No other Gospel account provides the amount of coverage as does Matthew. The phrase appears three times in Mark, four times in Luke, and is not employed in John’s account. Matthew revealed the Messiah to the Jewish readers: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1); but, the two blind men were the first uninspired men in Matthew’s account to acknowledge the carpenter’s son as the Son of David. However blind these men may have been, they were well-informed and well-timed. This sightless duo, while they were deprived of their physical eye, believed, knew, and professed what many of the people, priests, and Pharisees

denied and rejected. They understood and were willing to acknowledge and confess what the theologians, historians, rabbis, and other religious folks were not: Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

In today's society, a presidential candidate is often times introduced as "the next president of the United States of America." This kind of introduction leaves no doubt in the mind of the audience as to the conviction of the speaker pertaining to the identity of the next president. When people refer to the Messiah as "Jesus Christ," usually they are speaking of Christ as an historical figure or as a religious leader. When Christ is identified as "Lord," we speak of His authority as Master and Ruler over those who inhabit His kingdom, the Lord's church. Addressing Jesus as the "Son of David" caused everyone who heard these blind men to understand that they believed and knew Jesus to be the Son of God.

The request of the blind men was for mercy. They appealed to the Christ on the basis of His compassion. Several years ago the news media was fascinated with the story of a three year old boy who fell into a primate exhibit at the Brookfield, Illinois, zoo. The guests at the zoo rightly panicked as they watched an eight year old female gorilla pick up the toddler, cradle him within her arms and then place the little boy near a door where the zoo keepers could rescue him. Of course, the media reported and played up the compassion and almost humanlike mercy of the animal. While we all were thankful for the safety of the boy, why is our society overwhelmed by the instinctive response of an animal; but, is oblivious to the obvious and observable mercy and compassion of God?

The Old and New Testament authors both record and reveal the kindnesses of our Lord. The psalmist proclaims: "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender

mercies are over all his works” (Psm. 145:8-9). The prophet Joel promotes: “And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil” (Joel 2:13). Daniel declares:

O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies (Dan. 9:18).

Paul presents God’s purpose: “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). The apostle Paul portrays Christ in these words:

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17).

Truly, we serve a compassionate Lord and these men were establishing their plea on the reality of His exhibited mercy.

So far in our study we have observed that the blind companions had persisted in their pursuit of Christ, they perpetually proclaimed their plea for mercy, and they pronounced their profession of the Deity of Christ. Their dramatic operation and their passionate inspiration were confirmed in their humble aspiration with persuasion and concern: “And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord” (Matt. 9:28).

The response of the blind men was the first of the four “Yea (Yes), Lord” responses we find recorded in the

Gospel accounts. The Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:28), Mary (John 11:27), and Peter (John 21:15-16) all responded with the positive response, "Yes, Lord." On many occasions Christ exercised open questions to check understanding, to motivate the thought processes, to expose the false teaching of men, and other purposes as well. Our Lord also employed closed questions to gain commitment from those whom He was teaching. Questions were asked publicly to the crowd and privately to individuals; but, He never let a physically blind person leave with just their sight restored. Their participation was always certain and their understanding was complete.

Jesus asked the blind man in Bethsaida "if he saw ought" (Mark 8:23). Blind Bartimaeus was questioned: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" (Mark 10:51). The blind man in John 9, who was cast out of the synagogue, was queried by Christ: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" (John 9:35). Except for the blind man who was demon possessed (Matt. 12:22), not one of the blind men who came to Jesus privately was allowed to leave without having to answer a question.

But, why this question, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (Matt. 9:28)? These men had already persisted in their following after Christ. If they did not believe Christ was able to heal them, they would not have followed. They had already proclaimed their plea, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us" (Matt. 9:27). Their pronouncement of faith acknowledged that Christ was the Messiah. Additionally, as omniscient God, Christ already knew their faith. Why ask this question? Is it possible that Christ, when He asked, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" was asking, "Do you believe that I can do this by my own power?" A positive response to that question will set forth their faith that Christ is not only the Son of David; but, also the Son of God. Their affirmation that Christ is the

Son of God will not only bolster their faith; they will also be committing themselves, “Yes, we believe.” The next chapter of Matthew uncovers the Lord’s statement:

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

Their open confession that Jesus was “Lord” was a statement of their view of His supreme authority. They believed that Christ was indeed Who He claimed to be, the Son of God.

Many times Christ physically touched those around Him. The Power Who spoke the universe into creation, Who told the oceans when to stop, the One Who set the course of the rivers would also, in God’s own time and with His hands, raise the dead, embrace the children, draw in the dirt, touch the untouchable leper, be nailed to a cruel cross, and touch the eyes of these two blind men. Bible scholars suggest that blindness was one of the very many common diseases among the natives of Palestine. The blear eyes, often crusted round with the fly infested and dried secretions of the diseased eye, was one of the most sickening sights there was to see.⁴ But, Christ touched them--a reassuring, comforting, merciful, loving and healing touch.

The joy of sight created a desire to tell somebody what had happened in these two men. Even though Christ strongly commanded them not to tell anyone, “they....spread abroad His fame in all that country” (Matt. 9:30). Perhaps the reason for this command is seen as Christ knew the multitudes were not interested in the Word but, rather, in the miracles, and they might mob Christ. The possibility existed that Christ did not want to create premature opposition to His work; but, the command

was given for these two former men to be silent about the miracle which had taken place. Regardless of the severity of the command, these men were disobedient and divulged the miraculous power of Christ.

Jesus Heals In View Of Derision (Matthew 9:32-34)

The man who was brought to Christ after the healing of the blind men was both dumb (without the ability to speak) and possessed with a devil. The English word “dumb” may at times suggest being deaf (Matt. 11:5; Mark 7:32; Luke 7:22). Brother Boles wisely suggests that the meaning would be defined within each individual context.⁵ Matthew does not give us the details of this man’s healing, only the statement of fact that the devil was cast out and the man was healed and able to speak.

There were mixed and contrasting responses to the miracle rendered by the Christ. The masses of people marveled (Matt. 9:33), and the Pharisees lied and denied the origin of the miracle (Matt. 9:34). The people were amazed at the miraculous workings of Christ. No doubt they had seen or heard of Christ’s raising the deceased daughter of Jairus and the healing of the blind men and, when this miracle was performed, their zeal was full. As children they were most likely taught of the miraculous plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. They knew of God’s miraculous provision of their forefathers while in the wilderness wanderings. They were convinced of the trumpet’s blare and God’s power which brought down the fortified walls of Jericho. The miracles involving Daniel and his three companions were etched in their minds; yet, they determined, “It was never so seen in Israel” (Matt. 9:33). Even though miracles had been accomplished in Israel, they were not performed in this frequency or type.

The reaction of the Pharisees is a strong indicator of the intended purpose of the miracles. While it is not the intent of this chapter to discuss the purpose of miracles, it is necessary to briefly address the divine purposes. One purpose of miracles was to confirm the Word of God to those who heard it: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:20). Another purpose served in miracles was the provision of proof of a true apostle: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). A third purpose of miracles was to fulfill prophecy: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17). The purpose under investigation in this miracle is to show that Christ is the Son of God. John plainly identifies the purpose of the recorded miracles:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

And the Pharisees understood the implications of Christ performing this miracle by His power. They knew, but they had long since decided to reject Christ and deny His power and His identity. Oh, yes, my friend, they knew:

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism

of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23-27).

Oh, yes, they well understood Who Christ was:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:4-5).

Christ was an enemy to their traditions and He exposed their deadly doctrines. The attributing of this miracle to the prince of the devils was their weak attempt to deny the Deity of Christ.

Discourses To Be Discovered

These two miracles and the people involved within these two scenarios proffer a profusion of precepts to be applied to our lives; but, we will consider only two. **Persistent faith is characteristic of the faithful child of God.** Contemporary theology tends to view faith as some sort of mental or emotional contract with God which rejects any type of behavioral change. But, in order to become like Christ, change must take place. We must change. But, in all reality, we are accustomed to making changes in other areas of our life.

Faith may be best understood when we see it in the lives of the Bible greats, and Abraham is a tremendous

example of a living faith. Abraham had faith in God and the vision God had given him.

My friend, it is that kind of faith that changes lives, and the vision that God gave Abraham truly changed his life, for it challenged Abraham for a lifetime. But how do we find this kind of faith? Abraham's faith was developed by his decision to trust God and the promises set forth by the words of God: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). Can you imagine the natural fear of the unknown? Yet, his decision to obey God and his willingness to venture on was his mark of faithfulness.

You know, it's difficult to see the unseen. Most folks go through life only seeing the immediate as they limit their vision within their comfort zone. They never move beyond what's within their grasp. They never look beyond themselves to see what God has in store for them. They fail to see the potential God sees in them. But when we trust God, we look beyond ourselves.

But, would you consider that merely trusting does not develop faith? Faith involves making a decision to follow God as we hear what He says and commands:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas. 1:25).

There is a vast difference in the results of a man who thinks differently and the man who chooses to do differently.

Some folks want to move forward only when they can see their way through; but faith is not seeing our way through. It is seeing through the eyes of God and that is done as we trust and obey God. Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth that we do not walk by sight, but by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). Most of the time we focus on the positive aspect of that passage: "For we walk by faith," and that is important; but in this verse we must recognize that as Christians we do not walk by sight. So when Abraham left his home in Ur and followed the commands of God, he was walking by faith. When Moses led the children of God out of Egypt, he was walking by faith. When Joshua compassed the city of Jericho, he was walking by faith. As we walk by faith we go beyond our vision and we begin to see things as God sees them.

Now, you know good and well what was going through Pharaoh's mind as he was pursuing the Israelites after they left Egypt. When he saw they were cornered on all sides--the mountains on both sides of them, and the Red Sea in front of them--he knew he had them. But Moses saw the dry ground of the Red Sea through the eyes of God. Can you imagine the thoughts of the inhabitants of Jericho when Joshua and the Israelites were marching around the massive walls of that fortified city? They had heard of the mighty and powerful God of the Israelites; but, when the mighty warriors of Israel simply marched around the city, the fear of being defeated no doubt escaped from their minds. But Joshua saw the impossible become possible as he looked through the eyes of faith. He saw the walls of Jericho fall when his trust in God became active in obedience.

We walk by faith--not by sight. My friend, that's good news because we all face obstacles and difficulties along the journey of life.

The second lesson we learn from this account is the need for personal dedication. Philadelphia, 1776,

Gettysburg, 1863, San Juan Hill in 1899, Midway Island in 1942, Normandy in 1944, and many other dates and places were all turning points in the course of American history--wars in which regular, everyday Americans risked everything and stood up to be counted. As we scan the historical past of our nation, we learn that men and women were willing to totally commit themselves to their pursuit. In the same manner, spiritual freedom and successes will never be realized without a willingness to be committed to the pursuit. Jesus told Peter: "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). The apostle Paul wrote:

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

Our dedication and commitment is important for at least two reasons: 1) The urgency of time demands it, and 2) It is the emphasis of the Word of God. This writer will be the first to admit that it is far easier to talk about commitment than to actualize and assimilate that dedication in our lives; but, in spite of the difficulties, we must face up to the Biblical demands of commitment. Christianity has never survived on the basis of mild and uncommitted disciples. It is the business of every believer to understand and apply what it means to be dedicated.

The first thing we understand is that personal dedication demands a decision. Notice these two verses and see if you can pick up on the personal determination:

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (2 Cor. 8:5).

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting

those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before... (Phil. 3:13).

In the second place, personal dedication demands devotion to God. For many people, Christ is not very real. Religion to this type of person is only a casual, surface type of relationship. It's what's expected, only skin deep-- no commitment, no involvement. Through the years their Christianity has been little more than having become Christians and then eating the Lord's supper with some degree of regularity. It has not meant a new way of living. Their Christianity has been largely threadbare and negative. I think we can eliminate that being the pattern which Christ would have us to follow. Consider Paul's words as he describes the kind of devotion God demands:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1).

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Conclusion

As the Lord tarries and our physical bodies age, many of us already have or may have trouble with our eyes. Vision may grow dim or we may lose our sight totally; but, as in our study, we learn that faith will overcome eye care, old age, and the many other physical problems we may develop in this life. We are not saying that we will receive a miracle to renew our eyes or any other ailment, but, that if we are obedient to the Gospel of Christ and faithful to His Word, heaven will be our eternal home: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be

any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Home, sweet, sweet, home!

Endnotes

1 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1961), p. 213.

2 <http://www.afb.org>.

3 James Strong, **The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 51.

4 Boles, p. 213.

5 Ibid, p. 216.

CHAPTER 8

The Healing Of A Man With A Withered Hand

Kevin Beard

Introduction

THE MIRACLES JESUS PERFORMED brought varied reactions from those who witnessed them: some marveled, some gave glory to God, some tried to discredit Jesus, and some determined to destroy Him. These diverse reactions to the same phenomena demonstrate the varied conditions of the human heart present in the time of Jesus, for the condition of one's heart determined his reaction to the Lord's miracles. If he were skeptical, he would respond with skepticism. If he were antagonistic, he would respond with antagonism. But if he were open minded, he would respond with wonder, admitting that Jesus really must have been Who He claimed to be. Nicodemus was one such man. He told the Lord, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).¹

Though a Pharisee himself, Nicodemus stood in contrast to the majority of the Pharisees. This sect of the Jews opposed Jesus in every conceivable way. Though they heard the message and saw the confirmation of it, they refused to accept the obvious conclusion that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. These were the ones of whom the Lord said Isaiah spoke:

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:14-15).

They did not believe because they chose not to believe. This mindset led them to look for every opportunity they could find to catch Jesus in some kind of mistake, or in some circumstance that they could use to turn public opinion against Him. They thought they had found one of these occasions when Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the sabbath (Matt. 12:10-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11).

The Pharisees Vs. The Sabbath Day

The sabbath day was a day of rest for the Jews (Exod. 20:8-11). So strict was the prohibition of work on that day that violators of that law were stoned to death (Num. 15:32-36). But what action was considered work on the sabbath? In Jesus' day the Pharisees had very strong opinions regarding what was and was not lawful to do on the sabbath day. The Pharisees' exaltation of their own traditions over the law of God placed great burdens on the people. Jesus said, "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:4).

Their sabbath traditions were equally burdensome. Smith believed the Pharisees' traditions were "minute and vexatious extensions of the law of the Sabbath, which must have converted God's gracious ordinance of the Sabbath's rest into a burden and a pain."² One commentator said,

“The Pharisees had added many oral traditions to the written law. First, no burden-bearing was allowed. People could not even carry a needle in their clothing, write anything, or put out a lamp.”³

The Pharisees Vs. Jesus

These burdensome Pharisaic traditions often provided opportunity for confrontation with Jesus. On various sabbaths, He healed a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:10ff); He healed a woman who was “bowed together” (Luke 13:10ff); He healed a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1ff); He healed a crippled man (John 5:1ff); and He healed a blind man (John 9:1ff). On each of these occasions the Pharisees took exception to Jesus’ activity, either by condemning the healing itself as unlawful work, or by condemning any accompanying activity, such as His making clay to heal the blind man (John 9:13-16), or telling the crippled man to take up his bed and walk (John 5:8-10).

On one occasion Jesus and His disciples walked through a grain field on the sabbath and since the disciples were hungry they plucked some of the grain and ate it as they passed through the field (Matt. 12:1-9). The Pharisees, who saw the disciples plucking the grain, condemned the action as being a violation of the sabbath law. While the disciples very likely did violate the Pharisees’ sabbath **tradition**, they most certainly did not violate God’s sabbath **law**. Jesus defended the disciples’ actions, proclaiming them “guiltless” (Matt. 12:7), and pointed out the Pharisees’ hypocrisy in the way they bound their traditions. This greatly displeased the Pharisees (as nearly everything Jesus did seemed to do) and set the stage for the healing that would later take place.

After this confrontation (it was on another sabbath day, according to Luke 6:6), Matthew said Jesus went into “one of their synagogues” (Matt. 12:9). “One of whose

synagogues,” one might ask. This would have been a synagogue in which the Pharisees had a controlling influence: “The synagogue was a place where local groups of Jews in cities and villages anywhere could gather for the reading and explanation of the Jewish sacred Scriptures and for prayer.”⁴ Elders presided over the synagogue, regulating its policies.⁵ In the instance under consideration, since the Pharisees held this ruling position in the synagogue, their influence would have been significant; their traditions would have dominated the teaching done there. What better place could there have been for Jesus to challenge the Pharisees’ unlawful elevation of their tradition to the level of divine law?

Others may have been intimidated by the Pharisees and may even have feared contradicting them, but not the Lord. He knew that, of all the sinful things going on among the Jews of that day, the Pharisees’ sin was among the most despicable and the most dangerous. It was despicable because on the one hand they flouted the commands of God and on the other they elevated themselves to positions of great religious import by their feigned piety! No wonder the Lord reserved His harshest condemnation for them: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” As despicable as their actions were, it is possible that those actions were even more dangerous than despicable. Not everyone saw through the Pharisees’ pretense as Jesus did. Many looked up to these men as leaders. Jesus said they loved to be honored at feasts and to be called “Rabbi” (Matt. 23:6-7), so there must have been people willing to give the honor and use the title. Those who revered these men for their religiosity no doubt believed the Pharisaic standard to be the perfect one. What a paradox! These men despised the true law of God; yet in the name of their loyalty to that law they taught men to follow it, but to follow the Pharisees’ own perverted view of it, and in so

doing led men away from the law they claimed to uphold! This is the reason the Lord said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:2-3).

On the occasion at hand, Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach (Luke 6:6). If Jesus anticipated a confrontation with the Pharisees, He certainly did not enter the synagogue merely for the sake of the confrontation; He sought opportunity for people to see the truth in contrast to the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. However, given the Pharisees’ attitude toward Jesus, confrontation was inevitable.

Present in the synagogue on this day was a man with a withered hand. Because of their earlier dispute with Jesus regarding lawful activity on the sabbath, the Pharisees used this man to put Jesus to the test. “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days,” they asked so that they could accuse Jesus of violating the law (Matt. 12:10). This question demonstrates the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. They were not concerned with the man’s physical condition. People often brought those who were ill or infirmed to Jesus so that He might heal them. When they did, they did not do so hoping to trap Jesus in some inconsistency; they brought people to Jesus out of compassion. But compassion for the man with the withered hand did not prompt the Pharisees here. These Pharisees were not really concerned with acquiring an accurate interpretation of the sabbath law, either. They probably knew how Jesus would answer. Certainly they suspected that Jesus would heal this man, because they watched Him with suspicion (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7). They already knew that Jesus’ views on sabbath day activity were less stringent than their own; they had condemned the disciples for plucking grain on the sabbath and Jesus had defended them. The Pharisees’ motive was

vindictive. They knew that Jesus would heal the man and they planned to accuse Him of working on the sabbath.

Jesus' approach to this situation shows great wisdom and self-control. He could have acted with great arrogance and pride and healed the man with no attempt to address the question at hand. He had told the Pharisees earlier that He was "Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8), and as such, His actions on that day were above question. But He would have handed the Pharisees exactly what they sought by taking this approach. The only way to deal with this situation was to address the issue of the sabbath law. Jesus introduced His comments by responding to the Pharisees' question with a question of His own: "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). How could the Pharisees answer that question and still hold to their intentions? If they answered, "It is lawful to do good," then everyone would agree that healing a man was doing good, and therefore was lawful. They could not take the second option Jesus offered, for it is never lawful to do evil. They took the only option available to them and "held their peace" (Mark 3:4).

It is important to note that Jesus dealt with the lawfulness of this activity. He did not address this in terms of any kind of exception to the law, or any excusable violation of the law. Jesus lived completely above reproach. Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), and He never sinned (Heb. 4:15). If Jesus' actions here had been an exception to the law or an excusable violation of the law, His mission to be the sin offering for the world would have been compromised. So Jesus showed that this activity was completely lawful and therefore not to be criticized or condemned.

Jesus then proceeded to prove that it was indeed lawful to do good on the sabbath days: "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it

fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" (Matt. 12:11). It is interesting that Jesus did not cite any Scripture for His argument. Rather, He addressed the Jews' own understanding of the Law, which happened to be the proper understanding. The Law of Moses made no specific reference to rescuing an endangered animal on the sabbath, yet the people in this audience knew that such action was not a violation of the sabbath law. That no one contradicted Jesus on this point shows that all were in agreement that it was indeed lawful to lift a sheep out of a pit on the sabbath day. Jesus followed this observation with another: "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matt. 12:12). His reasoning is impeccable. Is it lawful to do good to a sheep on the sabbath? Yes. Is a man better than a sheep? Yes. Then is it not also lawful to do good to a man on the sabbath? Yes. Jesus' conclusion stands unassailable: "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days" (Matt. 12:12).

If Jesus had left the synagogue at that point, the Pharisees would never have been able to overcome the force of His reasoning. But Jesus put the matter completely out of the realm of discussion by healing the man with the withered hand. With the simple command for the man to stretch forth his hand, Jesus brought vitality to an impotent hand. No more would the man have to go through life struggling to do the routine chores of daily life one-handed.

Who could have accomplished such a feat? Only God could have been responsible for this. How did this miracle put the question of healing on the sabbath out of the realm of discussion? It showed that God approved of the One Who did the miracle. God certainly would not have empowered a false teacher to perform this miracle, because the miracle obviously confirmed the things that had just been said. The entire discussion of what was lawful on the

sabbath revolved around the question of healing. This miracle proved that Jesus was from God. That truth being divinely confirmed, who would dare question the teaching Jesus did? The Pharisees had been soundly defeated in their attempt to undermine Jesus' influence among the people. They could not accuse Him of violating the sabbath when God had demonstrated His approval by the miracle.

Reaction To The Miracle

What effect did Jesus' miracle have on the Pharisees? Had they been pure of heart, they would have admitted that Jesus was Who He claimed to be; had they been open minded, they would have given up their unlawful traditions. But these Pharisees did not possess these positive qualities. In the place of pure hearts they had selfish pride; in the place of open minds they had closed minds. They responded to Jesus' miracle in anger. Luke said, "And they were filled with madness" (Luke 6:11). The word "madness" is interesting because it means, "want of understanding, folly...madness expressing itself in rage."⁶ Theirs was a senseless rage. A. T. Robertson said, "Here is a rage that is kin to insanity, for *anoias* is lack of sense."⁷ There was no reason to their anger. Reasonable men would have recognized that Jesus was indeed a "teacher come from God." But with this miracle Jesus denounced all of the things the Pharisees treasured: their pride, their tradition, and their power. Albert Barnes stated it well. He said the Pharisees were filled with madness:

Probably--1st. Because he had shown his **power** to work a miracle. 2d. Because he had shown his power to do it **contrary** to what **they** thought was right. 3d. Because by doing it he had shown that he was from **God**, and that **they** were therefore **wrong** in their views of the Sabbath. And, 4th. Because he had shown no respect to **their views** of what the law of God demanded.⁸

So, unable to prove Jesus to be a fraud or to be opposed to the Law, and unwilling to change their own sinful attitudes, the Pharisees looked for a way to do away with Jesus. Their intentions had become sinister. They had been content with trying to humiliate Jesus, or to discredit Him. Now they planned to kill Him. The Pharisees viewed themselves as the ones who were most devoted to keeping the Law in strictest purity. Yet they were willing to kill a man who was a threat to them. Unbeknownst to them, their wicked plan to kill Jesus would bring God's plan to fulfillment, bringing the end of the Law of Moses and making it possible for Jesus to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Modern Day Applications

The Bible is filled with examples: some positive and some negative. The Pharisees certainly serve as a powerful negative example to people of all ages. They hypocritically declared themselves to be the standard by which all righteousness was judged. They haughtily bound on their fellow man their opinions of how the law should be kept, yet they refused to keep the law themselves. So strong was their pride that they were willing to murder an innocent man to maintain their position. Some falsely accuse those who are concerned about keeping God's commandments of being like the Pharisees. But it was not their devotion to obedience that condemned the Pharisees. It was their ungodliness in their devotion to human tradition over the law of God. Every servant of God ought to study the mindset of the Pharisees with a determination to eliminate any semblance of it in their lives.

Preachers and teachers ought to study the way Jesus interacted with the Pharisees to learn the proper way of dealing with times of confrontation. No preacher or teacher who truly desires that his audience learn and obey the

truth enjoys times of confrontation with those who oppose his teaching. However, when the truth is proclaimed, times of confrontation naturally will arise. In those times, teachers and preachers ought to be like Jesus and face the confrontation with confidence and the kind of attitude that seeks to destroy the false teaching but save the one who espouses it. The only way to do this is to stand unashamedly for the truth. Though the opponents of the truth may turn the confrontation into a personal attack, the servant of Christ must never retaliate in kind. Jesus never stooped to slandering the Pharisees. He never relied on name-calling or ridicule. Instead, He presented the truth and attacked their false doctrine and showed the fallacy behind their faulty reasoning. He did not want to be the Pharisees' enemy and He did not rebuff them in order to antagonize them or to belittle them in the eyes of the people. Had the Pharisees been open minded enough to recognize it, they would have seen that Jesus' dealings with them were designed to show the ungodliness of their practices, not only to the general population, but also to the Pharisees themselves. In the demonstration of that ungodliness, Jesus showed the beauty of true service to God.

Conclusion

Those who claim to be able to perform miracles today and those who believe that some men and women do perform miracles today ought to study the way Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. It is not clear what the exact nature of this man's malady had been. The word translated "withered" (*xeros*) means "shrunk, wasted, withered."⁹ Perhaps the man had been born with a hand that never functioned; maybe he had suffered a stroke that left that hand paralyzed; it may have been injured in an accident and was now left useless. The cause of the man's condition is irrelevant, but the condition itself was obvious.

By describing the hand as “withered,” all three inspired writers make it plain that one could ascertain by visible inspection that this man had a non-functioning hand. How many of today’s so-called miracle workers would dare attempt to heal someone with such an obvious infirmity as this man had? Today’s “faith healers” specialize in “healing” those disorders that are not visibly detectable. Back problems, deafness, cancer, arthritis, addictions--the “faith healers” love to claim to release people from the clutches of such terrible things. But who can tell by looking that the one who claims to be afflicted really does suffer with these things? When the “miracle worker” proclaims they have been healed, who is to say the healing actually occurred? Jesus gave sight to a man born blind, a man known to all in the community to be blind. He healed people of leprosy, a disease with very obvious physical manifestations. He even raised the dead! But where are the “healers” of today who are willing to bring about immediate, miraculous healing for such ailments as these? They will not attempt such healings because they know they would fail. It is not that God is no longer able to bring about miraculous healings, but that He no longer needs to do so. The miracles served their purpose; they confirmed the Word of God for all time.

By studying the healing of the man with the withered hand children of God can learn many valuable lessons. But the most important lesson of all is to learn that Jesus really was the Son of God. He proved it in everything He did. Whether in confrontation with Pharisees, in healing the infirmed, in teaching, or in communion with His disciples, Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah. He lived perfectly and went to the cross to die for a world full of sinners. How grateful every soul ought to be that this Jesus was not only compassionate on men like the one in that synagogue, but also on all men in all the earth.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

2 William Smith, "Pharisees," **Smith's Bible Dictionary**, Logos Library System, Electronic Edition, rev. and ed. F. N. and M. A. Peloubet (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

3 **King James Version Study Bible**, Logos Library System (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). From comments on John 5:9-18.

4 F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison, and Ronald F. Youngblood, eds., "Synagogue," **Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, Electronic edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

5 Ibid.

6 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), p. 48.

7 Archibald Thomas Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Volume 2 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 83.

8 Albert Barnes, "Luke and John," **Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 44.

9 Thayer, p. 432.

CHAPTER 9

The Feeding Of The Thousands

Brian Giselbach

Introduction

IT IS MY PRIVILEGE to investigate and discuss the feeding miracles Jesus performed during what we have come to know as His Galilean ministry. Most of the attention in this study will go to the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). However, I will also make some references to the feeding of the four thousand (Matt. 15:29-38; Mark 8:1-10).

I confess I have not always had a great interest in studying the miracles of the Bible. Early in my preaching career other subjects seemed to hold fast my attention. It was not that I in any way disbelieved the miracles of Jesus or others recorded in the Scriptures; I very much accepted them as true. But since such miracles as were performed by Jesus and His apostles are no longer in operation today, I did not give these events the priority they deserved. Other issues or topics seemed more pressing. However, with age has come a much greater appreciation for what these miracles mean. Amid the turmoil and stresses that plague the church today it is refreshing to contemplate these amazing events in the life of Jesus and His apostles. Honestly, it is my love for the truth and my love for Christ that brings me to this greater interest in His miracles. I

love Jesus more than I used to. I believe in Him more than I used to. His miracles have become a part of the whole that encourages and sustains me in the faith.

Peter, in his sermon in Acts 2, described Jesus as “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). Peter goes on to discuss the resurrection of Christ, and how he and many others had been witnesses of Him (Acts 2:32; 1 Cor. 15:1-8). The miracles of Jesus, including His resurrection, were tremendous evidences of His claims to be the Son of God. This was the point of Peter’s argument in Acts 2 (Acts 2:36). Jesus even referred to the evidential value of His miraculous works when He said, “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). Brother Guy N. Woods, commenting on this verse, stated:

Jesus, both by word and by works, established his claims. Thus these Jews were without excuse in their unbelief...They ought to have recognized that Jesus was from God because of the works (miracles) which he did.¹

Jesus’ statement in John 5:36 harmonizes with the total picture of miracles attributed to Jesus in the Scriptures. There were three basic purposes for these miraculous activities. First, they attracted attention to Jesus. Those who witnessed these events, such as those gathered at the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand, were filled with wonder and amazement. While this was not the primary purpose of His miracles, the effect was to bring people out to the desert places, lakeshores, and hillsides to hear the Word of God.

Second, the miracles revealed something about God Himself. Believers in God recognize the awesome power

and sovereignty of God to do great things. But for the most part, the miracles of Jesus demonstrate the compassion and tenderness of God. Jesus could have used His power in any number of ways to punish those who opposed His message and ministry. However, the miracles of Jesus primarily resulted in helping the hurting, giving life back to the dead, giving sight to the blind and strength to feeble legs, and feeding the hungry. Jesus saw great suffering, and His miracles were a compassionate response. This relief of physical needs was more than a kind gesture, it was a demonstration of God's willingness to respond to man's greatest need of all—salvation from sin.

Third, the miracles testified to the truthfulness of Jesus' claims. Jesus said He was sent by the Father (John 6:38). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-17). There had to be some basis for people accepting these claims as true. Jesus was speaking to a people who knew what to look for and expect in one who claimed to be a spokesman for God. They looked for the Christ to come, and they looked for Him to come with signs (John 7:31). Thus the miracles of Jesus were just that; they were signs. They provided undeniable testimony that what He taught concerning Himself and the salvation He came to bring to the world was from God (Matt. 9:5-6).

The feeding miracles were particularly impressive because they were performed before so many people. No one could deny they were done by Him. Even today, as skeptics attack the Gospel accounts of these events, their arguments are weak and unconvincing. The feeding of the five thousand, and later the four thousand, remain an important part of the greatest story ever told.

Background And Occasion

Sometime after Jesus' discourse in John 5 on matters attesting to His claims, and possibly even a year later, Jesus

and His disciples crossed over the Sea of Galilee by boat. They launched from Capernaum to a deserted place near the city of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). Their purpose in making this short journey was to find rest (Mark 6:31).

We are given two reasons why this rest was needed. First, the disciples had just returned from a preaching tour in Galilee (Mark 6:31). Second, news had just surfaced about the death of John the baptizer (Matt. 14:1-12). Concerning John's death some have raised the possibility that John's popularity and subsequent death would encourage the multitudes, and particularly the Zealots, to attempt to turn Jesus' "movement" into an insurrection.² These conditions made it important for Jesus to be alone with His disciples for prayer and personal instruction.

There was a great deal of excitement in the air, therefore, due to the disciples' successful campaign and the report of John's death. The disciples would have many questions pertaining to their experiences. Besides, what would John's death mean to their future work? No doubt Jesus intended to address these matters, as well as provide His disciples with needed rest from their labors.

As the inspired narrative progresses, it turns out that the rest Jesus proposed would have to wait awhile longer. The people had other plans. They had witnessed His power to heal the sick and diseased, and they wanted more (Mark 6:33). The people observed how Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and how slowly they voyaged across the sea. Though they probably did not know what Jesus' destination was, they saw the direction He travelled and they knew it would not be far to shore. The crowds set out to follow Jesus along the northern shoreline of the sea to wherever Jesus and His party might come ashore. This meant that the trip on foot by the people would be between four to six miles. Since we know the crowd was large, and because it was composed of women and children, as well

as the sick and the old, the line of followers seeking Jesus could have stretched out continuously the entire distance from Capernaum to Bethsaida. The persistence of the people to stay with Jesus was amazing. It had to have been a sight for the disciples in the boat to see as they looked to the shore. It soon became clear to them that they would not be able to outrun the multitude.

Who arrived at the destination first? Some have attacked the Gospel accounts on this point and have made the claim that the records are inconsistent. At first reading, Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to indicate that the people arrived first, whereas John seems to give the impression that Jesus and the disciples arrived first. But there is no disharmony in the records at all. If it is the case that there was a long line of followers making their way to where the boat landed, then it is obvious that some, probably the young, arrived first. When Jesus and His disciples disembarked the people were continuing to come. Jesus merely selected an elevated spot, sat with His disciples, and lifted up His eyes to behold the “great multitude coming toward Him” (John 6:5).

Mark informs us that, as Jesus looked out upon the people coming His way, He saw them as sheep having no shepherd (Mark 6:34). We are told He had compassion for them. Out of His compassion it is said that He “received them” (Luke 9:11). This reception included two things: (1) He healed those who needed healing, and (2) He spoke to them about the kingdom of God. This, of course, was one of Jesus’ favorite themes. What joy it is to have such a Savior, One Who is compassionate and knows just what we need. He is a Savior Who longs to receive us, to lift our burdens, and to teach us those things which will bring us into His kingdom.

Luke tells us that by now “the day began to wear away” (Luke 9:12). From Matthew we learn that “it was

evening” (Matt. 14:15), and Mark says that “the day was now far spent” (Mark 6:35). With the evening shadows upon them, Jesus is about to execute one of the most visible and undeniable miracles of His ministry.

The Miracle And Its Purpose

The reader is encouraged to read and compare all four accounts of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. All four records give emphasis to a concern that begins to loom large in the minds of the disciples as the time drags on. The need for food for the people was becoming ever more critical. This was a concern that grew out of their compassion for the people, as well as the realization of their own inadequacy to fulfill this need. Yet, in all likelihood the disciples did not consider this eventual problem until it was upon them. Jesus, on the other hand, “knew what He would do” (John 6:6).

It seems clear that Jesus was the first to bring the matter to the attention of the disciples. Perhaps He simply detected what they were thinking and decided to be the first to verbalize the concern. Peloubet, in his commentary on this miracle, gives a chronological order of the conversations as they occurred between Jesus and the disciples³: (1) Jesus asked Philip (who was familiar with the region of Bethsaida) about where to buy bread for the multitude. (2) Philip answered that two hundred denarii worth of bread was not sufficient for so many, even if everyone took just a little. (3) The disciples proposed that the crowd be sent away immediately to purchase provisions in the surrounding villages and countryside. (4) Jesus suggested that there was no need to send the multitude away, that the disciples should give them to eat. (5) The disciples complained that two hundred denarii was not enough to purchase food for the people. (6) Jesus asked the disciples to go and see about the amount of bread they

had in their possession. (7) The disciples returned from their search, and Andrew answered that they had found a boy who carried five loaves and two fish with him; but this was obviously inadequate for so many people. (8) Jesus asked for the loaves and the fish to be brought to Him.

How long it took for these conversations to go on we don't know. It is possible that an hour or two transpired throughout the discussions the disciples had with Jesus over the situation. The needed provisions simply did not exist. It was useless to even debate the matter. All could see that the resources were not to be had in a deserted place such as they were in. Why was this so clear to the disciples but not to Jesus?

From the disciples' point of view it is easy to understand their frustration. The need for food for so many was becoming a greater concern with every passing moment. The day was far spent. Seemingly, Jesus expected the disciples to answer this need out of resources that were not available. Except for the fact that we now know what eventually occurred, just as certainly as Jesus knew what was about to occur, we can sympathize with the frustration the disciples were experiencing. But Jesus "knew what He would do." Jesus issued the problem to His disciples as a "test" (John 6:6). What was the intention of this test? It was to see if the disciples' faith would propose a solution out of that faith. Did Jesus have power over nature, and, if the disciples believed He did, would they request such a display out of their faith in Him?

Jesus issued a command to His disciples: "Make them sit down in groups of fifty" (Luke 9:14). The disciples did as Jesus commanded. Mark tells us that the people "sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties" (Mark 6:40). In all probability the purpose of this arrangement was for the orderly distribution of food by the disciples once it was provided. Peloubet suggests:

the people sat down, literally, in table companies, arranged like guests at a Roman table, forming three sides of a square...or oblongs open at one end, so the disciples could pass along the inside and distribute the loaves.⁴

It is possible that the people sat down in close proximity with their friends and families. How much the crowd anticipated what was about to happen we do not know. It is difficult to believe that anyone present could have anticipated the extent of the miracle about to occur.

Matthew informs us the people sat down on grass (Matt. 14:19). From John we learn there was “much grass in the place” (John 6:10), and Mark tells us the grass was green (Mark 6:39). This is consistent with John’s insistence that the miracle occurred when the Passover was drawing near (John 6:4). There may be a further significance to this situation. It reminds us, as Lane suggests, that the Lord causes His people to lie down in green pastures (Psm. 23). The scene evokes the shepherd and sheep imagery presented previously by Mark (Mark 6:34).⁵ At the least, the idea that Jesus is about to miraculously feed so many (and will feed four thousand more later) causes us to recall the feeding miracles in the wilderness (Exod. 16). Thoughtful observers would have considered this a likeness to Moses, or even to God Himself.⁶

When the companies were formed on the grass, Jesus took the loaves and the fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them. After giving thanks to the Father, Jesus distributed the loaves and the fish to the disciples. The disciples, in turn, distributed the food to the multitude. McGarvey informs us that this is our precedent for giving thanks at our dinner tables today.⁷

The Gospel records are amazingly brief in the details they give about the miracle. Luke simply informs us that Jesus gave the five loaves and two fish to the disciples for

them to set before the people, and “they all ate and were filled” (Luke 9:16-17). The details of the event are just as sketchy in the other three records. Our curiosity wants more information. What did the miracle look like as it was actually unfolding? We know there was an actual multiplication involved. We know the people did not simply receive a crumb with the effect of making the stomach full. The fragments taken up afterwards indicates a multiplication of the loaves and fish. But did the loaves and fish multiply in the hands of Jesus, Who in turn gave to the disciples to give to the people? Or, did pieces of the loaves and fish multiply in the baskets as the disciples supplied the food to the companies?

To these questions there is no definitive answer. When Luke states that Jesus “took the five loaves and the two fish...and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude...So they all ate and were filled,” an amazing transformation took place in that process of time. We are left to wonder in amazement at what happened in those few brief moments. McGarvey writes:

The increase had occurred by the instantaneous restoration of the size of the loaf, as each man broke off a piece more than sufficient for himself. Thus the miracle was witnessed by each one of the five thousand, and it was really resolved into five thousand repetitions of the same miracle. On this account it was the most surprising miracle which the people had yet witnessed.⁸

Foster seems to object, though not too strongly, to McGarvey’s view. Foster suggests the possibility that the baskets which were used to hold the remaining fragments were previously used to distribute the food, and that the loaves and fish increased in the hands of Jesus as the disciples distributed the food to the companies and continually returned to Jesus for a new supply. The running

back and forth on the part of the disciples continued for as long as the need remained.⁹ This way the multitudes would be more likely to attribute the miracle to Jesus instead of to the disciples themselves. To his credit, Foster is somewhat favorable to McGarvey's idea that the miracle did not take place in Jesus' actual hands.¹⁰ He cites the example of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16). There, Elijah did not actually handle the flour used for producing bread for the widow and her family, yet the flour was not used up. It could be argued, however, that Jesus' miracle and Elijah's miracle were for different purposes, and therefore it was more necessary that the multitudes attribute the miracle directly to Jesus, thus establishing His claims to be sent from the Father (John 5:36; John 6:32-33).

I find it difficult to accept Lane's view that the source of the meal was hidden from the multitude. He suggests the miracle was meant for the spiritual consumption of the disciples only, and the multitude was unaware that the miracle had occurred.¹¹ This is out of harmony with the facts. The immediate reaction was that the people saw this as a "sign" that Jesus was "the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14; Deut. 18:15-18). Indeed, the response was such that the people were about to come and make Him a king (John 6:15).

Truly a great miracle was executed by Jesus, and many thousands, including the twelve disciples, were witnesses of His power. One can only read the accounts of the miracle in awe of what was done. Trench captures the essence of what transpired by the power of God:

This miracle, even more than that of the water changed into wine, when we endeavor to realize to ourselves the manner of it, evermore eludes our grasp, and baffles imagination. Nor is this strange; for indeed, how can it be possible to

bring within forms of our conception, or in thought to bridge over the gulf between not-being and being, which yet is bridged over in every creative act? And this being so, there is no force in the objection which one has made against the historical truth of the narrative, namely, that "there is no attempt by closer description to make clear in its details the manner and process by which this wonderful bread was formed." It is true wisdom, to leave the indescribable undescribed, and without so much as an attempt at the description. They who bear record of these things appeal to the same faith, on the part of their readers or hearers, as that which believes "that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3).

Others have urged that here, as in the case of the water made wine, Christ did but compress into a single moment all those processes which in ordinary circumstances He, the same Lord of nature, causes more slowly to succeed one another. But, true as in its measure is this, the analogy is good only to a certain point. For that which finds place in the field is the unfolding of the seed according to the law of its own being...But with bread it is otherwise; since, before that is made, there must be new interpositions of man's art, and those of such a character that by them the very life, which up to this point has unfolded itself, must be crushed and destroyed. A grain of wheat left to itself could never...issue in a loaf of bread. And, moreover, the Lord does not start here from the simple germ, from the lifeful rudiments, wherein all the seeds of a future life might be assumed to be wrapt up...The oak is folded up in the acorn, but not in a piece of timber hewn and shaped from itself. This analogy then, even as such, presently fails; and renouncing all helps to faith to be gotten from this quarter, we must be content to behold in this multiplying of the bread an act of divine omnipotence...Thus He, all whose works were "signs," embodied and visible words, did in this miracle proclaim Himself the

true bread of the world, the unexhausted and inexhaustible upholder of all life, in whom there should be enough and to spare for the spiritual needs of all hungering souls in all ages.¹²

After the miracle was accomplished, and all were filled, the disciples were able to take up twelve baskets full of the remains. These baskets were the evidence that something amazing had just occurred. How could so many be fed and so much remain? Matthew is most informative as to how many were fed—"five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matt. 14:21). Undoubtedly, the people would take these remains back to their homes and villages. With this abundant evidence they would tell their story to all who would hear, so that this miracle and its meaning would be pondered by many more thousands.

Some have argued that the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15) is the same event as the feeding of the four thousand (Matt. 15:29-38; Mark 8:1-10). There are some similarities to be sure. There are also enough differences to indicate they were not the same event. The number of people fed is not the same. The number of loaves and fish Jesus had at His disposal is not the same. The number of fragments taken up after the miracles is not the same. Matthew and Mark are the only two of the four Gospel accounts wherein both miraculous feedings are recorded. Are we to believe that Matthew and Mark mistakenly listed the same miracle twice? Who can believe they would have made such an obvious blunder? However, the most convincing argument against mistaking one event for two events comes from Jesus Himself. He mentions both miracles as two separate occurrences (Matt. 16:8-11; Mark 8:17-21).

One aspect of the two miracles is troubling for Bible students. If the two miraculous feedings are not the same

event, how do we account for the fact the disciples appear to be just as confused or unsure about what Jesus is able to do in both circumstances? The feeding of the five thousand occurred prior to the feeding of the four thousand. Why did not the disciples respond to the second circumstance with more faith and assurance? Trench gives a satisfactory explanation on this question.¹³ He proposes two possibilities. First, the hearts of men are prone to forget blessings and favors of God which were formerly displayed so convincingly: the Israelites in the wilderness did the same thing (Exod. 17:1-7). The disciples seem to have forgotten this miraculous ability as it pertained to their own physical needs (Matt. 16:5-12). Second, the disciples may have doubted whether Jesus would do the same miracle twice.

In my judgment, Foster offers the simplest explanation of all for the disciples' perplexity when it came to how the four thousand would be fed.¹⁴ They asked Jesus, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" (Matt. 15:33). The disciples did not doubt what Jesus could or would do at all. They were simply saying that **they** were unable to provide bread for such a multitude. If Jesus chose to do something, they were confident that **He** was able.

Reaction To The Miracle

Very little is said about any specific reaction to the miraculous feeding of the four thousand. We are told the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Him (Matt. 16:1; Mark 8:11). How soon they did this, and whether it was in direct response to the miracle we do not know. It seems incredible, however, that either after hearing of the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand or witnessing it themselves (which is unlikely), these men would come to Jesus seeking a sign from heaven.

The sixth chapter of John provides a lengthy description of how people reacted to Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand. This reaction begins with John 6:14: "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" This is an allusion to Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Moses had spoken of a Prophet Who would be like him. When this Prophet came, God intended for the people to hear Him. When Jesus provided bread for the five thousand, it reminded the people of Moses (through whom God had provided bread to Israel in the wilderness) and it reminded them of Moses' prophecy.

Following this observation, Jesus perceived that the people intended to take Him by force and make Him a king (John 6:15). Jesus did not want this for the reason the people had in mind, nor could He be the kind of king they proposed Him to be. Yes, Jesus came to be a King, but a King of a spiritual kingdom. To Pilate, Jesus said:

My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here...You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice (John 18:36-37).

Jesus then could not be the kind of king they were looking for—the king of an earthly domain. His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom, the foundation of which was truth. The text informs us therefore that Jesus retreated and went up to a mountain by Himself. Later, He rejoined His disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

The next day, the multitudes were waiting for Him near Capernaum. They came seeking Jesus (John 6:24). In the remainder of John 6, Jesus presents Himself to the

seekers as “the bread of life” (John 6:48). The words of Jesus in the opening dialogue are most suggestive as to what the issues were when they found Him. The reader is asked to read John 6:26-29, and note the following points of emphasis. First, the people sought Jesus not because they saw the signs, but because they ate the loaves and were filled. Wasn’t the eating of the loaves and the fish by the five thousand a sign? Yes, but Jesus was differentiating between the purpose of the miracle and the miracle itself. The miracle was the feeding of the five thousand without labor. Truly, some came to Him to be healed and to learn from Him about the kingdom of God. But those who came seeking Him this next day wanted food without labor and they saw Jesus as the source of that supply. It was earthly thinking. The intention of the miracle was to encourage men and women to believe His claim to be sent by God for the purpose of providing everlasting life. This intention was largely lost on those who came to Jesus on this occasion.

Second, Jesus exhorted the people to labor for food that endures to everlasting life instead of the food that perishes. Of course Jesus was not arguing that men should not work to provide for themselves and their families. These who came to Him on this occasion were coming because they were seeking material things at the expense of spiritual things. To put it in the form of a question, Jesus was asking: “Why are you seeking things pertaining to this world, which cannot last, and failing to seek those things that will abide forever?” Jesus was quite clear that He came into the world to be the source of life everlasting. This is why He was sent by the Father. If people are expecting an endless supply of material benefits from Jesus, they will be disappointed.

Third, in response to a question about what it means to work the works of God (or to labor for the food that

endures to everlasting life), Jesus informed them that the work that pleases God is to believe in Him. Jesus has to be sought on His terms and in His way. What Jesus came to give men and women is far, far better than temporal blessings. He came to establish a kingdom leading to eternal life. This Divine program requires faith: not faith as a mere mental assent, but a willingness to trust in Him Whom God has appointed to be the author of eternal salvation, a trust that acts and obeys (John 3:36; Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus must be acknowledged as the Bread of life (John 6:48).

Acknowledging Jesus as the Bread of life meant believing He was the source of everlasting life (John 6:27, 40, 47), believing that the Father had sent Him (John 6:29, 39, 57), believing that He came from heaven (John 6:33, 38, 41, 50, 58), believing that He could satisfy hungry and thirsty souls (John 6:35, 57-58), believing that He has seen the Father (John 6:46), and believing that He must be “eaten” (John 6:53-58). Notice how each of these themes are emphasized again and again in John 6. The idea of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus is a very dramatic description of what is required of true followers. Jesus’ words (John 6:53-58) are not meant to be taken literally, for that would be impossible. Nor are these words an allusion to the Lord’s Supper. A discussion of the Lord’s Supper would be out of place with this audience. The emphasis on eating His flesh and drinking His blood was meant to teach two significant points: (1) our union with Christ (John 17:21-23; Rom. 6:1-11), and (2) our complete dependence on Him for all of our spiritual needs (John 15:5; Col. 3:4).¹⁵

These were hard sayings for those who came seeking Jesus on this day. Because His words were difficult to accept (i.e., the people were unwilling to accept them), many “went back and walked with Him no more”

(John 6:66). It is amazing that they turned back even after seeing His great power over nature. This is evidence of how hardened the hearts of men can be to the truth.

What a test this was for the twelve disciples! If they were to depart, this was the opportune time to do so. It is always easier to go when everyone else is going. It is difficult to walk one way when everyone else seems to be going another. Jesus asked His disciples if they too intended to go away. Peter's response (similar to that of Matthew 16:16) showed significant insight. He identified Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69), and that the source of eternal life was in His words (John 6:68).

Clearly, then, a line had been drawn in a way that it had never been drawn before. Opposition to Jesus began to intensify dramatically. The time had come for a separation between those who truly believed and sought Him as the way to the Father, and those whose hearts were seeking other things. The very words that caused so many to turn from Him were the same words that caused others to remain with Him. One group was driven by a desire for this world; the other group was driven by a desire for the next. Even so today, the essence of faith in Christ is that we desire Him for what and Who He truly is. He is the Bread of life Who must be consumed by those willing to be saved and welcomed into eternal life.

Applications And Lessons

There are a number of applications and lessons for us to note in the miraculous feeding narratives we have studied. **First, as we have just mentioned, Jesus is the Bread of life.** Physical life is sustained by material food; spiritual life is sustained by spiritual food. Jesus Christ is all we need to live happy, productive lives on this earth. It is through Him we have hope for tomorrow and

every tomorrow thereafter. It is through Him that we have hope beyond the grave (John 5:24-30; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Therefore, we must go to Him often and learn from Him (Matt. 11:28-30). Since Jesus has the words of eternal life, to whom else shall we go?

Second, to receive Jesus is to receive His words.

In the course of life we meet many who claim to believe in Jesus Christ. We appreciate this acknowledgment and we commend it. What's more, many are actively involved in good works as a result of their faith in Christ. Everyone knows someone in a denominational church who seems sincere and alive in their faith. But let us not forget that true believers are those who have known and received Jesus through the Scriptures. There are many hard sayings Jesus has spoken to us in the Scriptures. To receive Jesus is to believe and obey what He taught about worship, salvation, marriage and divorce, the church, false religion, the last days, etc. (Mark 8:38; John 15:1-8).

Next, preaching and teaching God's Word must be done in love (as Jesus did); but it must be done firmly and without compromise (as Jesus did). One is impressed with Jesus' boldness in John 6. After the feeding of the five thousand, there was no stopping Him. Great crowds were seeking Him. But with Jesus it was never about crowds and numbers. People had to follow Him on His terms alone. What an important lesson! In a time when so many seem willing to compromise the truth for the sake of boasting large numbers, one may wonder whether Jesus would make such compromises if He were preaching today. The answer is found in John 6. He was perfectly willing to see the crowds walk away (which they did) if they did not accept what He taught.

Fourth, the events in the sixth chapter of John are a rebuttal to one of the tenets of premillennialism. It has been argued by premillennialists that Jesus came

to rule over an earthly kingdom, but was rejected by the Jews.¹⁶ Yet, after the feeding of the five thousand, many of the Jews seemed willing to make Him their king. Had Jesus desired to rule over an earth-bound kingdom, this was the time to act. John 6 strikes the death blow to this doctrine of premillennialism. According to the words of Jesus in this chapter, it is clear that the nature of His kingdom is spiritual.

Furthermore, the miraculous feeding events were the result of Jesus' seeing the multitudes as sheep in need of a shepherd. Men and women today are still in need of a shepherd to guide them in the way. Jesus had compassion on those who came to Him. So should we. There are times when this compassion must take the form of providing for physical needs. We cannot ignore these needs as we seek to bring people to the Savior. We will be judged by whether we have addressed these needs (Matt. 25:34-46). God's people, therefore, must be a compassionate people. We must open our eyes to the burdens people bear, and, if our resources will allow, we must apply ourselves to relieving those burdens. As we do this, we must remember that the greatest need men and women have is spiritual in nature. The greatest burden is the burden of sin. Whatever physical relief we provide should serve the ultimate goal of bringing people to the Shepherd of souls.

Sixth, we should be prepared for disappointment in our work for Christ. Truly, not all whom we hope to be saved will be saved. This is disappointing. We become excited when those we speak to about the Savior begin to show interest. Those who came to Jesus and were fed came because they were seeking something from Him. But the next day, Jesus made it very clear what it meant to come after Him. Many turned away because they would not accept the ramifications of His message. The text does not

say Jesus was disappointed when so many turned away, for He knew who would go and who would stay (John 6:61, 64). To some measure, however, He had to have been sorrowful that they turned from Him because He knew what it meant. In walking away from Jesus they were turning from hope to despair, from life to death. Those who follow the Savior will likewise feel the emotional sting of separation when loved ones and friends turn away from Jesus for the far less satisfying philosophies and things of this world.

Seventh, Jesus has taught us to be thankful for all God has provided. Those who received nourishment on this occasion were receiving it without labor. How often do we also receive such bounties? Let us acknowledge that we deserve so much less than what we receive. God has been so good to us! In a land of prosperity we are tempted to take our daily bread and so much more for granted. But let us lift our voices and hearts to God in humble gratitude for the abundance of health, money, peace, and comfort we enjoy. And let us do this as well: let us check the wastefulness that is so much a part of our lives. Wastefulness is an indication of our failure to understand the source of our blessings. It could be argued that the reason why Jesus insisted that the fragments of the loaves and fish be taken up was for the purpose of giving to those who were in need, as well as to provide evidence to friends of the miracle. We should be careful to use our abundance to bring glory to God (Matt. 5:16).

Conclusion

John wrote:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

John's account of the feeding of the five thousand is especially impressive because it records not only the miracle itself, but we are given insights as to the reaction of the people. Today, Christians accept the inspired stories of Jesus' miracles as true. But let us be careful not to lose sight of the bigger picture. Jesus is the Son of the living God and the Bread of life. We must unite ourselves to Him and acknowledge His right of authority over all of life. Everyday we are confronted with the choice to go with Him or turn from Him. Let us live everyday with these words bearing on our hearts, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 10

The Healing Of The Palsied Man

David Smith

Introduction

EVERY MIRACULOUS DISPLAY OF the Christ is worthy of each man's deepest consideration and utmost respect. While not every miracle performed during the earthly ministry of Jesus was recorded (John 20:30-31), and for obvious reasons at that (John 21:25), those which have been divinely selected for preservation serve perfectly to substantiate every claim of the Messiah, in order that men might reach eternal glory through an obedient faith. Each miracle fulfilled the very purpose for which it was wrought, and, as such, no one miracle is any less important than another. All miracles possess a unique importance so that each of these divine demonstrations of power recorded in the Word of God serves as a priceless part of the apologetic whole. Since each account is truth, then no man may cheapen or disregard any miracle in the Sacred Text without severe eternal consequence. And though every miracle must be given its due attention, it is fair to state that some miracles are more recognized than others.

Word pictures drawn in the mind leave long-lasting impressions. And so it is with certain miracles. An open tomb, spit mixed with earthen clay, a severed ear, and twelve baskets of excess food are images which provoke

an immediate remembrance of the great miracles respectively associated with each of the stated items above. This is equally true of the paralytic borne of four and subsequently lowered through a roof, images which set the stage for the miracle which will now consume the remainder of this deliberation.

The Return To Capernaum

No investigation of this miracle (**viz.**, the healing of the palsied man) would be replete which did not, in some way, address the events preceding the occasion. In this instance, remote context is not only needed to understand how Jesus came to reside again at Capernaum, but is equally needful to understand the purpose of the miracle itself.

The first year of Jesus' earthly ministration provides the unshakable foundation upon which the success of the later years would be built. Every word spoken and every action undertaken was but one step toward the climactic end (John 19:30). Opposition to His work began immediately after His baptism, first beginning with Satan (Matthew 4:1-11) and then by those who would eventually put Him to death. Thus, each miracle facilitated two primary responses: hatred and affection. With each divine demonstration, the separation between the people of both responses grew larger.

In order of occurrence, Jesus first turns water into wine by miraculous means (John 2:1-11). And, upon the completion of this miracle, He enjoys a limited sojourn in Capernaum. While His labors will be manifested in various parts of Palestine, Capernaum remains His primary place of retreat after John's imprisonment (Matt. 4:12-16). Throughout the initial stages of the first year, news of His work continues to be spread and, consequently, interest builds.

It is near the end of the first year that the specific miracle under consideration occurs. The healing of both Peter's mother-in-law and the leper precede the healing of the palsied man, but must be considered a valuable part of the context (Mark 1:29-34, 40-45). Sufficient interest is built by these two miracles to explain the phenomenal crowd present at the healing of the palsied man and the ease with which they identified the location of Jesus. In addition, the interim between the healing of the leper and the healing of the palsied man seems to constitute the time at which the official investigation against Jesus is formally developed by the Jewish leadership. Even if it is suggested that this investigation was launched much earlier, the formal emergence of the investigative party is not evidenced until now (Luke 5:17).

The return of Jesus into Capernaum (Mark 2:1) serves as the initial point for the events now to occur in connection with the healing of the palsied man.

A Detailed Examination Of The Miracle

With the exception of John, each of the remaining Gospel accounts records this miracle (Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). For the purpose of introducing the miracle to the present discussion, Mark's account shall here be cited:

And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their

faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Though the above quotation fulfills the need for basic familiarization with the miracle, it is needful that a more detailed examination follow, based upon a consensus of all three records. However, this should not deter the reader from personally examining the individual accounts of Matthew and Luke. Consider the following arrangement:

1. Jesus returns to Capernaum after “some days.”

Mark’s account was written primarily with a Roman audience in mind. But, this does not preclude the use of Jewish phraseology. The words, “after days” (Mark 2:1), form a once-typical Jewish description for a significant amount of time. This phrase, plus the events preceding and following the healing of the palsied man, helps to establish a seasonal context for the miracle. The journey through Galilee, preceding the healing, ended in the fall of the year. And the journey to Jerusalem for Passover, following the Lord’s stay in Capernaum, occurs in the spring—the beginning of a new year on the Jewish

calendar. Hence, the healing of the paralytic occurs during the winter months which predate the start of the second year of Jesus' earthly ministration. The winter months were characterized by "wet days when all the world seems blotted out in a smashing tumult of water and the dry days when the cold desert air is moving outward from the continent."¹ This information proves useful in demonstrating the reason for the selection of the house as the proper location for His preaching on this occasion.

2. While at the house, news of Jesus' location spreads among the people and an overwhelming crowd gathers at the place. Of those in attendance are the Jewish theologians who are present to investigate further the controversial figure from Nazareth.

The house to which the crowd had gathered is quite likely the home of Peter. Though specific mention is not made as to the exact home in which the miracle is performed, earlier evidence in Mark's account lends endorsement to this fact. Already, Jesus has shown that Capernaum is His selected place of retreat. This is confirmed by Matthew in calling Capernaum "His own city" (Matt. 9:1). In addition, Peter's home was formerly noted for both the presence of Jesus and miraculous manifestations (Mark 1:29-32), resulting in a large gathering at the door (Mark 1:33). There is little reason to doubt, then, that this was in fact the home of Peter, since (a) it had already been proven to be an effective base of operation in Capernaum and (b) would have been easily remembered by the people as the residence of the Messiah.

The crowd was surely diverse. Since some will be persuaded by the events to follow, it is evident that not everyone approached the occasion with a closed mind. Others are no doubt in attendance for the purpose of amusement, or even out of curiosity to the reports being spread about the teaching and ability of Jesus. But, the

primary audience was that of current-day, religious intelligentsia. They are styled “doctors of the Law” (Luke 5:17), as they were experts in both the Law of Moses and the manmade ordinances bound by the parties to which they were affiliated. Their presence at this assembly is not by happenstance. Recognizing who these men were, and the distance they had traveled to reach this home in Capernaum (perhaps, up to 100 miles), it is concluded that they have determined to be present here to draw pointed conclusions about the doctrine and methods of the Christ, and challenge Him if necessary. A variety of attitudes are therefore present in this situation. And, to be sure, the tension was extremely high.

3. During the course of the preaching, a paralytic carried by four men is brought to the proceedings for the purpose of healing.

By “palsied man,” it is meant only that this man’s unique physical ailment was paralysis (Gk. *paralutikos*). While the extent of this man’s paralysis is not revealed, the condition was sufficient enough to prevent mobility in the man’s body. Hence, his travel was solely dependent upon those who would carry him. That this man’s condition was genuine paralysis is demonstrated by (a) the employment of the term *paralutikos*; (b) his inability to travel without the four carriers mentioned in the text; (c) the knowledge of the carriers that his condition was authentic and that he needed healing; (d) Jesus’ recognition of the man’s condition as paralysis; (e) Jesus’ healing of the man’s physical condition; (f) the man’s ability to stand as a result of the healing, which was not before possible; and (g) the marvel of the bystanders that this man is now completely free of paralysis.

Concerning the “bed” upon which the man was carried, this was likely nothing more than either a blanket or lightweight mat. Thus, to carry a man upon this type of

material would require strength as well as a genuine attitude of beneficence. And so the mental picture is drawn of four men carrying a paralytic, each holding a corner of the bed so as to evenly distribute the weight.

4. The attempt to break through the crowd is of no avail. Hence, the four friends carry the palsied man to the roof. This action results in the removal of several roof tiles and the lowering of the paralytic through the opened section of the roof.

Religious meetings were traditionally held in the upper chambers of houses. This, however, can hardly be the case here. The fact that the four men carried the paralytic up to the roof, placing themselves on the next level of the house above the Christ, along with the number of people forced to stand on the outside of house by reason of the limited space inside, yields the conclusion that the room in which these great events occurred was ground level.

Concerning the actual house, nothing more is known except what the three accounts reveal. Since it has been earlier suggested that this is the home of Peter, and accounting for the number of people who were a part of this particular household, then the house was likely more spacious than others of that period. Whether the home was one or two stories matters little, since the room used for this occasion was but a one-story room. In all probability, this particular room was a type of gallery. This would accommodate the maximum number of people both inside and out, and would account for the ease with which the roof tiles were removed.

5. Seeing the faith of the men, Jesus offers comfort and forgiveness to the paralytic man, who has now been lowered from the roof into the room where the Christ is located.

No small number of controversies continue to be fought over what is meant by “Jesus seeing their faith”

(Matt. 9:2). Was this the faith of the four carriers only? Or, did this faith include that of the paralytic as well?

Arguments over the nature of acceptable faith notwithstanding, most are in agreement that Jesus saw the faith of the four carriers of the paralytic man. One needs only to examine the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke to know that it was by faith that the four men vehemently searched and found access to the all-powerful Messiah. But, what Jesus saw must necessarily include the faith of the paralytic man, too. Who could conceive that the four carriers were actually enemies to the paralytic, which brought the poor man against his consent? His faith was as much a part of the proceedings as the faith of his four friends. Additionally, the remission of sins is always dependent upon the existence and manifestation of faith (cf. Mark 16:16). Only a fool would assert that the remission of sins granted by the Christ to this man was “faithless forgiveness.” The text also implies that the paralytic had come to Jesus for more than physical restoration. Jesus graciously supplied the man’s wishes of both spiritual and physical healing.

Each of the statements made orally by the Christ work in ascending order: a statement of comfort, the forgiveness of sins, and finally the healing of the man’s body. While the forgiveness of sins far exceeds the physical healing of the paralytic in value, it was necessary for Jesus to arrange His wording in this way, so as to establish a valid argument working from lesser to greater. He begins by extending comfort to the troubled man: “Son, be of good cheer” (Matt. 9:2). Despite what shock the investigative committee may have received from hearing Jesus comfort this diseased man, “the smaller surprise was swallowed up in the greater, when they heard Jesus pronounce the forgiveness of the man’s sins.”²

Common to the religion of that day was the belief that all suffering was a result of sin. Though this theory can be dated to the Patriarchal era (Job 4:8), the religious leaders in the presence of the Christ on this occasion were especially fond of the concept that suffering was an expiation of sin. William Barclay makes the following report on this prevalent belief:

In Palestine it was a universal belief that **all** sickness was the result of sin, and that no sickness could ever be cured until sin was forgiven. Rabbi Ami said, "There is no death without sin, and no pains without some transgression." Rabbi Alexander said, "The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven." Rabbi Chija ben Abba said, "No sick person is cured from sickness, until all his sins are forgiven him." This unbreakable connection between suffering and sin was part of the orthodox Jewish belief of the time of Jesus.³

This theory, however, is false. Not all suffering is a result of sin (e.g., John 9:1-3), though some can be. In the case of this palsied man, there may have been a connection between his present state of paralysis and his former lifestyle. Something of his past may have facilitated the consequence of paralysis. If so, his present state would surely constitute a deeper anguish over his sins than the current condition of his body.

Being Himself divine, Jesus exercises the divine prerogative and grants the forgiveness of sins to the paralytic. The verb "are forgiven" appears as a perfect passive indicative (*apheotai*).⁴ The indicative mood demonstrates the reality of this action, while the perfect tense—having here a strong sense of the present—indicates the point at which the forgiveness has taken place. From the utterance of Jesus, this man's past sins were no more!

6. An undetermined number of the Jewish leaders in attendance immediately formulate arguments against the Christ in their minds.

Forgiveness of sins is a divine prerogative. And, Jesus claimed the ability to forgive as His own. This caused an instantaneous rebuttal within the thoughts of those present to scrutinize the Christ. They reasoned that since (a) God only can forgive sins, and (b) this man named Jesus claimed to possess an ability which belonged solely to God, then (c) Jesus was making an assertion to be divine. To the Jewish leaders, this was blasphemy. But, the claim of Jesus was shortly to be confirmed by miraculous demonstration. In fact, the inability of these Jewish leaders to explain earlier miraculous demonstrations by Jesus may account for the reason their arguments were not vocalized on this occasion.

7. The innermost thoughts of these Jewish leaders are addressed publicly by Jesus.

The reasoning of the Jewish leaders was not known to the others present until after such thoughts had been exposed by Jesus. These thoughts are labeled “evil” (Matt. 9:4), in that they charged the second person of the Godhead with blasphemy. Their charge was built upon the faulty premise that Jesus did not possess the prerogative which He claimed. The door was now opened for Jesus to provide clarification, instruction, and a demonstration of His very authority.

8. As part of His argument against the Jewish leaders, Jesus commanded that the paralytic stand, take up his bed and walk home.

The counter-argument now advanced by Jesus is based upon authority. If He possesses one divine prerogative, then He possesses all divine prerogatives. And if He therefore possesses the authority to make a paralytic whole, then He equally possesses the authority to forgive

sins. Though each facet of authority is divine, both are distinct, in that the manifestation of one will prove the possession of the other. His argument twice employs the use of the aorist infinitive “to say” (Matt. 9:5; Mark 2:9; Luke 5:23). The force of this verb tense is made clear by Lenski:

The two *eipein* are aorists to denote a single effective statement. The point is that both are an *eipein*. Jesus even quotes what the two sayings are by repeating the one from v. 20 and adding the other: “Arise (one act, aorist) and be walking (present, durative).” Both words evidently require the identical authority of God. No other answer is possible. As God alone can remit sins, so he alone can restore a paralytic on the instant.⁵

Hence, the entire argument advanced by Jesus rests upon the accomplishment of the divinely stated task—the healing of the palsied man.

9. The man’s paralysis is no more. Accordingly, he follows the instructions of the Christ and walks home.

What more proof is needed to back the claim of Jesus? He has now fully demonstrated that, by the possession of the divine prerogative to heal, He possesses the authority to forgive sins. The charge of blasphemy is false. His point has been made, forcefully so. And just as instantaneous as was the forgiveness of sins, so also now is the healing. The paralytic is immediately cured of the ailment.

10. Great praise is given to God for this miraculous happening.

Surely the doctors of the Law would be laughed to scorn if they should now attempt to gather pity from other bystanders. The crowd is completely amazed by this demonstration of divine power. Truly, Jesus had won the

argument and proven His claims. And by this victory, the wedge is driven deeper between the Christ and the freshly bruised leaders of the Jewish people.

The Purpose For The Miracle

Nothing of God is without purpose. Yet, some events serve to fulfill a multiplicity of purposes. So it is with the healing of the palsied man. And even though this miracle does have an intended specific purpose, the secondary purposes are no less important and must be considered too.⁶

There can be little doubt that this miracle was wrought for the primary purpose of establishing the authority of the Christ, since the entire debate centers upon this issue. The internal claim of the Jewish leaders was that He did not possess divine authority; the counterclaim and miracle performed by Jesus proved that He did. Because the particular authority debated on this occasion was that which can only be possessed by God, then the miracle ultimately serves to substantiate the deity of the Christ.

The bulk of His teaching was yet to come, and it was therefore needful to establish the authority behind His words. According to the chronological arrangement of this miracle in the earthly ministration of Jesus, the occasion falls between His initial preaching of the spiritual kingdom at hand and the Sermon on the Mount.⁷ Not only did this miracle verify the truth He had already spoken concerning the establishment of the kingdom, but it prepared the hearts of His followers for the laws He would teach concerning life in that church.

Jesus was not apathetic, however, concerning the palsied man. It is surely blasphemous to suggest that Jesus took no genuine interest in the man, since He used the healing of the paralytic to instruct the people of His authority. While the situation served as an open door for

such instruction, Jesus' compassion was present toward the diseased man from beginning to end. Jesus operated so as to help a man in his needs, spiritually and physically.

The Apologetic Value Of The Miracle

As with any section of Scripture, this account of healing is not without its critics. Yet, this inspired material provides ready answers not only for the critics of this particular miracle but for many other areas of dispute as well.

The healing of the palsied man reveals much about the Godhead, especially as it concerns the Christ. The fact of His deity is beautifully and variously affirmed in this portion of the Sacred Text. His ability to forgive sins and perform miracles manifest the attribute of omnipotence. None can deny this detail without a denial of the Bible's inspiration. Nor can any man deny that Jesus possesses omniscience, the ability to know even the thoughts of men. Whereas faith is evidenced in action, thoughts are not known until they are made manifest by those to whom they belong. Without the verbal acknowledgment of the possessor of thoughts, these intents of the heart will forever remain a mystery to other men. God only has the ability to know the innermost secrets of the heart. Yet, Jesus is plainly said to have "perceived their thoughts" (Luke 5:22). This is a clear admission of His deity. In that He therefore possesses all of the independent attributes of deity, He is God. And, since He was on earth and the Father was yet above, He was/is a distinct person from both the Father and the Spirit.

This account provides a superb insight into the nature of true miracles. The healing of the palsied man was genuine. And, by examining the details closely, a number of characteristics for true miracles can be gleaned from the text. First, the healing of the palsied man was

objective, in that this event was perceivable and undeniable. Thus, miracles were in no sense relative. Such divine demonstrations always appealed to the senses (e.g., sight, taste, touch, hearing, etc.), so the supernatural element was beyond doubt. All who witnessed these great events well understood that such occasions were authored by God alone, and that no part of these events could be attributed to a secondary source. Hence, these observable, objective demonstrations would confirm the truth for which the miracle had been wrought initially. On this point, Charles Hodge well stated:

Every miracle of Christ, therefore was a visible manifestation of his divinity. When He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, restored the lame, raised the dead, fed thousands with few loaves of bread, and calmed the raging of the sea, it was by a word, by the effortless exercise of his will. He thus manifested forth his glory, giving ocular demonstration to those who had eyes to see, that He was God in fashion as a man.⁸

Next, the healing of the palsied man was **complete** and **instantaneous**. Jesus' miracles were not sufficient to a semi-high percentage of restoration; when He healed, the healing was complete. The paralysis was not simply in recession; the disease was no more! And, the healing was immediate. Not a single moment lapsed between the words of Jesus and the cure. He spoke, and the disease was past tense. Last, the healing of the palsied man was **beyond the laws of the natural universe**. These events, therefore, were not subject to duplication. And, all who witnessed a miracle could well attest to the impossibility of the action. No other explanation existed except that these events were actions of an omnipotent God.

In spite of the ease with which the above points are gleaned from the text, opposition to the supernatural

events of the Bible is fierce. In fact, some have decided that the healing of the palsied man was nothing more than a feat of nature. Advocates of such a view insist that a miracle did not involve the bending or superseding of natural law. But, this doctrine necessarily places God in subjection to the laws of the natural universe. While God utilizes natural law in providence, miracles involved the operation of God on a level above the laws of nature. To thus suggest that miracles could not go beyond nature, is to suggest that (a) God is subject to His Creation, (b) God does not possess power over nature, and (c) the spiritual is inferior to the physical. If miracles were not authored by God, then what did these events prove? The fact that intricate details of miracles were not empirically verifiable does not warrant the conclusion that they were merely exhibitions of nature. In the case of the palsied man, as with all miracles, only the results of the miracle were verifiable. The evidence is *prima facie*, but no less important. No witness present could philosophically explain the mechanics of the miracle, only that it had occurred. The inability to explain the mechanics of a miracle does not justify the false doctrine which equates miracles to acts of nature.

Others have assumed that the healing of the palsied man was merely psychosomatic. This term simply means a

bodily disorder whose nature can be appreciated only when emotional disturbances (that is, psychological happenings) are investigated in addition to physical disturbances (that is, somatic happenings).⁹

These bodily disorders can be attributed therefore to severe mental distress, such as would come from grief, stress or worry. Thus, it is suggested that the paralysis of the man in view was psychosomatic, caused by grief over his sins.

But, perish the thought! While psychosomatic conditions may explain many of the so-called “modern miracles”¹⁰ advanced today, the paralysis of the man in view was completely organic. The healing of the man’s soul preceded the healing of his body. Hence, his body was not healed until the Lord spoke his condition gone, even though he had already received the words of comfort and forgiveness. The healing of the palsied man was a genuine miracle.

This account of healing is high in its apologetic content in that it displays the value of logic. Both Jesus and the Jewish investigative committee are engaged in a debate of eternal consequence. Though mechanically sound, the truth value of the Jewish leaders’ syllogism was false. They had based an argument on a minor premise that Jesus was not divine. Regardless of how well these men thought of their deductive capabilities, they were now face-to-face with the greatest logician ever to grace the earth. Jesus directs His words *ad hominem*, and, with absolute precision and power, defeats the flawed reasoning of the “doctors” and proves His case. Jesus argues thusly:¹¹

Major Premise: If I possess the divine prerogative to perform miracles, and the divine prerogative to perform miracles is equal to the divine prerogative to forgive sins, and the possession of such prerogatives implies the deity of the one who possesses them, then (a) I have the power to forgive sins, and (b) I am God.

Minor Premise: I possess the divine prerogative to perform miracles (Luke 5:24-25).

Conclusion: Therefore, I have the power to forgive sins and I am God.

Jesus’ argumentation was without challenge. The value of the logical presentation of truth is therefore witnessed in the healing of the palsied man. It bespeaks this one immutable fact: He is the Great Controversialist. The world will never know His equal. In fact, the greatness

of His reasoning capabilities set Him forth as being more than a mere man. This fact is set forth in the following description:

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the most persistent, alert, resourceful, and masterful controversialist that ever lived. He lived at a time when controversy was the order of the day. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the leading sects among the Jews, and they were constantly in disputes among themselves. The Sadducees were cool and calculating, rationalistic and philosophical. The Pharisees were technical, carping and captious. They were past masters in the tricks of sophistry, caviling, and casuistry. But Jesus met the combined efforts of these masters of debate and quibbling and put them to silence. His quick analysis, his penetrating, powerful, and unsparing logic, and his unanswerable and embarrassing *ad hominem* replies to their assaults have never been equaled among men. They, therefore, prove him to have been something more than a man.¹²

The healing of the palsied man also provides ready answers in defense of true, acceptable faith. In so doing, the account combats the false notions of “salvation by faith only” and “salvation by the faith of others.” That the faith seen by Jesus included that of the palsied man has been well proven. Those who would assert that the paralytic was saved by the faith of someone other than himself must contend with every passage which bespeaks faith as the first, personal prerequisite in the direction of forgiveness. Additionally, the faith seen by Jesus was not a mere mental assent, but a working, active display of faith. And, since the paralytic is included in the phrase “their faith,” then it is obvious that his faith was just as much at work in the proceedings. As a note of interest, the way in which the paralytic was saved does not provide a current plan of conversion for anyone today. He lived and died under the

former economy. As such, his situation is no more an example of a plan of conversion than the thief on the cross. All men now live and die under the last will and testament of Jesus Christ.

Last, the healing of the palsied man provides a confident denial of the false system of premillennialism. Jesus personally applies the phrase “Son of Man” to Himself (Mark 2:10). Coupled with Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 7:13-14), it becomes clear that upon the ascension of Jesus, He would reign as King over His spiritual kingdom.

The apologetic value of this miracle should not be underestimated.

Practical Applications From The Miracle

Every section of the Sacred Text must be read from the perspective of the initial audience. Otherwise, context is lost, and the exact meaning of the words is obscure. Having examined the text in its intended setting, the expositor is then able to make application of the various precepts and principles contained therein. While many sections of Scripture are limited in their application, there are still lessons to be learned. In the case of the healing of the palsied man, the applications are rich and full. For the sake of brevity, notice the following applications in list form:

- 1. Jesus proved the power of God by miracles; He is no less powerful today.** The fact that He has ceased miraculous activity does not preclude His Omnipotence. And, the same all-powerful God stands ready to save all those who obey His all-powerful Word (Rom. 1:16).
- 2. Jesus addressed false doctrine publicly, yet kindly. He was fully aware that false doctrine has pervasive influence.** And, rather than allow souls to be taken by damnable doctrines, He addressed the error so as to silence those who would have attempted to

sway the people into disbelief. If the church is to follow the example of her Lord, she must address false doctrine publicly, yet kindly (Rom. 16:17-18).

3. **Jesus took advantage of opportunities.** The paralytic lowered through the roof proved to be an open door for instruction on His authority, hence His deity. Doors of opportunity must be seized and utilized for the glory of God (Col. 4:2-6).
4. **Jesus used logic to capture the loyalty of the people.** Too often, men seek only to emotionalize the minds of others. But, true conversion can only occur when men are persuaded by the facts. And, the church is charged with tearing down illogical propositions which separate God and man (2 Cor. 10:3-6).
5. **Suffering is often the result of sin.** And, while there is no possibility of miraculous healing today, men can still receive the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Even though one may suffer the consequence of sin for the remainder of his life, he can replace mental anguish with the hope of eternal life that comes from a steadfast relationship with God (Tit. 1:2).
6. **By the simple investigation of the healing of the palsied man, Christians may deny the claims of “modern miracles.”**
7. **Jesus did not fear controversy.** He well understood that, by offering the forgiveness of sins to the paralytic, He would be challenged by the Jewish investigative party. Yet, despite the opposition, He continued with His instruction. The church should not be so naive as to think that she may exist without controversy. She has been charged with the highest degree of controversy (Jude 3), and fear only prevents the fulfillment of this militant order.
8. **God is still the knower of hearts.** Being omniscient, He continues to know the innermost secrets of every

man. Purity of the mind is therefore essential to a right walk with God (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 5:28; Phil 4:8).

9. **Sincerity must be met with truth.** No doubt, many of the religious leaders in attendance on this occasion were sincere in what they believed. This, however, was not enough. In that their reasonings were exposed as evil, sincerity must be coupled with truth (John 8:32).
10. **Determination is a key to success.** All five men were quite persistent in their efforts to reach the Christ, and so must men be today. Even through trials, temptations, and hardships, Christians must be determined to reach the heavenly goal through faithfulness, lest they fall from the grace of God (Gal. 5:4-7).

Conclusion

The healing of the palsied man is worthy only of the greatest reverence. For, it accomplished the magnificent task for which it was set forth, “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10). Through this, and other accounts, the deity of Jesus has been confirmed without doubt. And, because of this, man may know and obey and live!

Endnotes

1 Denis Baly, **The Geography of the Bible** (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 47.

2 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing), pp. 184-185.

3 William Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew**, Volume 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 327.

4 Some texts employ *aphientai*, a present passive indicative. At any rate, the meaning is the same.

5 R. C. H. Lenski, **Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 299.

6 All miracles served as tools for confirmation (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:2-4). The context of the miracle therefore determines what specific truth is being verified.

7 Matthew places the miracle after the Sermon on the Mount, while Mark and Luke both show that the healing precedes the aforementioned discourse. The accounts of Mark and Luke are correct in their chronological placement of this event. And, this does no harm to Matthew's biography of Jesus, since he intends only to arrange the events of Jesus' life by subject.

8 Charles Hodge, **Systematic Theology**, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 504.

9 J. L. Halliday "Concept of a Psychosomatic Affection," **Lancet** (1943), p. 692.

10 Miraculous activity ended with the completion of the written word (Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Cor. 13:8-10). Hence, those events which are claimed as current miracles are not. These supposed "miracles" may be explained as psychosomatic conditions, intentional fabrications, or diseases which are either diagnosed wrongly or quickly enter a state of remission.

11 Jesus employs an extended form of *Modus Ponens*.

12 G. C. Brewer, "Contending for the Faith," **Gospel Advocate** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1941).

CHAPTER 11

The Healing Of An Epileptic Boy; The Coin In The Fish's Mouth

Don Walker

Commendation

WORDS ARE NOT ADEQUATE to express the appreciation I have for the privilege to be a part of this work. To be able to submit this chapter and to present this material during the lectureship are honors indeed. My highest regards are extended to this congregation along with her bishops and deacons. Your love for Christ and His cause, your devotion to the Book, and your concern for this great Brotherhood are to be applauded.

I would also at this time express my joy to be able to call B. J. Clarke “my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier.” I consider him to be a dear friend, and I continue to be impressed with his labors in the Kingdom. The Lord’s Church could use more like B. J. Clarke.

Now let us turn our attention to the matters at hand.

Introduction

In his account of the Gospel, Luke wrote, “Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).¹ In the Gospel accounts, there is naturally a strong emphasis upon that which Jesus did, as well as that which He taught. One of

the key statements found in John's account of the Gospel is found in John 20:30-31. In John 20:30 we read these words: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." Though there is much which we do not have as a written record of Christ's activity, that which we do have recorded of the miraculous activity of Christ leaps off of the pages of these four accounts.

However, none of the other three focus upon His power and splendid majesty quite like Mark does. Mark wrote to the military mind of the day—the Romans. The Romans were concerned and impressed with accomplishment. Mark's account is the shortest of the four, and it is immediate. The word "straightway" is found some 42 times in these 16 chapters. Though the parables are scarcely mentioned, (we have only 4 recorded), a majority of the miracles (21) are recorded therein. Truly Mark focused on that which Jesus **did**.

In Mark 16:20 we find the purpose of miracles stated: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word with signs** following. Amen." Just as we learn in Hebrews 2:4, the purpose of miracles is revealed as "confirming the word." We see it in a practical way, even in the Old Testament. Moses' ability to perform the miracles was to confirm to Pharaoh and to the Israelites that the message he spoke was from above. We see it clearly in the statement of Nicodemus as recorded in John 3: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Jesus' words were able to impact Nicodemus, because he recognized Heaven's endorsement in the miracles. Without the miracles, we would have to wonder how highly God's Word would be esteemed. If we were to consider the skeptics who try to naturally explain away the miracles of

God's Word, we would have to conclude God's Word would not be held with much esteem at all.

But we do have the miracles recorded to confirm the message proclaimed, and for this we are grateful.

What Can We Expect To Get Out Of Our Study Of The Miracles?

We cannot enter our study assuming that each miracle will be recorded in the same fashion as others. Though we understand there will be some similarities, we also must understand there will be some differences in how the miracle is recorded, and in the purpose behind the recording of the miracle. Leland Ryken says this concerning the "Miracle Stories":

Another form that we especially associate with the Gospels is the miracle story. The typical structure of a miracle story is this:

1. A need is established.
2. Jesus' help is sought.
3. The person in need (or his acquaintances) expresses faith or obedience.
4. Jesus performs a miracle.
5. Characters in the story respond to the miracle and/or to Jesus.

A given miracle story might omit one or more of these elements.

There is a remarkable variety in the miracle stories. Some are skeletal outlines of what happened, while others are narrated in leisurely and full detail. Sometimes the miracle is the center of attention, while at other times it is subsidiary to another issue (thereby making the story a hybrid). Sometimes the physical miracle attests the power of Jesus, while on other occasions the miracle takes on a symbolic meaning or is told in such a way as to teach a lesson (about faith, for example).²

So we can see that care needs to be taken concerning background and context. Can we find, in the context, the

purpose behind the miracle? We should note the actions and reactions of Christ and also of those present at the time. In so doing, we will be able to gain practical lessons for our own spiritual growth.

The Miracles Assigned

Our assignment is “The Healing Of The Epileptic Boy,” which is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and “The Coin In The Fish’s Mouth,” which Matthew records for us.

Our intent is to look briefly at the background material, and then look at each of the miracles separately.

Background

After Jesus’ statement concerning His building the church, Matthew records:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

Jesus would teach then concerning discipleship (Matt. 16:24-25) and the value of a soul (Matt. 16:26). Matthew chapter 16 closes with His speaking of the coming kingdom.

Matthew chapter 17 begins, “And after six days.” Luke said it was “About eight days.” Some see a problem here, but, the answer is quite simple. Matthew spoke of the six complete days between events, whereas Luke included the partial days on which the events occurred. Matthew 17:1 continues with “Peter, James and John his brother” being set apart from the nine and accompanying Jesus.

What follows is one of the greatest events recorded in the Gospel accounts. Peter, James and John will be privileged to witness the Transfiguration where the glory

and supremacy of Christ are seen in dramatic fashion. Though Elijah and Moses stand with Christ for a moment, in verse eight we read, "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Jesus and His covenant are superior to the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah).

After a brief discussion concerning John the Baptist being the one who fulfilled the promise that "Elias must first come" (Matt. 17:10), the student learns that these four (Jesus, Peter, James, and John) returned to the multitude.

The Healing Of The Epileptic Boy (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-45)

The reader is encouraged to turn to each of the mentioned contexts where this event is recorded and familiarize himself with the inspired record of this miracle.

In careful study, we learn that Jesus and the three returned on the next day after the Transfiguration (Luke 9:37). Upon returning, "And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them" (Mark 9:14).

What A Great Contrast

The day before, Jesus had soared in the company of Moses and Elijah. Yet, when He returns, He finds chaos, confusion and despair. Herbert Lockyer wrote:

What a striking study in contrast the previous miracle and this one offer! Jesus came from communion with His Father to contact with the Devil! The contrast is so marked, for the summit all is sublime but in the valley all is confused and deplorable. He descended from the harmony of fellowship with Moses and Elijah for some of the wildest and harshest discords of earth: from the Father's honor and glory, He now comes to

face the hatred and murderous intents of the religious leaders, thirsting for His blood. On the mount we see the King in His supernatural splendor; below we have His disciples baffled and beaten.³

The lessons are great. First, we are reminded of the ups and downs in our life as we serve Christ. We are not always walking on a level path. There are peaks and valleys in our sojourn here. We face times of great blessings, and we face times of harsh tribulation. Oh how easy Christianity would be if we were able to soar among the mountain tops all of the time. Yet, there are times when we must run without being weary or, even more challenging, walk without becoming faint. To keep faithful when fulfilling the daily tasks and responsibilities is not always easy to do. Isaiah wrote these encouraging words concerning this point: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

Second, we note, there was no reluctance on the part of Jesus to be down among the people who had problems. He did not shrink back from the people. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and that meant much of His time would be spent with those who were so challenged by sin. If we are not careful, we may have a tendency to remove ourselves from the very ones that need so badly the Gospel of Christ. The great commission must ring in our ears: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). As we meditate on this passage, “**all the world**” must stand out. We must be out among the people.

Third, we see Jesus’ readiness to stand. Though we do not know the exact dialogue that took place during the scribe’s questioning of Jesus’ disciples, it does seem clear

that the conversation centered on the disciples' inability to heal the epileptic boy. In his response to Jesus' question it says, "And one of the multitude answered and said" (Mark 9:17). The point to notice is that Jesus came in and took control of the situation. He asked, "What question ye with them?" As Christians, we must be ready to handle situations that demand a stand for truth. Of course, this necessitates our being able to stand. Prayer and preparation by study are the only way that we will be ready to give an answer.

What A Great Opportunity

And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him (Luke 9:37-39).

In the ninth chapter of John, Jesus and His disciples come upon a "man, which was blind from his birth" (John 9:1). In verse two the disciples voice in the form of a question, a prevalent thought of the day: "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' answer is interesting to say the least: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). So too, in our study, we find an opportunity for God's works to be manifest.

Let's begin by examining the facts of this account. The man who comes out of the crowd to answer Jesus is a father who has only one child (Luke 9:38). In the words of the father, his son is a "lunatic" who is "sore vexed"

(Matt. 17:15). The Greek word for “lunatic” is *seleniazomai*, which literally means to be moonstruck. R. C. Foster makes these observations:

The description the father gave of the child indicates that the demon had caused epilepsy. One wonders whether the demon had also caused feeble-mindedness. Matthew 17:15 uses *seleniazomai*, which can mean insanity or epilepsy. “Those which were lunatick” (A.V.) are especially mentioned by Matthew as healed by Jesus (4:24). The A.S.V. translates this **an epileptic**. The ancients may have regarded epilepsy as a sort of insanity.⁴

The father attributes this malady to a “dumb spirit” (Mark 9:17).⁵ Jesus and the Holy Spirit also affirm this prognosis. Jesus questioned the father, “How long is it ago since this came unto him?” The father answered, “of a child” (Mark 9:21). These serve as a backdrop for the display of God’s great power. In Matthew we read, “And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour” (Matt. 17:18). Luke records, “And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father” (Luke 9:42b). Mark gives us a more detailed account:

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose (Mark 9:25-27).

Thus we see another view of God’s endorsement of His Son, Jesus Christ. The wise man will hear Him.

What A Great Disappointment

All three accounts tell us that the father had first besought the disciples of Christ to cast out the spirit, yet they proved to be impotent to accomplish the task. Jesus' response rings loud in our ears: "Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me" (Matt. 17:17).

The disciples had been endued with power to accomplish the tasks at hand. In Matthew 10, Jesus gave them this power and instructed them. Mark records this giving of power to the twelve and continues by saying, "And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13). In Luke 10, we learn of 70 that were commissioned and empowered. Their success brought them much joy when they returned to Jesus. Notice Luke's account:

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:17-20).

All of this notwithstanding, the apostles were still unable to perform the needed task. The problem was their lack of faith.

Oh what a challenge Jesus faced while here on earth. Jesus' attempt to elevate the thinking of man to a higher spiritual level was often met with a shallow, worldly thinking. In John 3, when Nicodemus comes to Jesus, we see the problem illustrated. Jesus tells Nicodemus of the necessity to be born again, speaking of a spiritual birth.

Yet Nicodemus' response shows a simple physical understanding and expectation: "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). The same problem is apparent in John 4 in His dealing with the woman at the well. Jesus spoke of "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Yet the woman's understanding is altogether physical: "The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4:15). Time and time again we see indications of this problem.

What A Great Disabler

How many times do we see in Scripture man's inability to accomplish what Jehovah expects, because of a lack of faith? The great tragedy is manifold. First, our lack of faith will condemn us. It was this very problem that plagued the Israelites and their entrance into the Promised Land. The Hebrew writer states this clearly: "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19). Second, and this may be worse, our lack of faith empowers the enemies of God. In Numbers 13, after the spies return with the majority showing a great lack of faith, we read this verse: "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). The people in Canaan were aware of the deliverance from the Egyptians and were sore afraid of the Israelites. However, because of the fear and lack of faith, the Israelites became as grasshoppers first in their own eyes and then in the eyes of the enemy. In our context we see the scribes emboldened at the ineptness of the nine. A lack of faith is certainly "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1).

There is no question that the Bible teaches us of our responsibility to grow: "But grow in grace, and in the

knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). We must “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). In 2 Peter 1, we learn the value of growing as we ought. After showing the specific areas of growth that are necessary, Peter goes on to write:

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:8-10).

However, the Bible not only expresses God’s expectation for our growth, but there are also statements that include increments of time, which indicate there are certain levels of growth that are expected at certain times. Jesus asked, “How long shall I be with you?” (Luke 9:41). The Hebrews writer addressed this very point:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (Heb. 5:12).

When we fail to study, as we should, our growth will be thwarted and the only expectation we can have is a lack of faith, and failure which follows such.

What A Great Display

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into

him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose (Mark 9:25-27).

Again Mark gives us a fuller account of the matters. Where Matthew and Luke simply state, “And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour” (Matt. 17:18), Mark tells what Jesus said, and what the actions of the dumb spirit were.

I am confident that the following points will be made time and again throughout this volume. Nonetheless, they are points that should be observed and stressed. First, when Jesus did a miracle, it was an immediate success. There were no days and weeks of healing and recuperation. When the lame were healed they could walk immediately and there were no relapses. Second, the miracles were obviously just that—they were miracles. In John 9, a man born blind was given sight. In John 11, Lazarus’ death was obvious: “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days” (John 11:39). Finally, when Jesus attempted to perform a miracle, a miracle was performed, always. He was 100% successful. There were times when faith was present on the part of the one being healed, and there were times when there was no faith present on the part of the one being healed, yet Jesus was always successful. Our account was no different.

What A Great Question

One means of teaching, which Jesus employed in a mighty fashion, was the use of parables. As powerful a tool as the parable was, and as simplistic as the teaching

may have appeared, the spiritual emphasis was not always understood. In fact, Jesus explained that this was one of the very reasons for His using this form of teaching. When asked, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” He answered:

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matt. 13:11-13).

The fact of the matter is, however, neither did the apostles always understand the parable. The difference between them and the Pharisees was not always that one failed to understand and one did understand. The difference was often that the apostles would ask for the meaning. In the context of our study we find this very attitude of “asking, seeking and knocking.” The disciples inquired as to why they were unable to cast out the demon (Matt. 17:19).

What A Great Faith

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:20-21).

One of the reasons the disciples failed, as has been stated earlier, was a lack of faith on their part. Another of the reasons was that there seemed to be a greater difficulty or challenge here. Jesus' statement, “Howbeit this kind

goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21), gives this indication. This raises questions for which there seem to be no answers given. What were the details concerning demon possessions? Though there seem to be some variances, there are not a lot of answers given. One lesson that does stand out though is the power of prayer and fasting: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). There are times in our lives when we must set time aside for prayer and fasting.

The main lesson here, however, is the power of faith. Jesus said, “verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20). What did Jesus mean when He spoke of moving mountains? Burton Coffman in his commentary believes Jesus was speaking literally:

Nothing shall be impossible unto you, is a very strong statement by the Lord. One is tempted to make our Lord’s remark about removing mountains mere hyperbole, but no such restriction seems justified from the text. To the true believer, and especially to the apostles, all things were possible through faith. To every true child of God, all moral and material difficulties vanish. The tragedy is that most disciples, like the nine in the case here, are hindered by seeds of doubt and unbelief, and perhaps also by the lack of fervent and devoted prayer.⁶

A. T. Robertson sees this to be figurative language:

Bruce holds “this mountain” to be the Mount of Transfiguration to which Jesus pointed. Probably so. But it is a parable. Our trouble is always with “this mountain” which confronts our path.⁷

John Wesley saw it as a proverbial saying:

To remove mountains was a proverbial phrase among the Jews, and is still retained in their writings, to express a thing which is very difficult, and to appearance impossible (Matt. 21:21; Luke 17:6).⁸

William Barclay makes these observations:

When Jesus spoke about removing mountains he was using a phrase which the Jews knew well. A great teacher, who could really expound and interpret scripture and who could explain and resolve difficulties, was regularly known as an uprooter, or even a pulverizer, of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for removing difficulties. Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally. After all, the ordinary man seldom finds any necessity to remove a physical mountain. What he meant was: "If you have faith enough, all difficulties can be solved, and even the hardest task can be accomplished." Faith in God is the instrument which enables men to remove the hills of difficulty which block their path.⁹

Brother Dehoff said:

Jesus did not promise that His disciples could perform magical tricks such as moving mountains but that they could do whatever God had said for them to do even to moving a mountain.

"Nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). Anything which God has authorized can be done if we but believe and obey Him.¹⁰

Anything that God has called upon us to do, we can accomplish. However, it takes a faith that does not waver. James said:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth

not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord (Jas. 1:5-7).

When we turn to the 11th chapter of Hebrews, we see so much that was accomplished because of the faith men possessed. God said it. That settles it. Oh that we would have the faith to accomplish His will. Truly, there are some great lessons for us here.

The Coin In The Fish's Mouth (Matt. 17:24-27)

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Capernaum was, at this time, home, and Christ and His disciples were returning after some time away. Upon their return, Peter was questioned about the paying of the tribute. This was a tax, payable towards the maintenance of the temple and its services. The tribute was required of every Jewish male twenty years old and upward.¹¹ The origin of this tax was found in Exodus 30:13-14:

This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is

twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the Lord. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord.

Peter's answer in the Greek language was *nai* which is a primary particle of strong affirmation.¹² It was not simply "yes." But rather it was a strong statement—"Most surely He does!" When Peter returned to the house, Jesus begins immediately to question him even before he had an opportunity to tell Him about the conversation with the tax collectors.

When Peter answered that the poll tax was to be taken from "strangers" and not from sons, He (though it may have been unknowingly), expressed an important matter concerning Christ. The temple belongs to God and it was His dwelling place. Jesus, being God's Son, would thus be exempt from paying the tax, for the poll tax was not required of sons. However, had Jesus refused to pay the tax, it could have been misconstrued as rebellion and very well could have caused a rebellion among those who were responsible to pay, thus causing them to transgress or stumble.

There are two lessons to be learned here. First, we must understand the responsibility we as Christians have to obey the laws of the land. We have a responsibility to be the best citizens **any** country has. Paul wrote:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 13:1-2).

Again, to Titus, Paul wrote, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be

ready to every good work” (Tit. 3:1). This of course would include paying our taxes.

Second, we see the responsibility we have to take others into consideration. Keeping a brother from stumbling is far more important than my expressing a liberty or freedom to which I may be entitled. The classic example would be Paul’s teaching concerning eating meat. Paul understood the import of faithfulness and at times how fragile it may be. So he wrote, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Cor. 8:13).¹³

The Miracle Itself

To pay the tax, Peter was told to “cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up” (Matt. 17:27). Peter was told that “a piece of money”¹⁴ would be in its mouth.

When we consider the miracles of the Bible and put serious study into the subject, it is not long until we find those who try to downplay the miracle or explain it away altogether. Notice William Barclay’s attempt to do just that:

Now we come to the story itself. If we take it with a bald and crude literalism, it means that Jesus told Peter to go and catch a fish, and that he would find a stater in the fish’s mouth which would be sufficient to pay the tax for both of them. It is not irrelevant to note that the gospel never tells us that Peter did so. The story ends with Jesus’ saying.

Before we begin to examine the story we must remember that all oriental people love to say a thing in the most dramatic and vivid way possible; and that they love to say a thing with the flash of a smile. This miracle is difficult on three grounds.

(i) God does not send a miracle to enable us to do what we can quite well do for ourselves. That would be to harm us and not to help us. However poor the disciples were, they did not need a

miracle to enable them to earn two half-shekels. It was not beyond human power to earn such a sum.

(ii) This miracle transgresses the great decision of Jesus that he would never use his miraculous power for his own ends. He could have turned stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger—but he refused. He could have used his power to enhance his own prestige as a wonder-worker—but he refused. In the wilderness Jesus decided once and for all that he would not and could not selfishly use his power. If this story is taken with a crude literalism, it does show Jesus using his divine power to satisfy his own personal needs—and that is what Jesus would never do.

(iii) If this miracle is taken literally, there is a sense in which it is even immoral. Life would become chaotic if a man could pay his debts by finding coins in fishes' mouths. Life was never meant to be arranged in such a way that men could meet their obligations in such a lazy and effortless way. "The gods," said one of the great Greeks, "have ordained that sweat should be the price of all things." That is just as true for the Christian thinker as it was for the Greek.

If all this is so, what are we to say? Are we to say that this is a mere legendary story, mere imaginative fiction, with no truth behind it at all? Far from it. Beyond a doubt something happened.

Let us remember again the Jewish love of dramatic vividness. Undoubtedly what happened was this. Jesus said to Peter: "Yes, Peter. You're right. We, too, must pay our just and lawful debts. Well, you know how to do it. Back you go to the fishing for a day. You'll get plenty of money in the fishes' mouths to pay our dues! A day at the fishing will soon produce all we need."

Jesus was saying, "Back to your job, Peter; that's the way to pay your debts." So the typist will find a new coat in the keys of her typewriter. The motor mechanic will find food for himself and his wife and family in the cylinder of the motor car. The teacher will find money to pay his way in the blackboard and the chalk. The

clerk will find enough to support himself and his dear ones in the ledger and in the account sheets.

When Jesus said this, he said it with that swift smile of his and with his gift for dramatic language. He was not telling Peter literally to get coins in fishes' mouths. He was telling him that in his day's work he would get what he needed to pay his way.¹⁵

Those who believe the Bible to be God's inspired Word and have a healthy respect for God's words realize that what Jesus said to do and what the result would be are accurately recorded by Matthew. In other words, the coin was found in the mouth of the fish and the tax was paid.

Conclusion

As we close this study we are again reminded of the words of John:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

The two miracles we have studied are but a minuscule part of that which Jesus did here on earth. However, they do serve to help strengthen and increase our faith. It is our prayer that this effort will be of value to all who read and study from it. May we all benefit from this study of miracles and determine we will study our Bibles more and more.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture references are taken from the KJV unless otherwise specified.

2 Leland Ryken, **Words Of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), pp. 39-40.

3 Herbert Lockyer, **All the Miracles of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 216.

4 R. C. Foster, **Studies in the Life of Christ** (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1971), p. 744.

5 Thus it is generally accepted that this demon possession was displayed in the form of epileptic seizures.

6 Burton Coffman, **Bible Study Library: The New Testament on CD** (Abilene, TX: ACU Press).

7 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Volume 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), p. 142.

8 John Wesley, **John Wesley's Explanatory Notes** (e-Sword, version 3.2.0, 2000).

9 William Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew on CD-ROM** (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press).

10 George W. DeHoff, "The Transfiguration; Elijah Must Come; The Epileptic Boy; The Second Prediction of the Passion; The Temple Tax," **The Book of Matthew** (Getwell, TN: Getwell church of Christ, 1988), pp. 466-467.

11 **Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary** (e-Sword, version 3.2.0, 2000).

12 Strong's.

13 To study this in more detail, one needs to study 1 Corinthians 6, 8, and 10 along with Romans 14 and Acts 15:20, 29.

14 The ASV says a "shekel." Both the KJV and ASV footnote "a stater." A stater was the equivalent to 4 didrachmon. The temple tax was 2 didrachmon or about 37 cents. The stater would pay both Jesus' and Peter's tax.

15 Barclay.

CHAPTER 12

The Healing Of Two Blind Men At Jericho; The Miraculous Withering Of The Fig Tree

Preston Silcox

Introduction

VIEWING THE SCHEME OF redemption as a dramatic play written in the mind of God and performed on the stage of history, the climax of the production is only moments away. At that point, the Hero will give His life a ransom for many. He shall be betrayed into the hands of His enemies, mocked and scourged by the ignorant, and crucified for the sins of humanity. The scenes at hand place the central figure of this drama journeying toward that climactic act.

During the course of these greatly important and highly emotional scenes, Jesus, the leading character, will perform a number of compelling and thrilling miracles. In the Bible, the script as it were, two such heavenly works are recorded in Matthew 20:30-34; Matthew 21:17-23; and Mark 11:12-22. Among other notable purposes, the miracles under consideration demonstrate both the compassion and the power of the story's Hero. Never has

such a character graced the stage of history, and the mighty works to be considered in these scenes express this profound fact plainly.

A Miracle Of Mercy (Matt. 20:30-34)

At the moment, the Lead Character, the apostles, and a multitude of followers have made their way through the old city of Jericho. Here, outside the town, two blind men are sitting by the side of the road and hear that Jesus is passing by. The events about to transpire in this encounter shall make a dramatic impact on the physical circumstances of these particular men, as well as the spiritual situations of untold others.

The Conditions Of The Men

Peering in at these noteworthy characters, the intrigued audience is able to observe and compile some very important facts. Concerning the physical conditions of these men, they are without sight. Whatever the causes of their infirmities, the results are the same: these men can do nothing but beg. Without means to work and make a living for themselves, they are at the mercy of their fellow man. Their station in life has set them by the wayside where they will soon seize the opportunity of a lifetime.

Besides the detection of physical blindness, onlookers of the present scene are able to recognize the spiritual perception of the characters at hand. Though the men of Matthew 20:30 lack the corporeal ability to see the beauty of the world around them, they possess the great spiritual capacity to see the splendor of heavenly matters. Crying out at the passing Savior, the men beg, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." Such a statement of faith should ring aloud in the ears of every person viewing this touching scene.

No doubt, these men had heard all about the One Who had passed through Jericho, the One Who had done

so many great works in His short but powerful ministry. Surely the reliable testimony of others developed in these men a knowledge and conviction of the Kingship of Jesus and a firm trust in His ability to make them physically whole. Indeed, though these noble characters as of yet have not the ability to see with their eyes, their spirits are well equipped to view the invisible (2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 11:1).

The Criticism Of The Multitude

While hearts are moved and convictions are strengthened by the great faith of the blind men, witnesses to the scene at hand are quickly taken by surprise, as the multitude following the Christ breaks character and seemingly lashes out at these desperate and pleading souls. Surely no one could have expected those who have been following the Prince of Peace so cheerfully to act in such a calloused manner. They have been eyewitnesses to His merciful, forgiving, and compassionate nature. They have seen how those in difficult circumstances often touch His heart. No doubt, they have viewed his exaltation of the Law that demands mercy on such disadvantaged persons (Lev. 19:14). Still, they rebuke the blind men, desiring that they “hold their peace” (Matt. 20:31).

Contemplating the surprising situation, onlookers might arrive at a number of possible causes to the sudden criticism. Perhaps the crowd is concerned only with their own comfort and dignity instead of sympathizing with the unfortunate.¹ In fact, no more than a scene or two previous, the mother of Zebedee’s children desired prominent positions in the coming kingdom for James and John (Matt. 20:20-28). A similar attitude could very well characterize all those who have just spoken out so brazenly. Another possibility is that maybe the crowd believes that it is “beneath the dignity of the Son of David to parley with beggars.”² Again, such a view would have the mass of

followers ignoring the merciful and kind nature of the Christ's work. Or still, perhaps the multitude believes that the blind men are interrupting the greater cause of the Christ—they are delaying His claim of the promised kingdom.³ Once more, such a view would underscore the crowd's misunderstanding of the Son of God, the scheme of redemption, and the nature of the kingdom.

Whatever the reasoning is behind the criticism, those in the audience of this profound production are exhilarated once again as the blind men absolutely ignore the remarks of the calloused crowd and in courageous faith cry out even more, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David." Surely such persistence, conviction, and trust shall gain the caring attention of the merciful Messiah.

The Compassion Of The Master

As previously noted, the great Protagonist of the drama is not far now from the shame and agony of the cross. However, even with the enormous weight of death looming over Him, His gentle and helpful hand cannot be stayed. Indeed, Jesus entered the arena of humanity not to be served, but to minister to His creation, and before Him now is yet another opportunity to play His part so well.

Over the insensitive rebukes of the crowd, Jesus hears the faithful pleadings of the blind men. Eyes are fixed on the Savior as onlookers watch Him stop in the midst of the multitude and ask the men of faith, "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" The request of the noble characters is not for alms, as has been so often up to this moment, but for sight: "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." Touched, no doubt, by their unfortunate stations in life, but surely even more by their humble trust in Him, God in the flesh is tenderly moved with compassion.

As the rest of the scenery fades into darkness, only the sympathetic Savior and the trusting two are seen. All attention is focused on center stage as the compassionate

Christ reaches out with His healing hand and touches the eyes of the blind men. Excitement and amazement fill the hearts and thrill the souls of the audience as all witness the immediate healing of the sightless characters! No longer shall these two souls grope about in darkness. No longer shall they have to beg. No longer shall they be at the mercy of others to lead them about or provide them with means to survive. Now, they possess the faculty to see the beauties of the world around them. Now, they have the capacity to go and do as they will. Now, they own the ability to look on the face of the compassionate Son of David, Who heard their cries and helped their infirmities. And now they can follow Him!

The Contributions Of The Message

As one contemplates the inspiring scene of Matthew 20:30-34, a number of encouraging lessons and practical applications flood the mind. For example, those who follow the Christ serve a God who yearns with compassion over the often-sad circumstances of His creation. He is not calloused to or unconcerned with the pitiable predicaments of mankind. God stands ready to assist and comfort those who are in pain. He knows what is best for His people and is desirous and capable of providing them with what they truly need.

In addition, the scene at hand illustrates the sympathetic attitude that Christians must possess as followers of Jesus. The example and religion of Jesus dictate that, to be Christ-like, one must: be mindful of those who suffer, “bear the infirmities of the weak,” and help those who are helpless (Heb. 13:3; Rom. 15:1; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 1:27). Surely the compassionate and emotional actions dramatized in Matthew 20:30-34 compel the tenderhearted person to implement the attitude of mercy and concern into his own life.

Finally, among other lessons played out in the scene under consideration, one is reminded that the faithful must not be moved by the criticism of the unlearned and uncaring. True faith has the power to see beyond the discouraging dilemmas of ridicule and insensitivity. It does not give in or give up because of the calloused remarks and actions of the non-spiritual. In fact, opposing events and circumstances stir the faithful to draw nearer to their God by petitioning Him frequently and trusting Him wholly. Such is true in the scene of Matthew 20, and so is it in every trying situation of the truly dedicated.

No doubt, the inspiration and encouragement received from Matthew 20:30-34 is overwhelming. The scene's great triumphs of faith and compassion over the tragedies of misfortune and criticism excite hope and courage in the hearts of onlookers. By means of the studied Word of God, may this scene be replayed joyously and continually before the minds of history's truth-seeking audience as long as God permits time to continue!

A Miracle Of Might (Matt. 21:17-23; Mark 11:12-22)

Still viewing the great scheme of redemption as a play developed in God's mind and acted out on time's stage, the audience of history remains in suspense as the Lead Character continues to press toward the climax of Calvary. Among other notable events, the audience witnesses the heart-stirring entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem and His evening retreat back to the Bethany home of Lazarus. After lodging there for the night, Jesus makes His way back toward Jerusalem with His disciples. It is on the pathway to that prominent place that Christ shall perform an additional miracle, providing onlookers with yet another awe-inspiring scene.

The Promise Of The Season

In the midst of His early morning journey, God in the flesh hungers. As significant as this fact alone is, the main focus of the moment is the Savior's discovery of a means by which to alleviate this very human predicament: "a fig tree in the way" (Matt. 21:19). All eyes are on the Christ as He moves toward the distant tree in hopes of finding fruit thereon. Instead of finding food, however, the hungry Jesus finds only a hypocritical tree bearing leaves but no fruit!

Although the season itself, being only early spring, promises neither fruit nor leaves, the leaves being worn by the tree proclaim the possibility of at least green figs, which would be edible at the present and fully ripe by the harvest of late summer.⁴ Before the Christ, then, is a fruitless object that resides only as a deception to the eye and a waste of the soil.⁵ Although the deceitful tree fails to provide sustenance for the Christ, it does allow for a great demonstration of the power and authority of the Son of God!

The Power Of The Savior

Those viewing the actions of the Lead Character, knowing full well His eternal nature, understand that the barren tree has not taken Jesus by complete surprise; He already knew its condition and now shall simply use it as an important object lesson for His Truth-seeking students. Loud enough for the disciples to hear, Jesus curses the deceitful tree, saying, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever" (Matt. 21:19).

Having seen the might of the Master already, anxious onlookers intently focus on the object of Christ's curse. Though Jesus' disciples shall not see the end result of the pronouncement until the following day, those listening to the dialogue of God's Word see the tree beginning to wither

immediately (Matt. 21:19)! By this, another mighty miracle wrought before the eyes of humanity, once again great confirmation is made that this humble carpenter-turned-preacher is more than a mere man; He truly is God in the flesh. His words are authoritative, His actions are powerful, and thus His followers are mesmerized.

The Pondering Of The Students

As the stage darkens then brightens once again, a new day arises and finds Jesus and His disciples making their way back to Jerusalem. Following the familiar path of the previous morning, the disciples see the hypocritical tree wilted in the way. Peter, as spokesman for the group, in amazement says to the Savior, “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away” (Mark 11:21).

While those sitting in the seats of recent time, witnessing this miracle from the viewpoint of God’s Word, are in awe of the great deed done, somewhat perplexing is the amazement of those firsthand witnesses. Here are men who saw Jesus turn water into wine, heal the sick, still a tempest, walk on water, and even raise the dead. All such things were done before their very eyes, yet here once again they are in awe at this present miracle of the Master. Of course, rather than casting a negative light on these followers of Christ, such a reaction speaks even more volumes about the deity, authority, and power of God’s only begotten Son!

The Possibilities Of The Sign

With the marveling of the disciples, the Lord now applies the point of the miracle:

Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you,
That whosoever shall say unto this mountain,
Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea;
and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe

that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them (Mark 11:22-24).

Those listening to Jesus instruct His students quickly conclude from the action performed and the application given, that the primary purpose of the miracle was to teach those disciples about faith—faith apparently of a miraculous nature. Such was obviously a gift vitally important and exclusively belonging to particular people of that very first century (Matt. 17:14-21; 1 Cor. 12:9; 1 Cor. 13:2). As Jesus continues to near Golgotha and His ultimate departure from His students, it becomes quite evident that these disciples will be in strong need of this ability that they too might continue the Cause for Which He will die.

Along with the primary purpose of this most recent marvel-causing scene, a number of possible applications and lessons are found. As noted continually, one such lesson concerns the confirmation of Christ's power and authority. When such evidence is rehearsed in the ears and hearts of history's audience, no reasonable and honest soul has any grounds to doubt or dispute the might of the Master and the weight of His words.

Among other possible applications from this remarkable scene, onlookers see the destructive course of hypocrisy. Numerous observers of this portion of God's redeeming production see the barren fig tree, and Christ's judgment of it, as spiritless Jerusalem and its devastating destiny at the hand of God. Though the tree of Jerusalem, with its leaves of supposed godliness, professed to be the city of God, it was actually barren of righteousness, as evidenced by its rejection of the Christ. Hypocrisy withers the spirit and destroys the soul.

The event just viewed, with its primary purpose and its possible applications, is yet another compelling scene of God's wondrous plan to reconcile man back to Himself. It should thrill the heart and excite the soul of every person seated beneath the stage of history, for it shows the ability of the Christ to accomplish every work given to Him by the Father, including the soon-to-be-realized work at Calvary.

Conclusion

While the scheme of redemption can be viewed as a theatrical performance, thrillingly played out with its villains and heroes, let it be understood very clearly that the events and characters of this drama were and are absolutely real! The journey toward Calvary with its miracles of mercy and might truly transpired exactly as the New Testament records. That journey and those miracles stand as a memorial of God's love for humanity and His power to save mankind. When the curtain of time is drawn and the characters of life's production are reviewed for their performances, those who properly responded to the mighty works of Christ will be rewarded accordingly for the parts they played.

Endnotes

1 J. W. McGarvey, **The New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: Matthew and Mark** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), p. 177.

2 Herbert Lockyer, **All the Miracles of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 234.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, p. 237.

5 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 416.

CHAPTER 13

**Healing Of The Woman
With The Issue Of Blood;
The Raising Of Jairus'
Daughter**

Cliff Goodwin

Introduction

Y^{E MEN OF ISRAEL}, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22).

Before the foundation of the world God had planned that the Word would be incarnate (John 1:14), and that He would be the sacrificial Lamb to redeem humanity from its sins (1 Pet. 1:18-20). God provided sundry promises of a Savior to those who lived and waited under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations. These promises, however, did not reveal the fullness of God’s detail. Even the prophets of old themselves, who prophesied of the grace that would be enjoyed during the Christian dispensation, still inquired and searched diligently as to the complete detail and time frame of the Spirit’s prophecies (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). When the time was right according to God’s

Divine planning and infinite wisdom, the promised Savior made His entrance into the world. During the course of His life and ministry He would be more and more clearly manifested as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. His resurrection and victory over death would be the crowning fulfillment. Pentecost would follow with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the establishment of the church, and the revelation of New Testament Scripture. The very details and understanding for which the ancient prophets had yearned would be both revealed and confirmed, and the message would be clear: Jesus Christ is the promised Savior of the world (cf. John 1:29)!

God provided ample, yea, more than sufficient, testimony attesting to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The miracles Jesus performed were a vital part of this testimony (Acts 2:22). Christ taught that His miraculous works bore greater witness to His identity and mission than did the testimony of John (John 5:36). Nicodemus appreciated the weight of miraculous testimony when he stated, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). This sentiment is coupled with that of the former blind man who said, "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing [i.e., nothing **miraculous**, CG]" (John 9:33). Works that transcend the natural into the supernatural must, of necessity, emanate from supernatural power. Hence, God was obviously working through Christ when He performed miracles. This validates Christ's claim to be the Son of God, for God would never accompany, much less empower, a liar (cf. 1 John 1:5).

On one occasion, while walking in Solomon's porch, Christ was approached by a number of Jews asking, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." (John 10:24). This was certainly an insincere

and even loaded question—Christ had already performed great miracles that attested to His Deity and Sonship (John 10:32). Any doubts remaining in the minds of the Jews were the result of their hardened hearts (cf. Matt. 13:15). Christ responded with these words: “I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 10:25). God worked miracles through Christ in order to substantiate and confirm Christ’s claim that He was the Son of God (John 10:36-38). Hence, miracles were wrought in Christ’s personal ministry to confirm His word then, even as they would be used to confirm Christ’s Word later (Mark 16:15-20).

The two miracles presently under consideration are the healing of the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56). Both the infirmed woman and Jairus possessed a faith in Christ that prompted action on their part. Jairus came and sought Jesus, and when he found Him, he bowed himself and beseeched the Lord to come and heal his daughter (Mark 5:22-23). While he and the Lord were en route to the ruler’s house, Jairus’ faith was doubtlessly tested when a messenger encountered them with news that the daughter was already dead (Mark 5:35). Nonetheless, Jesus both reassured and bolstered the ruler’s faith when he said, “Be not afraid, only believe” (Mark 5:36). Likewise, one observes the faith of the infirmed woman as well. Her faith came by hearing, even as faith comes today (Rom. 10:17). Mark recorded, “When she had heard of Jesus, [she] came in the press behind, and touched his garment” (Mark 5:27). This woman worked her way through the multitude thronging Christ, in order that she might touch His garment (Mark 5:28). In both of these examples, active faith was rewarded. These two miracles were wrought because people believed, whereas today people believe because miracles were wrought (John 20:30-31).

A Daughter

While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live (Matt. 9:18).

Matthew's account of Jairus and his daughter begins with the words, "While He spake these things." Earlier in the context one will find that Christ had sat down to a meal in someone's house (Matt. 9:10). Mark's record reveals more clearly that this was indeed Matthew's (Levi's) house (Mark 2:14-15). On this occasion Jesus answered questions from the Pharisees and the disciples of John. The Pharisees asked the Lord's disciples why their Master ate with sinners, and Jesus pointed out that sinners were the ones who needed salvation (Matt. 9:11-13). Then the disciples of John asked the Lord why His disciples did not fast, and Jesus explained that it was not yet time for them to fast:

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast (Matt. 9:15).

It was while answering these questions that Jairus came unto the Lord.

Upon seeing Jesus, Jairus cast himself at the Lord's feet and began begging Him greatly (Mark 5:22-23). Such actions were indicative of both the extremity of the situation and the condition of Jairus' heart. In the eyes of men Jairus was a powerful man, for he is described as "a ruler of the synagogue" (Luke 8:41). He apparently was one in the "college of elders"—a group of men who administered the affairs of the local synagogue.¹ One in this position would have such responsibilities as convening

the synagogue assembly and inviting readers or speakers.² Many of Jairus' peers would likely have been too hardhearted and too puffed up to have humbled themselves in this manner. Nevertheless, one does not see Jairus in such haughtiness. He humbles himself at the feet of the Lord and implores on his daughter's behalf.

At the time of his coming unto Jesus, Jairus' daughter was in a dire, yea seemingly hopeless, medical condition. Matthew recorded Jairus' words in the strongest terms: "My daughter is even now dead" (Matt. 9:18). The different wordings used by Mark and Luke are both very helpful commentaries on Matthew's statement:

My little daughter lieth at the point of death
(Mark 5:23).

For he had one only daughter...and she lay a
dying (Luke 8:42).

The Holy Spirit did not contradict through Matthew's pen that which He inspired through Mark and Luke. When Jairus left his daughter's side to come and find Jesus, it was obvious that she was about to leave this world. It was apparent to Jairus, and doubtlessly others, that the little girl was **in the process of dying**. Hence, when Jairus arrives in Christ's presence He says, "My daughter is even now dead." In other words, her condition had been deteriorating so rapidly when he left, that, as far as Jairus knew presently, the little girl could already be dead. His words might have been in the modern vernacular, "She is as good as dead." J. W. McGarvey provided these helpful comments:

The two reports [**Matthew's and Mark's**, CG] are not at all inconsistent, but each writer, as in so many other places, reports a part only of what was said. The man made both remarks: "My little daughter is at the point of death. She is even now dead."³

It was great faith that caused Jairus to seek out the Lord and to humbly make his request. This faith, however, would not appear as strong as that of the Gentile centurion in Matthew 8:5-13. Jairus came with the request for Jesus to come into his house (Luke 8:41) and lay His hands on the daughter, that she may be healed (Mark 5:23). The centurion, on the other hand, humbly refused the Lord's offer **to come** and heal his servant:

And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed (Matt. 8:7-8).

Whereas Jairus' faith could see Jesus coming, touching, and healing his daughter, the centurion's faith could see Jesus merely speaking from a distance and thereby healing his servant. Matthew further records that when Jesus heard the centurion's statement He marveled and made this statement: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10). Hence, one sees Jairus as a Jewish man of great faith but the centurion as a Gentile man of greater faith.

The Lord complied with Jairus' wishes, going to the ruler's house with a throng of people following behind (Mark 5:24). Matthew reveals that He arose, apparently from the meal provided there in Matthew's house: "And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples" (Matt. 9:19). Hence, Matthew portrays the Lord Who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19), as well as the Lord Who followed a man who had come begging for His help.

A Distraction

And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said,

Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee,
and sayest thou, Who touched me? (Luke 8:45).

A multitude of people, all seeming to throng one man and moving from one house in Capernaum⁴ to another, would certainly attract the attention of onlookers and passersby. Upon hearing of this man Jesus, a woman came up behind the Lord, working her way through the swarming crowd to touch the hem of His garment (Mark 5:27; Matt. 9:20). This was her desire as she had been afflicted with a flow of blood for twelve years (Mark 5:25, NKJV). Mark uses one of his favorite words, straightway (or immediately), in recording the account of her healing: “And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague” (Mark 5:29).

The synoptic writers term the woman’s affliction as an issue of blood (Matt. 9:20; Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43)—apparently a chronic hemorrhaging.⁵ In light of the Levitical law, such a condition would render one ceremonially unclean⁶:

And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean (Lev. 15:25).

One can scarcely imagine twelve years of separation from the human contact of others. As one writer well suggested, such severance and detachment could easily be responsible for the manner in which she approached Christ.⁷ Hence, this infirmity had afflicted the woman not only physically, but also socially—and perhaps, after such a protracted duration, even emotionally.

The greatness of this woman’s faith can be seen in both her action and her attitude. Upon hearing of Jesus

she came in among the press of people herself to approach the Lord. Faith prompted this action. It would have been much easier to approach the Lord from the front, but due perhaps to prolonged castigation and disdain she sheepishly drew near from the back. This would have required wading through all the other followers—the press becoming thicker and thicker as she got nearer the Lord. Nonetheless, her faith afforded fortitude, and even amid such a crowd she made it to within an arm's reach of Jesus Himself. Faith resulted in such action. It is at this point that one must note the woman's attitude: she regarded Jesus as so powerful that she determined within herself that the mere touching of His clothes would be sufficient for her healing: "For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole" (Matt. 9:21). The woman's faith produced an attitude that fostered both action and determination, and by such faith she was rewarded (Matt. 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48).

Upon touching the border of Christ's garment the woman's flow of blood stopped immediately (Luke 8:44, NKJV). Many have conjectured that the healing was an unconscious or involuntary miracle by the Christ. Nevertheless, this assertion seems incongruent with other texts found throughout the Gospel accounts. The apostle John points out that Jesus knew what was in man—the thoughts and intents of the heart: "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25). The **notion** that a woman came upon Christ unawares, reaping the rewards of an involuntary miracle, is difficult to reconcile with the **fact** that Christ knew what was in man! For further evidence one may consider Nathanael's first meeting of the Lord (John 1:47-50). Jesus already knew Nathanael's heart even as He watched his approach: "Behold an

Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47). Nathanael asked, “Whence knowest thou me?” The Lord’s reply truly astounded Nathanael and convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (John 1:48). Even before Philip had gone to Nathanael telling him to “come and see” the Messiah (John 1:46), Jesus had seen Nathanael under a fig tree. With regard to these matters Guy N. Woods commented:

The Lord, in answer, revealed His omniscience, by telling Nathanael that He saw him earlier under a fig tree where, underneath its thick foliage, the disciple had rested and meditated. There, Jesus saw and heard him; in this secret place where no merely human being could have possibly done so.⁸

If the Lord could see and have knowledge of one who was not only absent from His personal presence but also obscured under the cover of a fig tree, then doubtlessly He knew of the infirmed woman’s approach and of the objective within her heart.

Why then did the Lord ask, “Who touched me?” (Luke 8:45)? Many commentators have incorrectly assumed that Christ asked for the sake of information. Peter and the other disciples, who did not yet fully appreciate the Lord’s omniscience, seem to have made this assumption when they replied, “Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?” (Luke 8:45). To Peter and others, who understood neither the purpose nor force of the Lord’s query, the question perhaps seemed almost absurd. One Who knew the hearts of men did not ask His question for the sake of information.

Throughout the Bible God asked questions when He already knew the answers! After Adam and Eve

transgressed in the garden of Eden, God called unto Adam asking, "Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). Did the omniscient God of heaven and earth not know where Adam was? Of course He did. But He asked His question in order that **Adam** would realize where he was! Whenever Deity asks a question, it is not for His own benefit but rather for the benefit of others.

Having finally received the healing she had desperately sought for twelve years, the woman apparently would have slinked back into the crowd without any outward ado. This would have been beneficial for neither her nor the multitude. Luke reveals that the woman knew she was not hidden when the Lord posed His question (Luke 8:47). Without the Lord's question, therefore, she would have thought that she and her blessing had been hidden from Jesus. This would have been detrimental to the woman spiritually, for what good is a Messiah from whom you can hide? Also, the multitude following Jesus benefited from His question, for when the woman came forth "she declared unto Him **before all the people** for what cause she had touched him, and **how she was healed immediately**" (Luke 8:47, emp. mine throughout, CG). Hence, all present were able to know of the miracle God had wrought through Christ, and the Deity of Jesus was further confirmed.

Thus, Jesus is en route to the house of Jairus, where the ruler had left his daughter dying, when an infirmed woman makes her way to Christ and causes a temporary delay in His travel. Can one scarcely imagine the eagerness, edginess, impatience and probably even irritation that must have filled the heart of Jairus while he witnessed Christ's advance delayed by the incident of the infirmed woman? Jairus knew that his daughter was at the point of death when he left her to get Jesus. Is she dead already? Can her life stand such a distraction as this

infirm woman? All the while Christ had everything under control and was working the works God had given Him to do (John 5:36). From these thoughts one learns that what is often a distraction to man may be an opportunity for the Lord.

A Death And A Deliverance

While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? (Mark 5:35).

One would think that, at the hearing of the above words, the heart of Jairus must have sunk low in his chest. He had left his dying daughter to go and get the only one he knew of who could possibly help her. But before he can return with Jesus, death comes and takes its prey. Within an hour's time Jairus is probably about to experience both the saddest and happiest moments of his life. The messenger's words bring him down into one of the lowest valleys through which man might walk—the death of a child. Then, after he and Christ have made their way to the house and Jesus takes the daughter by the hand (Matt. 9:25), Jairus experiences joy to which no one in modern times can fully relate—the resurrection of a loved one.

Much is revealed about the faith of the messenger (or perhaps messengers) when he asks the question, "Why troublest thou the Master any further?" The question is asked as if to say that Jesus could possibly have helped the girl while sick and barely alive, but now that death has come the situation is out of Christ's hands. Such faith is incomplete. Omnipotence means **all**-powerful. Surely a God Who can create and give life is also a God Who can restore life when it is gone. Can the God who gave life the first time not give life a second time? Such doubt is contrary

to both reason and revelation. Jeremiah wrote, "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17).

Lest the incomplete faith of the messenger sway the faith of Jairus, Jesus promptly responds upon hearing the doubtful message: "As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus knew and understood that the doubts of some may breed doubts in the hearts of others; hence, He spoke such words of reassurance to Jairus. There have always been those who sought to undermine and tear down the faith of ones who would seek God and His will. It began with the devil in Eden, when he attacked Eve's faith in what God had said and persuaded her to think suspiciously toward her Father (Gen. 3:4-5). When the devil and those in the world see only darkness and despair, and when they plant seeds of doubt and discouragement, Christ stands with outstretched arms and offers hope (cf. Matt. 11:28-30).

When Jesus arrived at the house of Jairus, no one was allowed in the room of the daughter save Peter, James, John, and the parents of the little girl (Luke 8:51). Even the minstrels and mourners, who laughed when Jesus said the girl was not dead but simply sleeping, were put forth before Jesus took the hand of the maiden (Matt. 9:23, 25). It is difficult to determine with certainty whether the minstrels and mourners were actually put forth out of the **house**, or whether they were simply put forth out of the **room** where the daughter lay (cf. Mark 5:40). Whatever was the extent of their dismissal, one sees clearly that Christ allowed only five persons to witness firsthand the girl's resurrection.

Inspiration does not reveal why Christ limited the number of eyewitnesses to only Peter, James, John, Jairus,

and his wife. There have been numerous speculations offered by commentators through the years, and perhaps many are helpful, but one must remember such are speculation and not inspiration. This was the first occasion on which the “inner circle” was separated and allowed privileges not given the other apostles.⁹ Peter, James, and John are so termed because they were the only three apostles with Jesus not only on this occasion, but also on the mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9) and in the garden of Gethsemane as well (Matt. 26:36-37). Why were these three permitted to see Jairus’ daughter raised and not the others? Perhaps these three were more mature in their faith and better prepared to witness such a wonder. Perhaps there were a number of reasons, but God did not see fit to reveal them in His Word. Regarding the mass of disciples who had thronged Jesus as He traveled from Matthew’s house toward the house of Jairus, perhaps they were not allowed to witness the resurrection because of immaturity in their faith. Christ revealed to the people only as they were able to hear it (Mark 4:33). Perhaps the bulk of people thronging Jesus at this time were simply not ready to witness such a work as this. One cannot know with certainty. And finally, with regard to the minstrels and mourners already within Jairus’ house, perhaps they were not permitted to witness the raising of the little girl because of their own unworthiness. Jesus spoke, and they laughed Him to scorn (Luke 8:52-53). It seems that they were not of an attitude worthy of witnessing a feat so great as that which Jesus was about to perform. E. Bickersteth proposed this opinion:

The common crowd were not worthy to see that in which they would not believe. They were unworthy to witness the great reality of the resurrection; for they had been deriding Him who wields this power.¹⁰

As to the positive reasons why Christ would so limit the number of eyewitnesses, McGarvey remarked in the following manner: “This was to prevent the house from being overrun by a curious and excited crowd, and also to secure the fullest opportunity for the chosen witnesses to see clearly what was done.”¹¹ Whatever the reasons were for Christ’s action, one knows and trusts that His decision was the fruit of Divine wisdom (cf. Col. 2:3).

These were the words of Christ that drew the scorn of the mourners: “Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth” (Luke 8:52). Many have misinterpreted the words of the Lord to mean that the damsel was not dead at all, but merely swooning. Modernists of varied stripes will assert such a notion as this, hoping to undermine the miraculous power of Jesus. By His wording, however, Jesus only indicated that the damsel’s death would not possess the same finality commonly attached thereto—she would be raised from her death just as one is awakened from sleep.¹² Further, there can be found from the synoptic texts at least four proofs that Jairus’ daughter was actually dead, and therefore actually resurrected. One, in the messenger’s words as recorded by the physician Luke (Luke 8:49), the word “dead” is placed first in the Greek order, thereby emphasizing the dead state of the girl.¹³ Obviously there was no doubt in the mind of the messenger as to whether or not the girl was dead. Two, the presence of the minstrels and mourners attests to the fact that she was dead (Matt. 9:23). It was customary in ancient Palestine for there to be hired mourners in the house of the deceased, bewailing greatly the recent loss (cf. Mark 5:38).¹⁴ This sorrowful practice was intensified by the playing of flute music (Matt. 9:23, NKJV).¹⁵ These hired mourners were well acquainted with death, for they would see it from house to house as they moved from one paying job to another. Their presence in the house of Jairus is strong testimony to the fact that

the ruler's daughter was indeed dead. Three, inspiration provides this very important statement, "And they laughed Him to scorn, **knowing** that she was dead" (Luke 8:53). It is true that these hired mourners were not inspired, but Luke was inspired when he recorded that they **knew** the daughter was dead. This also is weighty evidence. Finally, one knows that the damsel was actually dead, for Luke writes that her spirit came **again**: "And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat" (Luke 8:55). In light of the fact that her spirit had already departed her body, and that it had to return in order that she be raised, God's Word plainly teaches that she was dead: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26). There can be no doubt that Jesus resurrected Jairus' daughter literally **from the dead**.

For God's glory and the manifestation of His Son, with the death of Jairus' daughter came also a deliverance from that death: "And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat" (Luke 8:54-55). Mark added one of his favorite words in saying that she arose straightway, or immediately (Mark 5:42). Hence, even as was the healing of the infirmed woman earlier, so the quickening of Jairus' daughter was instantaneous. Christ's power is such that it is not confined by the barriers of time. Luke records that Jairus and his wife were astonished (Luke 8:56). Mark adds the emphasis, "And they were astonished with a great astonishment" (Mark 5:42)—astonishment meaning "amazement," which is expressive of bewilderment.¹⁶ The witnesses knew that they had seen the mighty power of God. This is as one would expect, for Christ is Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Matthew reveals that

the fame of this wondrous work went abroad into all the land (Matt. 9:26). Truly by this miracle was demonstrated the truth that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

Practical Lessons For Today

1. When one door shuts, another one often opens. The Lord had been across the Sea of Galilee in the country of the Gergesenes, or Gadarenes (Matt. 8:28; Mark 5:1). After casting the devils out of the demoniacs (Matt. 8:28-32), Christ was implored by the people that He would depart out of their coasts (Mark 5:17). Jesus had done only good, but still He was not wanted by the Gadarenes. Nevertheless, as that door closed another one opened, for He entered into a ship and came across to His own city, Capernaum (Matt. 9:1), where He worked these two mighty miracles.

2. Going to the wrong doctor will do you no good. Mark uses great detail in expressing the pitiable condition of the infirmed woman (Mark 5:25-26). She had been ill for twelve years, suffering many things at the hands of many physicians. This malpractice had cost all she had, and to make matters worse, her health was further deteriorating instead of getting better. What was the problem? She had been seeing others rather than Jesus. She had a condition that only Jesus could cure, and it was not until she came unto Him that her health was remedied. The same is true today. Everyone has a spiritual sickness only Jesus can heal. It is called sin, and until one comes unto the Master, it will only get worse.

3. Discouragement and doubt must be quickly confronted. Mark's account of these two particular miracles is the fullest. Thus, it is no surprise that he provides a glint of meaning not found in Matthew or Luke. When the messenger of incomplete faith came with the

news of the daughter's death (Mark 5:35), Mark provides exact detail as to when Jesus spoke up: "**As soon as** Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36). This illustrates a wonderful lesson for today: whenever the faith of a friend is being attacked by doubt or discouragement, the best time to offer reassurance is **as soon as possible**.

4. People often mock what they don't understand. When Jesus said that the damsel was not dead, but only slept, He was laughed to scorn (Matt. 9:24; cf. Mark 5:40; Luke 8:53). The problem was neither with Jesus nor with His understanding; it was with the scoffers and their ignorance. They were looking at spiritual truth through carnal eyes. They probably thought of Jesus as being too foolish or too ignorant to recognize death, when in actuality they, themselves, did not recognize the true source of life (cf. John 1:4).

5. The young die too. James describes the frailty of human life as a vanishing vapor (Jas. 4:14). Even one more day of life is not guaranteed to any person (Prov. 27:1), and as the daughter of Jairus illustrates, not even to the young. The key is to live every day of one's life as if it were the last, for it very well may be. It is appointed unto men once to die (Heb. 9:27), and that appointment may come while young or when old.

Endnotes

1 E. Bickersteth, "St. Mark," **The Pulpit Commentary**, eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph Exell, Volume 16 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 211.

2 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1991), p. 181.

3 J. W. McGarvey, "Commentary on Matthew and Mark," **New Testament Commentary**, Volume 1 (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), p. 294.

- 4 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth), p. 352.
- 5 Bickersteth, p. 211.
- 6 Boles, p. 182.
- 7 H. D. M. Spence, "St. Luke," **The Pulpit Commentary**, Volume 16, p. 209.
- 8 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 47.
- 9 Bickersteth, p. 213.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 McGarvey, p. 296
- 12 Ibid, p. 85.
- 13 Marvin R. Vincent, **Word Studies in the New Testament**, Volume 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 337.
- 14 Spence, p. 210.
- 15 McGarvey, p. 85.
- 16 Vincent, p. 191.

CHAPTER 14

The Raising Of Lazarus

Marvin Weir

Introduction

THE MIRACLES RECORDED IN Holy Writ during the infancy of the Lord's church were **convincing** because they were **genuine**. The words "immediately" and "straightway" are freely used to describe the results of Bible miracles. People were **instantly** cured of leprosy (Matt. 8:3),¹ raised from the dead (Mark 5:42), cured of life-threatening fever (Luke 4:38-39), healed of blindness (Luke 18:43), cured of lameness and made to jump and walk (Acts 3:7), and made well from an eight-year-old palsied condition (Acts 9:34). Yes, we do believe in the genuine Bible miracles that produced instantaneous results that all could see.

Can miracles be performed today? Absolutely not! Why? The miracles performed during the early period of New Testament Christianity were designed to be **temporary**; they were never intended to be **permanent**. A careful study of God's Word, void of human emotions, will reveal that miracles were never intended to last throughout the Christian age (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10).

There are at least three purposes for the miracles that are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The first purpose of miracles was to designate the beginning of a Bible dispensation (Patriarchal--Gen. 1:1-27; Mosaical--Exod. 7; Christian--Mark 16:15-19). The second purpose of miracles was to confirm that the word spoken was indeed the Word of God (Mark 16:20). The third purpose of miracles was to

reveal to the New Testament writers that which is to be written and thus insure that the Bible contains the Word of God and not the word of man (John 14:26; John 16:13). The apostle Paul affirms this truth in saying:

But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

The apostle Peter also testifies regarding Bible inspiration, saying, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

It is also noteworthy to observe that, during His earthly ministry, Christ did not give hearing to **all** the deaf, sight to **all** the blind, or raise **all** the dead. Bible miracles provided credible evidence **before** the written Word was completed. **All** evidence now resides in the written Word, which "was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Miracles are no longer needed to produce faith as "belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Background Of The Raising Of Lazarus

Lazarus lived in the town of Bethany with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, in a home located about two miles east of Jerusalem. Jesus, as all people, had special friends that He took great pleasure in visiting with as often as possible. The Bible teaches that it is a sin for one to be a "respector of persons" (Acts 10:34; Jas. 2:9). In Christ Jesus "there can be neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...male and female" (Gal. 3:28). All are **one** in Christ

Jesus, and no person is to be given preferential treatment or exalted above another. It is not wrong, however, to have an inner circle of friends with whom we have a lot in common and thus we enjoy associating with them more so than we do with others.

Mary and Martha are aware that Jesus is in Perea and separated from them by about thirty miles, but they hasten to send the Lord word of Lazarus' sickness. It speaks volumes of their faith in Christ and their closeness to Him that they made no demands of Him at this time of personal crisis. The message delivered to the Savior simply states, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3).

The Primary Purpose Of This Miracle

It is fitting that the resurrection of Lazarus serve as grand climax to what has already occurred in the life of Christ. In John 5, the Lord is portrayed as the authority of life. John 6 records Christ saying, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:48). In John 7, Jesus portrays Himself as the water of life. John 8 reveals Christ as the judge of life, and John 9 identifies the Master as the light of life. In John 10, Jesus is revealed as the Shepherd of life. It is only fitting, then, that John 11 records Jesus as saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).

This miracle specifically identifies Jesus Christ as the Son of God and reveals Him as the resurrection and life. Hendriksen is on target in saying:

We should never lose the thread of the entire story. In his early ministry Jesus revealed himself to ever-widening circles, but was rejected (chapters 1-6). At the feast of Tabernacles and at the feast of Dedication he made his earnest appeal to sinners, inviting them again and again, not only by direct appeal but also indirectly by showing the rewards of discipleship. He also performed a great miracle. But he was bitterly

resisted (John 7-10). And now, by means of two deeds which in greatness excelled all the others (the raising of Lazarus and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem) he more than ever before manifests himself as being, indeed, the Messiah.²

The miracle we are studying demonstrates Christ's power over the tomb. If He can raise Lazarus who has been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17), then He can raise all who are in the tombs. The cry for Lazarus to come forth reveals what it will be like at the end of time. Jesus, as always, spoke the truth in saying:

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

The Situation Involving Lazarus

The Declaration

When told that Lazarus was sick, Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (John 11:4). It is only logical to assume that the messenger delivered the words of Jesus to Mary and Martha but not before Lazarus died. The sisters may have thought that the death of their brother contradicted Jesus saying, "This sickness is not unto death": "What is said is that its **result** and ultimate design is not death, i.e., in this instance the sickness will not lead to the death for which there is no resurrection."³

The raising of Lazarus from the dead will serve to glorify God and establish undeniable proof of the Deity of Christ. Far too many times today the spotlight is shined on man instead of God! It matters not who does what in

the Lord's kingdom as long as His will is done. The apostle Paul gives us a principle worthy of remembering in saying, "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). May this be the attitude of all faithful soldiers of the cross who wield the sword of the Spirit for the cause of Christ!

The Devotion

The inspired Word of God makes it very clear that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5). The Savior is our example and we are to walk in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). Our love for brothers and sisters in Christ is not optional. One who hates his brethren but claims to love God is a liar (1 John 4:20). The Savior's plea must not be taken lightly:

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Biblical love is not understood by most today. The love that God demands will always seek first another person's best spiritual interest. This means that sin will not be overlooked or tolerated to keep from hurting a brother's or sister's feelings. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and one who truly loves his brother will never fail to point out this truth. Biblical love will never allow the faithful to withhold God's warning from those who have chosen to live in sin (cf. Ezek. 33:2-9). May we be truly devoted to our brothers and sisters in Christ!

The Delay

When Jesus received the message that Lazarus "was sick, he abode at that time two days in the place where he was" (John 11:6). By delaying Lazarus' resurrection, it

provided positive proof that he was really dead. The custom of the day would call for the preparation and burial of the body on the very day of one's death. All friends and neighbors who attended the gathering would know that Lazarus had really died.

Martha had a problem with the Lord's delay. Her first recorded words to the Lord were, "Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). There is a tendency for people to get ahead of God, and Martha does such on this occasion. God had everything under control, but events were not happening according to Martha's timetable. Martha's problem is a common affliction of mankind.

Many wonder as did the Psalmist why the wicked seem to be "always at ease" (Psm. 73:12) and prospering in this world. The Psalmist realized he got ahead of God when he

went into the sanctuary of God, and considered their latter end. Surely thou settest them in slippery places: Thou castest them down to destruction. How are they become a desolation in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors (Psm. 73:17-19).

Scoffers have always mocked the second coming of Christ, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). The one thing we must remember is "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Our timetable is not the Lord's timetable! This wicked world still stands because the Lord does not wish "that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). May we learn to be patient and trust in the Lord to do that which is best for all concerned!

The Discussion

The Lord announces His plans to return to Judaea, and the disciples remind the Savior that the Jews are seeking to kill Him (John 11:7-8). The disciples are concerned about the potential danger involved in returning to Bethany, and Jesus is concerned about raising Lazarus from the dead and thereby causing many to believe who would otherwise not believe. Christ knows that His time is limited to accomplish the Father's purpose. He had earlier told His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34).

The disciples do have the best physical interest of the Lord at heart, but it is also understandable if they are concerned about their own safety. The Savior reminds His followers in John 11:9-10 that there is a limited amount of time to do the work of God, and thus one must take advantage of the opportunity to work during the day. Jesus had previously taught this truth to His disciples in saying, "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). He is committed to making the trip even though they must travel back into the territory of the hostile Jews.

There was one other thing to be understood before they left on their journey to Judaea. The disciples were thinking that Lazarus was merely asleep, but Jesus now makes it very clear to them that Lazarus is dead (John 11:13-14). Christ is also grateful He was not present when Lazarus became sick, as He would have been constrained to heal him. If He had done so the healing would not have had the impact on the disciples that the resurrection of Lazarus will have.

The Displayed Despair

Thomas urges his fellow disciples, saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). One must

admire the courage that Thomas possessed even though he had no hope of leaving Judaea alive. He was willing to do the Master's bidding, even though it would cost him his life, and he encouraged his fellow disciples to do likewise.

We need those in the Lord's church today who are willing to do as Thomas did. There is a price to pay for being a faithful soldier of the cross. Christianity costs (Luke 14:25-33)! The Lord made it clear that one cannot be His disciple who is not willing to give up all that he has for the cause of Christ. If one will not live for Christ, then one will surely not die for Christ. A child of God must learn to deny self if he is going to walk in the steps of the Savior (cf. Matt. 16:24; 1 Pet. 2:21). The message to the congregation at Smyrna must not be forgotten by those who have set their minds on things that are above (Col. 3:2): "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

The Sorrow Over Lazarus

The Sorrow Of The Jews

When Jesus and His disciples arrived in Bethany they found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. In all probability, Lazarus died shortly after the messenger was sent to locate Jesus. If one day is allowed for the messenger's travel, two days of tarrying by Jesus, and one day for the messenger's return, one arrives at the total of four days.

There were many Jews who had traveled the distance of approximately two miles from Jerusalem to Bethany to pay their respects to the family of Lazarus (John 11:17-19). The fact that "many" Jews came to offer condolences to the grief-stricken sisters indicates that this family was a prominent one: "Jewish tradition provided that there

should be seven days of public mourning and thirty days of private mourning for prominent persons.”⁴ Even though many of the Jews had no respect for the Christ, they honored their traditions by coming together out of respect for their deceased friend.

It is always appropriate to sorrow with those who have lost loved ones. The Holy Scriptures implore us to “Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). Just being present when death has invaded a family is a source of comfort to those that are left behind. It demonstrates that care and concern exist.

Today many have more respect for human beings than they do for the only begotten Son of God. More honor is often bestowed upon man-made traditions than upon the inspired Word of God. Such should never be! May we ever love and cherish the One Who gave His life for us that we might enjoy life that is “life indeed” (1 Tim. 6:19).

The Sorrow Of Martha

According to John 11:20, Martha leaves the house to go and meet Jesus (cf. John 11:30). Even though she is **frustrated**, she demonstrates great **faith**. Her frustration is evident when she says, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21). Her frustration, however, did not mean that she had lost her faith. She quickly added, “And even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee” (John 11:22).

There are at least two characteristics of Martha that are sorely needed by people today. First, she believes in the Word of God: “Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:23-24). She does not for one moment doubt the Old Testament promises regarding the resurrection. Second, she believes in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God:

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even he that cometh into the world (John 11:25-27).

Martha accepts the very truth that the hypocritical Jews deny--that Jesus is "the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).

Would it not be wonderful today if people would demonstrate their faith in Christ by casting aside their feelings and traditions and embracing the authoritative "thus saith the Lord." Even many today within the Lord's church when confronted with the Holy Scriptures regarding their error say, "I know what the Bible says but this is what I believe." One only deceives himself in thinking that he believes in God if he refuses to accept the truthfulness of the Word of God.

The Sorrow Of Mary

Martha secretly informs her sister that "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee. And she, when she heard it, arose quickly, and went unto him" (John 11:28-29). Mary, demonstrating her great faith, "fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:32). These are the very same words stated earlier by Martha. It is obvious that both sisters believe that Jesus by His presence could have prevented their brother's death, but neither Martha nor Mary grasps the fact that the Lord was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

The Sorrow Of Jesus

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, he

groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said,
Where have ye laid him? They say unto him,
Lord, come and see. Jesus wept (John 11:33-35).

It is probable that the words “Jesus wept” are twofold in meaning. First, the Lord always exhibited a compassionate spirit:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick (Matt. 14:14).

As the Son of Man, Jesus could sympathize with His friends who had lost a beloved brother.

Second, a reason for Jesus weeping could be “because Lazarus was about to be brought back from rest, pleasure and comfort in the Hadean Paradise to a world of woe and this sphere of sorrow and sighing again.”⁵ Another expresses the same sentiment with these words:

The weeping of Jesus is another mystery. Was it merely the sympathetic reaction to the grief and sorrow of loved ones, or was there some deeper reason for it? Our Lord was about to call back to our world of temptation and sin a valiant soldier who had already won the crown of life; and, in such a thing, there was an undeniable danger to the soul of Lazarus. The prospect of Lazarus again facing life with its inevitable dangers to the soul, and particularly with the additional burdens that would be imposed by his resurrection (for the Pharisees would try to kill him)--all such considerations are of such profound weight that they may be rightly viewed as plunging the Son of God into tears as he thought of them.⁶

It is the conviction of this writer that the words “Jesus wept” are indeed twofold in meaning. The Lord, demonstrating His humanity and showing His compassion, wept at the sorrow of His friends but also grieved because He would bring Lazarus back to again face the trials and tribulations of this life.

The Summons To Lazarus

The Preparation By Jesus

Jesus was first and foremost the Master Teacher. There was much more to accomplish than **just** raising Lazarus from the dead. When the Lord commanded that the stone be removed that sealed the tomb, Martha reminded Him that the body would now be in a decayed state (John 11:39). The Lord replied, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (John 11:40). The primary purpose for the miracle was for the glory of God.

Followers of Christ today must make special preparation to glorify God in worship and in daily living. One’s attitude must be correct, and his worship must be according to truth (John 4:24). A Christian is to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matt. 5:13-14). The **purpose** for such preparation is so that one’s good works will be seen by others, not to glorify self, but to glorify the Heavenly Father (Matt. 5:16).

The Prayer Of Jesus

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou heardest me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the multitude that standeth around I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me (John 11:41-42).

It is evident from the verb tense used that Jesus had already petitioned His Father in prayer. This prayer was for the benefit of the multitude that they might believe that He was God's Son.

Jesus always prayed, and He taught His disciples to pray (Luke 9:28; Luke 18:1). The apostle Paul reminds the brethren to be regular in prayer (1 Thess. 5:17). John, the apostle, admonishes:

And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him (1 John 5:14-15).

The Power Of Jesus

The unbelieving Jews denied that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Christ thus cries with a loud voice so that all can hear, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). The **dead** immediately obeyed the command that Jesus gave: "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44). Surely all can see the distinct difference between a genuine Bible miracle and the so-called miracles by men today! Truly, the Son of God has demonstrated for all to see that He is indeed "the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).

One will also observe that Christ does not do for man what man can do for himself. The people who were present **could** and **did** take away the stone that sealed the tomb (John 11:41). Those that were standing by **could** remove the grave clothes from Lazarus' body, and they **did** such at Jesus' command. Bible miracles were for the purpose of confirming the Word of God (Mark 16:20), causing people

to believe in the power of the Christ, and doing that which human hands could not do.

The Wickedness Plotted Against Christ

The Problem

Many of the Jews who were present at the resurrection of Lazarus now believed in the Lord (John 11:45). Some, however, immediately beat a trail back to Jerusalem to tell the Pharisees of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. One would not think that believing in the Son of God would pose a problem, but it surely did for the unbelieving Pharisees. The chief priests immediately formed a council and said, "What do we? for this man doeth many signs" (John 11:47). Yes, Jesus had done many mighty works! It should now be evident to all that He truly was what He claimed to be--the Son of God.

The prejudices and biases of men are alive and well and still stand in the way of people submitting to and obeying the commandments of the Lord. The wicked Jews thought more of the traditions of their fathers than they did of Christ, and "they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God" (John 12:43). Many today act no differently than did the unbelieving Pharisees of Jesus' day. However, those who truly love the Savior will "gladly" (Acts 2:41, KJV) receive and obey His Word. All today sorely need the spirit of the noble Bereans who "received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The Prophecy

The providence of God is clearly seen when the high priest, Caiaphas, seeking as many do today to be "politically correct," unintentionally affirms Messianic prophecy in

declaring that Jesus would die for both Jew and Gentile, and they both would become one (John 11:49-52).

The Plot

The Holy Scriptures declare, “So from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death” (John 11:53). A few days later “the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10-11). Men will stop at nothing when they do not get their way. Neither the devil nor those who yield him their services must be underestimated. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders, saying:

I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

There are those today who plot against the Lord’s church just as the Pharisees plotted against Jesus.

The Praise And Prophecy

The enemies of Jesus cannot prevent the popularity that He enjoys on this occasion. The cry goes forth, “Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel” (John 12:13). The King does not make a spectacular entry into Jerusalem riding on a white stallion but ever so humbly rides in on the back of a donkey. God’s prophet, Zechariah, had predicted that such an event would occur (Zech. 9:9).

The Popularity

But with the increased popularity of the common people the life of Christ was endangered even more. Many

people's faith in Jesus was growing, and the envious Pharisees were more determined than ever to kill the Christ. Those who observed the raising of Lazarus from the dead begin to tell others, and multitudes flock to the Savior.

The Protest

The jealous Pharisees grew more than furious at the acceptance and popularity of the Christ. They had demanded to know where Jesus was (John 11:57), and now they knew but did not know what to do. They were aggravated and furious and began to bicker among themselves as is evidenced by them saying to each other, "Behold how ye prevail nothing: lo, the world is gone after him" (John 12:19). When people who glory in themselves begin to see their own power and influence slipping away, they will stop at nothing in an attempt to rectify their problem.

Conclusion

To invoke the name of God or Christ in a promise to **heal, bless,** or say a **special prayer** for people **if** they will send in a certain amount of money is to **profane** the holy name of God. The **only** "blessing" involved in such a scenario is the money sent by the one deceived to the "demanding merchandiser" who is more than willing to abuse sacred matters for a profit!

It is truly amazing the ability that the Devil has to deceive. Neither Christ nor His apostles ever **charged** for a miracle, yet gullible people who know not the Word of God will pay "fake-healers" for that which they cannot do.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was the greatest of proofs that Gospel preaching was indeed valid. The apostle Paul proclaimed:

Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain (1 Cor. 15:12-14).

Those that have “fallen asleep in Christ” have not perished (1 Cor. 15:18), and the faithful child of God has a legitimate hope that reaches far beyond this world. May we continue to make our refuge in Christ and thereby “lay hold of the hope set before us: which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast” (Heb. 6:18-19).

May we never forget that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), and may we let His Word be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psm. 119:105).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 William Hendriksen, **The Gospel of Matthew** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 136.

3 Guy N. Woods, **The Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1981), pp. 228-229.

4 Ibid, p. 235.

5 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Studies in the Gospel of John** (Abilene, TX: Quality, 1998), p. 167.

6 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on John** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1974), p. 282.

CHAPTER 15

**The Casting Out Of The
Unclean Spirit In The
Synagogue;
The Healing Of Peter's
Mother-In-Law**

Joel Wheeler

Introduction

NEARLY TWO THOUSAND YEARS ago, Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth, proving He truly was the Son of God by the authority of His teaching and power of the miracles which He performed. His teaching produced faith in the hearer because of the authority it commanded. No scribe, lawyer, or rabbi could come close in comparison to what Jesus taught and did. John Mark recorded the reaction of the common people as they listened to Jesus. He said, "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). Jesus spoke truth by the authority of God and did not teach the traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus was not just another rabbi or a radical Pharisee but proved His teaching with the power of miracles. A miracle has been defined as an event which the force of

nature, including man's own natural powers, cannot produce and which must, therefore, be attributed to supernatural sources. Miracles were done only in Biblical times and for a specific purposes. First, miracles were done to prove that Jesus was the very Son of God. The apostle John wrote:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

Second, miracles were performed by men of God to confirm the words of the messenger. John Mark records:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:17-20).¹

Miracles were used to show that both the message and the messenger had God's approval. These signs would remove any doubt from the listener that the messenger was preaching by God's authority and that the message was true (Acts 8:12-13). Third, the purpose of miracles was to reveal to the messenger unknown truth. Jesus, in speaking to the apostles, said:

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

The inspired apostle Paul wrote:

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:10-13).²

Before the New Testament was completed, the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles and other inspired writers God's plan to save man from his sins. They wrote and spoke by inspiration to reveal the mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One must also recognize that purpose of miracles was never used for anyone's personal benefit. Many New Testament examples can be cited to show this was not the purpose of miracles. The apostle Paul, who raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9) and cast out demons (Acts 16:18), did not heal Trophimus but left him sick at Miletum (2 Tim. 4:20). The young preacher Timothy had a stomach ailment and Paul did not heal him (1 Tim. 5:23). The apostle Paul was afflicted with "a thorn in the flesh" which he asked the Lord three times to remove, yet the Lord would not relieve him of his discomfort (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

The miracles which Jesus performed certainly proved He was the Son of God (John 20:30-31). Our Lord performed miracles before an audience and also in the privacy of a few privileged people. Whether the miracles of Christ were done in public or private, they produced the same effect on the witness, and that was faith. One must be reminded that there had not been a revelation or message from God

for at least four hundred years between Malachi and John the baptizer. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, the power of His message was backed by the power of miracles. The fame of Jesus spread quickly by the witnesses of the supernatural events which He did.

Jesus And The Unclean Spirit In The Synagogue

Mark and Luke are the only two out of the four Gospel accounts that record the confrontation between Jesus and the unclean spirit in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. The Lord began his earthly ministry teaching in the synagogues and preaching the coming of the kingdom and forgiveness of sins. The Sabbath was a holy day in which the Jews came to the local synagogues to worship and listen to the teachers of the Law. Jesus came to Capernaum in the region of Galilee and entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. There He would reach the most dedicated people in one small place. The Jews came with the purpose to worship God and to learn from the teachers, scribes, lawyers and doctors. The synagogues were peculiarly teaching institutions because the rabbis were there at every service declaring what the law meant to them.³ The synagogues were the center of the Jewish communities and were looked upon as their identity and stability as a people. As Jesus taught in the synagogue, he encountered a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:23) or unclean devil (Luke 4:33). There were many cases of “devils,” “unclean spirits,” or demons during Biblical times. Jewish historians such as Josephus and Philo wrote about the demons in the days of Jesus and the apostles.

There has been much discussion as to what these “devils,” “unclean spirits,” or “demons” might be. The word *diamonion* is translated “devils” in the King James which

means “devilish” and “demon” in the American Standard Version, 1901.⁴ These devils or demons are not Satan, for there is only one Devil which is translated from the Greek word *diabolos*. Satan, who is also called the Devil, means accuser and he is the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:9). These demons could not have been the wicked angels awaiting judgment because angels do not need a body in which to dwell, just as the ones that went into the swine (Mark 5:12). Others such as Strauss makes the account of demon possession in the Scriptures a lively symbol of the prevalence of evil in the world. The casting out of the “devils” or demons by our Lord is a corresponding symbol over that evil power by His doctrine and His life.⁵ If these demons were only symbolic, then Jesus himself was only symbolic and not a real individual. Other liberal theologians believe that our Lord and the writers of the New Testament only spoke of demonic possession to accommodate the Jewish belief without any assertion to its truth or falsity.⁶ This does not harmonize with the teachings of Jesus nor with the Bible. If these demons were simply the imagination of the Jews, then our Lord would have rebuked their superstitions, just as He had done with the Pharisees on many occasions (Matt. 23:5, 16, 25-26). Some so-called “theologian” also believed that the demons were merely illnesses such as epilepsy or mental disorder.⁷ Yet the Scriptures make a distinction between demon possession and epilepsy. Matthew writes:

And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them (Matt. 4:24).

Demons were real and active in the days of Jesus and the apostles, in which they possessed children, women, and men.

We, therefore, are led to believe that these demons were the spirits of departed wicked men whom God allowed Satan to use so that Jesus could exercise power over them. Demons were greatly feared among the people of that day. Demons often controlled the individual they were possessing. Demons caused blindness, deafness, convulsions, and often tormented the person they held captive (Matt. 12:22). The individual that was demon-possessed often had super human strength which no man could control (Mark 5:3).

When Jesus came to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, He taught the people and they were truly amazed at His message. The people were prepared for the next incident because Jesus truly had their attention. His teaching was not like the opinions of the scribes; His words contained power and truth. A man possessed with an “unclean spirit” or demon was in the Synagogue and shouted to our Lord. He said, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). First, this unclean spirit recognized and testified to all that were present in the synagogue Who Jesus was. Jesus was from Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, and the unclean spirit identified Him and His location. These demons knew Jesus was Deity and they could not but help acknowledge Him. Many of the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers knew Jesus of Nazareth, yet they would not acknowledge Him. Lenski makes this statement:

The demon makes this revelation by a direct and open declaration because he knows that Jesus does not want it made thus, but that the people should discover who he really is by his words and his works.⁸

Second, the unclean spirit recognized our Lord’s power and authority. Notice the phrases “let us alone” and “art thou

come to destroy us” (Mark 1:24). Unclean spirits vexed the people with terror and panic, yet they knew the power and authority which Jesus possessed. Instead of their terrorizing the people, they were terrified by Jesus. These demons were doomed to eternal damnation and they knew it. What might be the reaction of the people when they witnessed that the demons themselves feared Jesus of Nazareth? Third, the unclean spirit recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). The Holy One of God is the Son of God Whom God sanctified and sent into the world (John 10:36).

The demons knew exactly Who Jesus was. Notice what the inspired writer says: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). Demons trembled at the sight of Jesus of Nazareth because they knew that He is the Holy One of God. Fourth, Jesus had power over them when He said, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mark 1:25). Jesus refused to receive the testimony of the unclean spirit. McGarvey suggest three reasons why Jesus would not accept or receive the testimony of these demons: 1. it would be the testimony of liars; 2. it might be perceived that Jesus had friendly relations with demons; and 3. it was not time for Jesus to be revealed.⁹

The reaction of the demon was fear and objection. The unclean spirit threw the man on the ground and cried with a loud voice (Mark 1:26). The demon had no choice because the power of the Son of God forced him out of the man. The cry was perhaps one of anger and agony, yet he was still forced to be removed from the body of the man. The reaction of the people was one of amazement. The beloved physician writes, “And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Luke 4:36). This event caused

two things to happen: to prove that Jesus was the Son of God, and to produce faith in the listener. His fame spread quickly through out the land.

Our Lord was often criticized by the scribes and the Pharisees. On one occasion the Pharisees accused our Lord of casting out demons or unclean spirits by the power of Beelzebub who would be the prince of the demons (Matt. 12:24). Their attacks against our Lord were plainly illogical and unreasonable to conceive. Our Lord, knowing their hearts, rebuked their accusations when he said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25). If Satan cast out the demons then it would be contradictory to his work.

The power which Jesus had would not even allow the unclean spirit to speak. Jesus said "Hold thy peace," meaning that He commanded instant silence and then ordered the demon to leave. Our Lord never wrought a miracle for self-aggrandizement and never exercised His marvelous power merely in order to draw attention to Himself. He was not like the so-called magicians among the heathen who merely dazzled the people. Jesus proved before the multitude of people that He was the Son of God and had power to cast out the unclean spirits. No man had power or could tame these unclean spirits. Jesus not only has power over this world but also over the underworld. Casting out the unclean spirit amazed the people (Mark 1:27). It resulted in the people's recognizing the authority of Jesus not only with His teaching but also with power over the demons. These eyewitnesses could not deny the power of our Lord and they spread the news of Jesus very quickly.

Jesus was also preparing His disciples to cast out the unclean spirits when they began their preaching and

teaching. Our Lord gave them the power over the wicked spirits when He sent them out preaching the kingdom of God and repentance (Matt. 10:1).

One must also remember that sin has the same controlling effect upon men today. Man cannot free himself from it and it will eventually lead to his being lost forever. Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

The Healing Of Peter's Mother-In-Law

At the end of the day, Jesus leaves the synagogue and enters into the house of Simon Peter. Jesus had no house of His own. Our Lord stated, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). Jesus often visited the house of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum. Peter's mother-in-law was taken with a great fever. The news of her illness came quickly as Jesus entered into the house where she was ill. Immediately, He came into the sick room where she lay. Luke tells us that He "stood over her, and rebuked the fever" (Luke 4:39), and Mark records that He "took her by the hand and lifted her up" (Mark 1:31). Matthew writes that "he touched her hand." The results were all the same: "and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them" (Matt. 8:15). In the days of Jesus, fevers were common and caused great difficulty, leaving the individual weak and frail. Just as soon as Jesus touched her and rebuked the fever it left her and immediately she served Him. If this miracle did anything, it was to make her a believer in Jesus as the Son of God. Her reaction was to serve Jesus.

Lessons

There are many lessons that can be learned from these two miracles. **First, Jesus has all power and**

authority. Our Lord was not afraid of confronting the unclean spirit and even commanded him to be silent. Jesus has power over the underworld and demons know Him. The apostle Paul wrote:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

Second, Jesus is the Great Physician. No human doctor can do what Jesus did in healing this woman or any other person. She may have tried the local doctor but she was still sick when He arrived. The very fact that they told Jesus of her sickness was an indication of a serious matter. His healing power extends to the spiritual illness called sin. The Master's touch can rid the obedient of the eternal damnation which sin brings. James wrote:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (Jas. 1:14-15).

Jesus had the power to forgive sins on earth (Luke 5:24) and also to take away the sins of the obedient (Heb. 5:9).

Third, we must realize the importance of serving Christ. Jesus said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John 12:26). Christians must serve Him faithfully even unto death (Rev. 2:10).

Fourth, miracles produced faith in those that saw and heard. They produced faith in the individual affected. Peter's mother-in-law perhaps contributed to bringing others to Jesus. After her sickness left she was

able to serve, which also influenced others. Peter and his wife were also strengthened by the miracle. Peter perhaps could have related to the other miracles but this one was done in his home to a relative.

Fifth, miracles were instant, complete, comprehensive. The man that had an unclean spirit was completely rid of it. The fever that affected Peter's mother-in-law did not just subside for a few hours. She was healed as though she had never had the fever.

Conclusion

Jesus has all power and authority (Matt. 28:18), even over Satan, his agents, and even sickness. Jesus came to seek and save the lost by becoming that Sacrificed Lamb upon the cross. Our Lord proved He truly was the Holy One of God both in private and public. There was absolutely no denying that Jesus was the Son of God.

There is no reason for miracles to be performed today. Miracles served a purpose to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. If we need a miracle today to prove Who Jesus was, then we do not believe the Bible. The Word of God is complete and inspired. Paul wrote:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Endnotes

1 KJV.

2 Ibid.

3 Frank S. Mead, **Tarbell's Teacher Guide**, September 1976-August 1977 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), p. 173.

4 James Strong, **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Greek Dictionary of the New Testament**, 37th printing (Nashville: Abington, 1978), p. 21.

5 H. B. Hackett, **Smith's Dictionary of the Bible**,
Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), pp. 584-585.

6 Ibid, p. 585.

7 Ibid.

8 R. C. H. Lenski, **Commentary on the New
Testament: The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel**
(Hendrickson), p. 79.

9 J. W. McGarvey, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati:
Standard), p. 168.

CHAPTER 16

The Healing Of The Deaf, Speechless Man; The Healing Of The Blind Man At Bethsaida

Sean Hochdorf

Introduction

THE MIRACLES OF OUR Lord are indeed fascinating to read about. It is comforting to know that our Saviour has such wonderful power. The two miracles that will be discussed in the upcoming pages are different in that: (1) Mark is the only one to record the miracles and (2) They are performed in somewhat of an unusual manner. One should not hasten to say that, since the miracles were only recorded in the book of Mark, they are not reliable. Rather, unlike the modernist, we believe these miracles took place because the inspired pen of Mark has recorded them for us.

The Healing Of The Deaf-Mute

After the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter in the area of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus departs to go to the area known as Decapolis. It was in this location that the healing of the deaf-mute took place. Decapolis, which literally means "ten cities," was located on the southeast corner of the sea of Galilee and was wedged in

between the tetrarchies of Philip and Antipas.¹ Decapolis was built by followers of Alexander the Great and consisted of Scythopolis, Damascus, Hippos, Philadelphia, Gadara, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Kanatha, and Raphana.²

Which one of these cities the miracle takes place in we do not know. For the most part the occupants of these cities were Gentiles. They were heathen cities that bordered Palestine, and in some places the people even intermingled with those things that were Jewish. The people in this area would entertain themselves on several occasions by watching magicians carry out their tricks, or sleight of hand, and would have very much liked to have seen Jesus perform this miracle, though He does not do so.³ Many times, when magicians and modern day “healers carry out their tricks, they utter unintelligible phrases. And yet when our Lord carried out this miracle of healing he spoke in Aramaic, which could be understood by the majority of Gentiles and Jews. A great crowd had gathered in this area (Mark 7:33) and they presented a man to the Lord who “was deaf and had an impediment in his speech” (Mark 7:32).⁴ However, the Lord draws the man away from the crowd:

Victims of deafness and speech impediments tend to withdraw within themselves, rather than live through the stigma inflicted by a staring, impatient public who may add insult to injury equating intelligence with the ability to speak clearly. Evidently, the deaf man with the speech impediment suffers from these social stigmas, including a public pity that assumes his case is hopeless...Elton Trueblood refers to the act of taking the man away from the crowd as an example of the “courtesy of Jesus”...Jesus makes no apology for His act of common courtesy. He will not use a person for personal gain or embarrass a person for public show. No matter what the crowd thinks, the feelings of the deaf man must come first.⁵

The manner in which the Lord heals this man is unique in that He “put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened” (Mark 7:33-34). This man was not completely dumb, as we are told that he had a speech impediment. The phrase “impediment in his speech,” here used by Mark, is unique in that it is used in only one other place in scripture. It is from the Greek word *mogilálon* and literally means “tongue-tied.” The prophet Isaiah said concerning the coming Messiah:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the **dumb** sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert (Isa. 35:5-6, emp. mine, SH).

The impediment was so bad that the man could not be understood. His being deaf certainly did not help his speech either, as he wouldn't be able to articulate that which he would speak. In fact, he must not have been deaf from birth because he knew how to speak: “Instead, either disease or accident had taken away his hearing, leaving him with the memory of clear speech, but with crippled motor skills for speaking.”⁶ A common method for communicating with those who are deaf is through the means of sign language or making certain gestures. Most likely this is why the Lord touches the deaf man by placing his fingers in his ears. Trench says, “The fingers are put into the ears as to pierce through the obstacles which hindered sounds from reaching the seat of hearing.”⁷ If it were the case that Jesus was simply piercing through an obstruction, such as wax or some other form of debris, then any man could do such. However, this is a miracle, that which man could not do:

Critics complain that Jesus resorts to techniques of black magic when He puts His fingers into the deaf man's ears and touches his stammering tongue with the taste of spit. How wrong they are. If Jesus begins to communicate with spoken words, He will bury the man in his fear and helplessness. Instead, He moves to the kinds of communication with which the man will have no struggle. Fingers in the unhearing ears and spit on the uncoordinated tongue tell the man that Jesus understands this problem and intends to do something about it. Then, with even greater nonverbal eloquence, Jesus sighs, not with the pity of the crowd, but with the compassion of the Christ.⁸

As noted above, the Lord employed spit for performing this miracle. Spittle was thought by many of the day to have medicinal value. The Jews especially thought of spittle as a well known remedy for infections of the eyes.⁹ There have been different comments made about how the spit was used. The general consensus is that the Lord spit upon His fingers and then touched the man's tongue or that He directly spit upon the tongue of the man and rubbed it in. Perhaps this was done to lubricate the dry tongue of the dumb man or to communicate with the man that the Lord knew his infirmity and would soon remedy the problem—one can't be certain. It is interesting to point out that the use of spit stands in direct opposition to the belief of the Gnostics. The Gnostics believed many false things, one of which was that Jesus was a figment of the imagination, that He wasn't real. However, Mark states that the Lord spit. A figment of the imagination can't bring forth physical spit; thus this passage is a testament to the literal person of Christ.

After applying the spittle, Jesus looked up to heaven and "he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is Be opened" (Mark 7:34). As the Lord gazed up toward heaven, the deaf man could see the Lord's acknowledgment of His

oneness with God the Father. The Lord made it clear on numerous occasions that it was His mission, and desire, to carry out His Father's will. He said on one occasion:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel (John 5:19-20).

Regarding the Lord's sigh, Frederic W. Farrar observes:

Here again it is not revealed to us what were the immediate influences which saddened His spirit. He may have sighed in pity for the man; He may have sighed in pity for the race; He may have sighed for all the sins that degrade and all the sufferings which torture; but certainly He sighed in a spirit of deep tenderness and compassion, and certainly that sigh ascended like an infinite intercession into the ears of the Lord God of Hosts.¹⁰

Upon the Lord's utterance to "be opened," the text says that "straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain" (Mark 7:35). Thus the man's hearing and speech were completely restored. Upon the restoration, the Lord charged or commanded the people that they should keep this matter private and "tell no man." However, as is the case with so many, the louder the Lord spoke, the more they disobeyed. The text says concerning the miracle that they "published it" (Mark 7:36). The word publish literally means to "herald as a public crier." Someone has well said that the Lord asked them be quiet and they spread the word abroad. The Lord today tells us to speak up and preach and yet we refuse to open our mouths! Even though the people didn't heed the command of the Lord to keep silent, the

truthfulness of their proclamation cannot be denied: “He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak” (Mark 7:37).

The Healing Of The Blind Man At Bethsaida

In between the miracle of healing the deaf-mute and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand takes place. After this “miracle-feeding” the Lord and His disciples depart Dalmanutha by boat. The disciples have forgotten to pack the necessary food for the trip. The Lord takes the opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson concerning the leaven of the Pharisees. The disciples reasoned that since they had no bread this was the reason for the lesson (Mark 8:16). However, the Lord responded by saying:

Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand? (Mark 8:17-21).

Matthew’s account of this event makes it clear that the disciples did not understand that the Lord was not speaking about the bread but rather the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:12; Mark 8:21). It is in this context of the disciples’ believing one thing, and not seeing the application the Lord was making, that the miracle of the blind man at Bethsaida takes place:

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch

him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town (Mark 8:22-26).

The town of Bethsaida in this text is different than the Bethsaida where Peter, Andrew, and Philip had previously dwelled. This is evident because of the way they crossed from the west to the northeast side of the lake. This Bethsaida would later be referred to as Julias. In fact it is commonly called Bethsaida-Julias.¹¹

As was the case with the deaf stammerer, a man who is blind is brought to the Lord and the Lord leads him out of the city to take care of him. Again the Lord employs spit to accomplish His task. This time He spits directly on the eyes of the blind man and rubs it in. Possibly this man had sore eyes, and the spittle was applied to moisten and sooth. After this was done the Lord asked him what he saw and he responded by saying, “I see men as trees, walking” (Mark 8:23). This response gives us insight into the fact that the man was not born blind, but rather by disease or injury he became blind. This man knew what trees looked like and he knew that they shouldn’t be walking. Upon voicing his observations the Lord again placed His hands upon the man’s eyes and made him look up. After doing so the man was “restored and saw everything clearly” (Mark 8:25).

The two-phase nature of this miracle has caused many to offer numerous explanations as to what happened. Warren Wiersbe makes the following foolish statement: “Was the miracle hindered by the atmosphere of unbelief in the town?”¹² This is truly absurd. Wiersbe is affirming

that man can upset the plan and power of our Lord. Of course this is not surprising when considering that Wiersbe is a premillennialist. The premillennialist teaches that the Jews rejected the Lord, thus stopping Him from establishing His kingdom, and in essence that He began the church as an alternate plan or an afterthought. If this were true then man has upset the plan of God. The question that should continue to be posed, as it has for so many years, is, if the Lord can be rejected once, can't He be rejected again upon His return? If man can upset the plan of God then, yes, He can be rejected again. However, the Lord's plan wasn't thwarted by man then and it won't be thwarted by man now!! The church/kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19) has been in the eternal mind of God (Eph. 3:10-11). To say that our God has no more power than what man allows Him to have is blasphemy at best. Shame on those who reason in this fashion.

Others in the past, who did not have the medical technology that is available today, have given reasons for this two-phase miracle, none of which do harm to the Scriptures in their reasoning. R. C. Sproul suggests that the first phase left the man with blurred vision and with the second touch the things that were blurred now came into sharp focus and the man could distinguish between trees and men.¹³ McGarvey says:

Jesus adopted this method of cure to give variety to the manifestations of his power by showing that he could heal in part and by progressive steps, as well as by his more usual method of effecting a perfect cure at one word. This cure was not less miraculous than others, but rather more so: for it was really the working of two miracles, each effecting instantaneously all that was intended by it.

What then is the explanation of this miracle? Why the two-phase process? This writer believes that an article written by brother Steven Lloyd answers the question:

When people are born blind or lose their sight early in life and have their sight restored in later life, there is something surgery cannot remedy. It cannot give the newly sighted the ability to conceive of what they perceive. Mortimer J. Adler, in his book **Intellect: Mind Over Matter**, refers to a phenomenon known to neurologists as *agnosia*, saying that it “occurs in individuals whose sensory powers are in no way impaired but who have suddenly become conceptually, not perceptually, blind.” The difference between what Dr. Adler describes and the one who receives sight is that the once-blind person has never conceived of things by means of sight. He has never interacted with the world by sight. The fact that someone has received his sight does not mean he recognizes what he sees.

Dr. Sacks, quoting ophthalmologist Albert Valvo, writes: “In fact, the number of cases of this kind over the last ten centuries known to us is not more than twenty.” This being the case, our knowledge of what takes place when a blind man receives his sight by natural means would be obscure. No wonder we have misunderstood the miracles described in Mark 8.

The man in Bethsaida can now see, but he cannot yet make sense of what he is seeing. Tree and man run together...All this, moreover, is not surprising to Jesus. He knows, it would seem, that a newly healed blind man has neither depth perception nor the ability to synthesize shape and form. The blind man’s brain must first be recalibrated: must be taught (in one miraculous instant) what you and I have known since childhood--how to see.

This summary helps to explain the two-phase nature of the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida. In the first phase, he received his physical sense of sight. In the second phase of the miracle, Jesus gave the man his conceptual sense of sight. The man Jesus healed saw (perceptually) clearly, but was not quite sure what to make of what he saw (conceptually). This explains how Jesus could heal the man’s physical sense, and at the same time have the man say something so puzzling--at least to those of us who have lived with sight all our lives.¹⁴

Once the man was healed Jesus told the man, “Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town” (Mark 8:26). There, of course, was no need for the man to noise abroad what had happened to him for, as soon as he went to his home, those that knew him would know immediately. Whether the man respected the wishes of the Lord we do not know. Hopefully, because of his gratitude toward the Lord, he respected His wishes.¹⁵

Lessons Learned From These Two Unique Miracles

First, an important lesson for us to grasp is our need to have a wide field of service.¹⁶ The people in this region were mostly Greek, and yet Jesus helped them. God has always loved every soul and it is His desire that all be saved: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). As members of the body of Christ, it is imperative that we look outward to seek those who are lost. Whether this be our next-door neighbor or those in other countries, we must set forth efforts to reach those lost souls with the Gospel of Christ.

Second, one can notice that some of the most effective service for our Lord is done in private. Jesus took this afflicted man away from the crowd to heal him. He wasn’t searching for the praise of men but rather He desired to do His Father’s will. Oh, how the church could benefit from this lesson today! So many want to be in the limelight, involved in various works of notoriety. If they can’t receive credit or praise for doing the work then they simply won’t do it:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men,
to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward
of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore

when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1-4).

Third, one can never be too courteous. Earlier, the courtesy of Jesus was mentioned concerning pulling the deaf stammerer away from the crowd. Common courtesy is a lost art in today's age. Children don't say "yes sir," "no thank you, ma'am," etc. People don't want to wait their turn at four way stops; women ignore a man who holds the door open; waiters expect a tip even if they didn't smile, didn't fill your glass, and didn't want to wait on you to begin with!!!¹⁷ However, our Lord was courteous. He cared about people and was loving and kind to them. With our Lord being the perfect example (1 Pet. 2:21), we would do well to practice the art of courtesy.

Fourth, we learn that the power is in the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord opened the deaf man's ears. The Word of the Lord loosed the string that bound the man's tongue. The Word of the Lord healed the blind man at Bethsaida! That same Word can circumcise a calloused heart (Heb. 4:12) and cause one to wholly dedicate himself to the cause of Christ. As brethren we must have confidence in the Word of our Lord. Paul made it clear when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Paul truly believed that the Gospel was the **only** power to save a sin-sick world and then he set out using it to convert others. We too must use this very same tool as it is the only thing in our modern, sophisticated society that can save man today!!

Fifth, as was the case with the disciples, we can be blinded to the truth. Numerous stories could be told of those who have tried to conduct Bible studies with those who are members of a denomination. These Bible studies may go well for awhile, but get to the subject of baptism or instrumental music and these poor souls simply cannot see the Lord's clear teaching on the matter. Why? Because they have been blinded to the truth by the teaching of the creeds of men. As members of the body of Christ we need to remember that those who were blind in the context of Mark 8:22-26 were the disciples. In other words, as children of God we are not exempt from being blinded to the truth ourselves. Erring family, pride, evil desire, etc. are all things that can contribute to our being blinded to the truth. As Christians we must ever keep a pure, humble, and honest heart ready to study and carry out the will of God.

Conclusion

The miracles mentioned in these two cases stand alongside the other awesome wonders that were wrought by our Lord. The compassion and healing power of the Lord should be an encouragement to all. The Lord loves us just as much as He loved the deaf stammerer and the blind man at Bethsaida. He can spiritually heal us, too, if we will let Him. He can take our sins away (Acts 2:38), add us to the church (Acts 2:47), strengthen us while we are on this earth (1 Pet. 5:7), and give us a mansion when we pass from this life (John 14:1-3). Indeed, we serve an amazing, benevolent, loving God!!

Endnotes

1 Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah** (Hendrickson, 1995), p. 504.

2 **Dickson New Analytical Study Bible Dictionary**, p. 74.

3 Craig S. Keener, **The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament**, (Downers, Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

4 **Dickson New Analytical Study Bible**. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated.

5 David L. McKenna, **The Communicator's Commentary**, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, Volume 2 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p. 159.

6 Ibid, pp. 159-160.

7 Richard C. Trench, **Notes on the Miracles of our Lord** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), p. 220.

8 McKenna, p. 160.

9 Edersheim, p. 506.

10 Frederic W. Farrar, **The Life of Christ** (New York: H. M. Caldwell, 1874), pp. 358-359.

11 John William McGarvey, **Commentary on Matthew and Mark**, CD Version (Faith and Facts), p. 313.

12 Warren W. Wiersbe, **Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament** (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1992).

13 R. C. Sproul, **Playing God** (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 1988), pp. 14-15.

14 Steven Lloyd, "A Two-Fold Miracle," **The Gospel Journal** (Denton, TX: Valid, May 2000), pp. 11-13. The reader would benefit from reading brother Lloyd's excellent article, as all of the material could not be quoted in this manuscript.

15 Herbert Lockyer, "The Miracle of the Bethsaida Blind Man," **All the Miracles of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), pp. 211-212.

16 W. Gaddys Roy, **Sermons on the Miracles of Jesus**, p. 138.

17 McKenna, p. 160.

CHAPTER 17

The Healing Of Blind Bartimaeus

Gary McDade

Introduction

THE BIBLE DISCUSSES THREE types of blindness. One, those deprived of natural sight, as the man born blind mentioned in John 9, or as the host of the king of Syria was temporarily blinded by the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 6:18-20, or as the temporary blindness the apostle imposed upon Elymas the sorcerer for withstanding the Word of God in Acts 13:11. Two, those morally blinded, as by taking bribes and thereby corrupting their judgment (Exod. 23:8). Three, those spiritually blinded, whether through ignorance or self-will, as Jesus said of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14 and of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:16-19.¹

No known cure for physical blindness exists. This blindness is temporal. It relates only to existence here in this present world. Moral and spiritual blindness is a malady far worse because it comes to bear on the eternal destiny of the soul. Unlike physical blindness, which affects a portion of the population, moral and spiritual blindness affects everyone (Rom. 3:23). The power Jesus used to heal Bartimaeus demonstrated His Divinity. The remedy of the fatal disease of the soul called sin demanded a power greater than man could ever provide from himself. The

Son of Man again stepped in on behalf of others to provide the saving power of the Gospel to cure mankind's greatest ill, the loss of heaven and the doom of hell because of sin.

The Placement Of The Miracle

The healing of blind Bartimaeus took place as Jesus was preparing to ascend from the Jordan River basin, wherein the city of Jericho is located, as He made His way toward Jerusalem. (The site of the ancient city of Jericho was located approximately one mile north of the rebuilt Jericho that Jesus visited, which was about five miles west of the Jordan River and about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem.) The latter chapters of the synoptic gospels² occur geographically in Judea.³ For the third time He told His disciples of the passion which awaited Him in Jerusalem (cf. the first mention: Matt. 16:13-23; Mark 8:27-33; Luke 9:18-22. the second mention: Matt. 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45. the third mention: Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34). He privately said to His disciples:

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again (Matt. 20:18-19).

These statements were made just prior to the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Jesus knew that He was virtually standing in the shadow of the cross, yet He unselfishly expressed genuine concern and compassion for others.

The city of Jericho itself was the site of the first victory of Israel, following the wilderness wandering at the beginning of the conquest of Canaan. A people with faith in God had emerged from the desert sands of the

Sinai peninsula after forty long years of wilderness wandering. The reason for the destruction of their ancestors in the wilderness was given by Joshua:

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord sware that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey (Josh. 5:6).

The first test of their descendants' trust in God and willingness to obey Him was the walled city of Jericho. God had given them the city, and by faith they took it (Josh. 6:2, 20-21; Heb. 11:30). The memory of this victory of faith in God is attached to Jericho. And, it is not unlikely that the critical victory gained there in the history of the Hebrew people would serve to strengthen Jesus as He made his way to Jerusalem and to the destiny that awaited Him there.

Just before the destruction of ancient Jericho, Jesus Christ presented Himself in a pre-incarnate form to Joshua. Joshua was the commander of the Israelite forces, but Jesus Christ Himself was the Captain of the host of the Lord. The remarkable record of the meeting of Joshua and Jesus Christ reads:

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's

host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so (Josh. 5:13-15).

Perhaps an examination of the text to point out the proof that this represents a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God would be helpful. In order of occurrence from the text, notice first that Joshua “lifted up his eyes.” His gaze apparently went heavenward. Second, he saw a man standing with “his sword drawn in his hand.” Jesus is mentioned in connection with a sword many times in the New Testament. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew He said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). In the book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as “The Word of God” and has a sharp sword that goes out of His mouth to exercise the judgment of God upon the wicked (Rev. 19:15, 21; Rev. 1:16; Rev. 2:12). The Word of God is declared to be “sharper than any two-edged sword,” and it is the “sword of the Spirit” (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17).

Third, the man identified Himself as the “captain of the host of the Lord.” Hebrews 2:10 informs, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” So, Jesus without question is referred to as “the Captain.” Fourth, Joshua addressed Him as “Lord.” Fifth, as an expression of reverence and worship, the Captain instructed Joshua to do as his predecessor Moses had done before the burning bush in the wilderness and remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Men may not accept worship; therefore, the Captain was not a mere man (Acts 10:25-26). Angels may not accept worship; therefore, the Captain was not an angel (Rev. 22:8-9). But, Jesus Christ is worthy of worship and accepts reverent worship (Matt. 2:2, 11;

Matt. 14:33; Rev. 5:12-14). Therefore, a great likelihood exists that the Captain of the host of the Lord was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Joshua was the newly designated leader of Israel following Moses' death. "Moses had laid his hands upon him," thereby conferring on him that responsibility (Deut. 34:9). In the opening chapter of the book which bears his name, God both charged Joshua with His commands and comforted Joshua with His companionship (Josh. 1:1-9). So, when Joshua was told by the Captain of the Lord's host to "loose his shoe from off thy foot," his compliant response recorded in his own words is, "And Joshua did so," establishing the fact that Joshua acknowledged that he was in the presence of Deity.

Additional background information concerning Jesus Christ emerges out of the rubble of wrecked Jericho. Rahab the harlot, who by faith received the spies with peace and sent them out another way, and whose family thereby was spared is in the lineage of Christ (Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25; Matt. 1:5). If someone today could walk through Jericho and have these memories flood his soul, how improbable is it to suggest that the Lord Jesus Christ may have experienced similar reflections? Any reminder of physically descending from faithful Rahab, who was the great-great grandmother of King David, could have served as a mental prelude to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem which lay just ahead of Jesus by a only few days (Ruth 4:21-22; Matt. 1:5; Matt. 21:1-9). Nevertheless, these events are in the distant background of Jericho, the location where the healing of blind Bartimaeus took place.

The occasion of Jesus' traveling through Jericho marks His coming into contact with Bartimaeus. The Lord cured many people of blindness. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2, and mentioned the "recovering of sight to the blind" (Luke 4:18-20). After

returning the book to the minister with every eye on Him, “He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). The One Who had the power to give sight to blind eyes was before them. Later on, during His ministry in Galilee, Jesus healed two blind men at Nazareth (Matt. 9:27-31), the man who could neither see nor speak (Matt. 12:22-23), and the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:21-26). In Jerusalem, He healed the man blind from birth (John 9:1-41). The reply Jesus sent back to John the Baptist when he was in prison, through two of his disciples, offered among the evidences of His Deity the fact, as Matthew and Luke record, that “unto many that were blind he gave sight” (Luke 7:19-23; Matt. 11:2-6). While Jesus healed many of their blindness, Bartimaeus is the only blind person Jesus healed that is mentioned by name (Mark 10:46).

The name “Bartimaeus” likely is a hybrid word from both Aramaic and Greek meaning “son of honor.” The synoptic Gospels carry the healing of Bartimaeus in Matthew 20:29-34;⁴ Mark 10:46-52; and Luke 18:35-43. What is known of Bartimaeus is revealed from these passages. **Observe first, Bartimaeus was blind.** The Greek word used provides evidence that at one time Bartimaeus did have the benefit of sight. ἄναβλέψω (*anablepso*) means “look up, see again.” Arndt and Gingrich say it is used “of blind persons, who were formerly able to see, **regain sight.**” They then offer this translation of Mark 10:51 and Luke 18:41, “**I want to regain my sight.**”⁵ In the account of the man known to have been born blind (John 9:1, 20), upon being healed the man’s testimony is that he “received sight” (John 9:11). Again, the word he used is ἄναβλέψω, (*anablepso*) but here the lexicographers say it has sustained a “total loss of the force of ἀνά [*ana*] **again.**” And, the weight of the context insures that the meaning is “**receive sight, become able to see.**”⁶

Second, Bartimaeus begged. He “sat by the highway side begging” (Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35). Begging commonly was viewed as shameful (Luke 16:3). But, the blind and infirmed had little recourse except to plead for mercy from strangers (Luke 16:20, 22; Acts 3:1ff). The Lord taught His disciples benevolence toward such poor:

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13-14).

Those who begged positioned themselves in prominent places where they could have access to passers-by: for example, Bartimaeus by the highway side, Lazarus at the rich man’s gate, and the lame man at the Beautiful gate of Jerusalem (Mark 10:46; Luke 16:20; Acts 3:2).

Third, Bartimaeus beseeched. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth passed by, “he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47). His faith in Jesus was the motivation for his cry, as shown in Christ’s compliment to him later regarding the power of his faith (Mark 10:52).

Fourth, Bartimaeus was brave. Mark says, “And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:48). Luke says they “rebuked him” (Luke 18:39). But, he bravely cried out “so much the more” or “more a great deal.” His being blind meant he was vulnerable, yet he risked his safety to see Jesus.

Fifth, Bartimaeus benefited. After he answered the Master’s call, he immediately received his sight (Mark 10:52; Luke 18:43). The man in darkness would not remain in silence. His faith was put into action. The people could not stop him. When he came to Jesus he was blessed.

The Purpose Of The Miracle

The purpose of the miraculous healing of blind Bartimaeus is woven into the overall fabric of the purpose of miracles as they appear in the Bible in general and in the life of Christ and the apostles in particular. Quite simply miracles were employed to authenticate the Divine message. Miracles served as credentials.⁷ Jesus said to Philip:

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake (John 14:10-11).

The purpose statement of the Gospel of John reflects this truth. John wrote:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

The last sentence in Mark's Gospel focuses attention on the purpose of the miracles that the apostles did. Mark wrote, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:20). The miraculous signs were the apostles' credentials of authority to preach the Gospel. Paul wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). Hebrews 2:3-4 rounds out this affirmation of the purpose for which miracles were performed:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

The Gospel record confirms over thirty miracles Jesus performed. They are: water to wine (John 2:1-11), the nobleman's son healed (John 4:46-54), the draught of fish (Luke 5:1-11), the unclean spirit cast out (Mark 1:23-27; Luke 4:33-36), Peter's mother-in-law healed (Matt. 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38), the leper cleansed (Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16), the paralytic healed (Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 1:1-12; Luke 5:17-26), the impotent man healed (John 5:1-16), the restoration of the withered hand (Matt. 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-11), the centurion's servant healed (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), the widow of Nain's son raised to life (Luke 7:11-16), many with unclean spirits were healed (Matt. 12:22-37; Mark 3:11; Luke 11:14-15), stilled the storm (Matt. 8:23-27; Matt. 14:32; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25), cast devils out of two men at Gadara (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39), Jairus' daughter raised to life (Matt. 9:18; Matt. 19:23-26; Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 8:41-42, 49-56), the issue of blood stanching (Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48), two blind men received sight (Mark 9:27-31), cast a devil out of a mute (Matt. 9:32-33), fed five thousand men beside women and children (Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:5-14), walked on the water (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21), healed the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30), fed four thousand men beside women and children (Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9), healed a deaf mute at Decapolis (Mark 7:31-37), healed a blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26), healed a demon-possessed child (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-27; Luke 9:37-43),

tax money from a fish's mouth (Matt. 17:24-27), cleansed ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), healed a man born blind (John 9:1-41), Lazarus raised to life (John 11:1-46), straightened the bent woman (Luke 13:11-17), cured a man with edema (Luke 14:1-6), healed Bartimaeus and another blind man at Jericho (Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), withered the fig tree (Matt. 21:17-20; Mark 11:12-14, 20-21), restored Malchus' right ear (Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10-11), and a second draught of fish (John 21:6).

As defined by Gus Nichols:

a miracle is an astonishing event which the beholder cannot trace to any known law of nature. As a sign a miracle is an astonishing wonder which points as a sign of something else—as to the trustworthiness of the performer and speaker of divine truth.⁸

Roy H. Lanier, Jr., has grouped the miracles of Jesus into five categories: (1) power over nature, (2) power over disease, (3) power over demons, (4) power over material things, and (5) power over death.⁹ Miracles are not a contradiction of natural law but the intervention of the power of God over natural law.¹⁰ Again, brother Nichols wrote:

The laws by which God works miracles are laws unknown unto man, but man does not know all things. In fact, man knows about as much about God and his infinite wisdom and power, as a flea knows about an elephant, or as a spider by the railroad tracks knows about the great locomotive engine and train when it comes thundering by on the tracks.¹¹

The trustworthiness of Jesus Christ and His apostles to present God's will through the Gospel was confirmed by the miraculous.

The purpose of miracles was to reveal and to confirm Divine truth. Those across history who have attempted to

assault the miracles of Jesus—for example, unbelieving Jews, heathens (Celsus, Hierocles, Porphyry), pantheists (Spinoza), skeptics (Hume, Russell, Ingersoll), rationalists (Schleiermacher, Paulus), modernists (Woolston, Strauss), humanists (Flew, Sagan, Murray-O’Hair)¹²—have despised and rejected the truth of God’s Word. Today, those who claim miraculous power—for example, Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, et al.—but do not claim to have some among them who are writing inspired Scripture are showing their ignorance of the Bible and their absence of inspiration. If miracles were performed today, then the ones performing the miracles would be writing inspired Scripture because there is nothing in the Word of God that set the power to perform miracles apart from the purpose for which those miracles were performed. The apostles of Jesus Christ completed, confirmed, and conveyed the final revelation of God’s will to the world (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). And, those such as Joseph Smith, author of the **Book of Mormon**, **Doctrine and Covenants**, and **Pearl of Great Price**, and Ellen G. White, author of **Keys to the Scripture**, claim to be authoring Scripture inspired of God but without the confirmation of miraculous power. Notice the **confirmation** of miraculous power is missing. The **claim** is present but the **confirmation** is absent. The ability to do miracles is a matter of demonstration, not argumentation. Remember that even the enemies of Christ and the apostles could not deny their miraculous power (Matt. 12:13-14, 24; Acts 4:16; Acts 16:18-19).

The specific purpose for the healing of blind Bartimaeus is revealed in the interrogation from Christ Himself. He asked the blind man, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” (Mark 10:51). The question proves that the miracles Jesus performed were not done capriciously. Within the request from Bartimaeus for sight

lies the key to understanding the purpose for which the miracle was performed. Bartimaeus said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight” (Mark 10:51). Mark recorded that Bartimaeus referred to Jesus as “Lord” from an Aramaic form Ραββουνι (*Rabbouni*) and is an even more respectful form of ῥαββί (*Rabbi*, or master), meaning “my Great Master.” The word is used only here and in John 20:16 by Mary Magdalene when Jesus revealed Himself to her following His resurrection from the dead. The compassionate deed done to Bartimaeus shows also the value of faith in the heart and life of the believer. Mark wrote, “And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way” (Mark 10:52). Faith was not always required from those upon whom a miracle was done (John 11:39; Acts 13:11-12; Acts 16:18). On one occasion the person benefited was not even present (Matt. 8:5-13). But, the connection of Bartimaeus’ faith with his healing instructs all who gain knowledge of this event of the value of faith. So, the purpose of Bartimaeus’ healing is threefold: (1) declaration of the power of the Master, (2) declaration of the preeminence of the Master, and (3) declaration of the pity of the Master.

The Perception Of The Miracle

The reaction to Bartimaeus’ healing, as stated by Mark, was that he “followed Jesus in the way” (Mark 10:52). Luke says, “And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God” (Luke 18:43). So, Bartimaeus became a disciple of Christ and followed Him. His following Christ was coupled with “glorifying God.” Also, the reaction of “all the people” is given in Luke’s account. When they saw that Bartimaeus was made whole, they “gave praise unto God.” It is of interest that one of the three inspired

writers of the account, Luke, was a trained medical doctor (Col. 4:14). The observations that he gave of these events carries the additional weight of one schooled and experienced in the scientific healing arts. The miracle invites investigation and stands up to the test. A large number of people “saw it.” So, the miracle is attested by eyewitness testimony. The degree to which the multitude is convinced of the authenticity of the miracle is seen in their response of giving praise to God. The miracle has been properly recorded and permanently preserved, so it should evoke the same response to all that take the time and show an open mind to investigate it.

The Pragmatism Of The Miracle

Consider what the blind man saw. He lived in physical darkness, yet he saw some things in the spiritual realm that those who were enjoying the light of day did not see. The opportunity to see what he saw is essential, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). The blind man could not walk by sight. He saw the blessing of faith. Through faith he was saved from spending the remainder of his life in darkness. Although the account referencing his faith is brief, several items may be identified which sprang from his faith. **First, he saw the merit of listening.** Some people are blessed with the physical ability to hear, but they do not really listen. The only opportunity he had to know what was going on in the world around him was to listen. Before the arrival of Jesus to Jericho he had learned enough to know that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of David. “The sure mercies of David” would be realized in the Messiah, the Christ (Isa. 55:3): “And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant...They told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by” (Luke 18:36-37). He knew from what he heard that he

was in the presence of the Savior. In order for anyone to be saved from sin today he must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6).

Second, he saw the merit of speaking. Luke wrote, “And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:38). The choice of remaining silent would have yielded the result of remaining in darkness. What is learned from his speaking is that he believed Jesus to be the son of David or the Christ. In order for anyone to be saved today he must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (John 3:16) and repent of his sins (Luke 13:3, 5). Then he must speak his convictions regarding the Christ. Paul wrote:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

Again, Paul said, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13).

Third, he saw the merit of mercy. He cried out, “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.” Mercy is pity for those who cannot help themselves. He knew that there was no cure for his infirmity except through Jesus Christ. Jesus saved him by His mercy from his physical blindness. Today Jesus saves by His mercy. Paul wrote to Titus, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). Those lost in sin are dependent on the mercy of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Once a person has confessed Christ, “the washing of regeneration” or baptism saves him (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16). The apostle Peter said that in

baptism one finds the “answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet. 3:21). When a person has been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for the remission of his sins, the Lord adds him or her to the church of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38, 47; Rom. 16:16). Many today cannot see the merit of mercy, but the blind man saw it.

Fourth, he saw the merit of persistence. The multitude tried to discourage him from speaking up. They “charged him that he should hold his peace,” and they “rebuked him.” But, he knew that what was at stake was of surpassing importance, and he could not silently sit by even though the voices of many were against him. As when Jesus showed the multitude the value of a little child (Matt. 18:1-6), the multitude learned the lesson with the healing of Bartimaeus that the love and compassion of Christ are available to all men regardless of how humble or lowly their estate. Those who know they are laboring and heavy laden are the ones to whom Jesus promises rest (Matt. 11:28-30). The blind man was living proof that the ones who endure to the end shall be saved (Matt. 10:22).

Fifth, he saw the merit of hastening. When Jesus called for him, he cast away his garment and rose and came to Jesus (Mark 10:50). He cast away his garment, or he threw off his garment, i.e., his outer robe. The word picture portrays the absence of meandering or dawdling. He made haste to answer the call of Christ: “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). The king’s business requires haste (1 Sam. 21:8).

Sixth, he saw the merit of reverence. As shown earlier, the Aramaic word “Rabboni” (ASV), translated in Mark 10:51 as “Lord,” is a heightened form of the word “Rabbi,” which means “master.” The blind man’s use of “Rabboni,” meaning “Great Master,” is an elevated expression of reverence. Every knee will bow and every

tongue will confess to God before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-11). “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psm. 111:9). The Psalmist wrote, “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psm. 89:7). The blind man saw it.

Seventh, he saw the merit of asking. He needed something, and he asked for it. He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight” (Mark 10:51). Jesus taught His disciples to ask:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matt. 7:7-11).

James urged proper asking:

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (Jas. 4:2-3).

Eighth, he saw the merit of discipleship. He followed Christ. More people need to open their eyes to the good gifts from God they get every day and respond as did Bartimaeus (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17; Jas. 1:17). Whoever finds his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for the sake of Christ shall find it (Matt. 16:25).

Ninth, he saw the merit of glorification. Luke says that he “followed him, glorifying God” (Luke 18:43). The ultimate goal of a Christian is to “do all to the glory of

God” (1 Cor. 10:31). At Caesarea, Herod was smitten by the angel of the Lord following his eloquent oration “because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:23). The instrument of God’s glory today is the church of Christ (Eph. 3:21).

Tenth, he saw the merit of leadership. He was following Christ and glorifying God, “and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God” (Luke 18:43). The multitude that had given their best efforts to keep Bartimaeus quiet now saw his healing and his example and praised God. Bartimaeus was letting his light shine like a city that is set on a hill, and others were benefiting from his leadership (Matt. 5:14-16).

Now, if the blind man could see all these practical applications from the miracle, what could possibly keep a person with clear vision from seeing them, too? Jesus said:

For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Matt. 13:15-16).

Endnotes

1 Alexander Cruden, **Cruden’s Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments**, eds. A. D. Adams, C.H. Irwin, S.A. Waters (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968), p. 47.

2 “Synoptic” from the Greek *συν* (*sun*) meaning “with” and *ὀπτικὸν* (*optico*) meaning “view.” Webster has “affording a general view of the whole.” **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1980), p. 1174. The Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are synoptic, i.e., written with the same view, as contrasted to John’s Gospel, which is often called “the Gospel of belief.”

3 The final Judean section is contained in Matthew 19-27; Mark 10-15; and Luke 18:15-23:40.

4 Matthew mentions two blind men; Mark and Luke mention one, Bartimaeus. The similarities of the narratives insist upon a common reference point, i.e., one event is receiving comment from three sources. The Gospels often do this, and in doing so they present not contradiction but, moreover, confirmation of the record. **Fausset's Bible Dictionary** offers the following brief discussion on the point: "Seeming discrepancies establish the independence of the witnesses and the absence of collusion. Substantial agreement of many witnesses, amidst circumstantial variety, is the strongest proof of truth. Modes of reconciling seeming discrepancies may not be the true ones, but they at least prove the discrepancies not to be irreconcilable and that they result only from our ignorance of all the facts of each case" (Electronic Database: BibleSoft, 1998). "The healing of two blind men" is the subject of another lecture in this series, and the harmonization of the three Gospel accounts, while an alluring study, is beyond the scope of the present assignment.

5 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1957), p. 50.

6 Ibid.

7 Cf. Hugo McCord, "Treatment of Miracles in the Bible," **The Spiritual Sword** (January 1970), p. 28.

8 Gus Nichols, "Jesus as a Miracle Worker," **The Spiritual Sword** (April 1970), pp. 14-15.

9 Roy H. Lanier, Jr., "The Miracles of Jesus," **The Spiritual Sword** (April 1996), p. 29.

10 Ibid, p. 30.

11 Nichols, p. 13.

12 Cf. Lanier, p. 30.

CHAPTER 18

The Miraculous Catches Of Fish

Jim Laws

Introduction

OF THE MANY MIRACLES performed by Christ there are two that stand out both as interesting, as well as revealing. Those two miracles are the miraculous catches of fish, found first in Luke and then later in the book of John as a different miracle, though utilizing the similar elements. This chapter will deal with both of these miracles and in doing so will develop three major points of emphasis about each. First, consideration will be given to the background and the occasion of these miracles. Second, a brief discussion will be given as to the specific purpose of the miracle along with the reaction to it, if any is mentioned. Then, third, practical application will be given to our present situation of how these two specific miracles performed by Christ help us in living the Christian life faithfully as members of His church.

Obviously, a presentation of this sort has its own presuppositions and limitations, and a brief word about each will help eliminate any ambiguity. For instance, the existence of the God of the Bible, as well as the fact of the inspiration of the Bible itself, is presupposed to be true for this discussion. Sound argumentation can and has been given in regard to both of these crucial matters; however,

to do so here would simply be beyond the parameters of this research. Therefore, it is presupposed for this consideration that God does exist, as He is revealed in the Bible, and that God has revealed His Divine will to man and that will is the Bible. Further, God holds all men everywhere amenable to His Word, more specifically to the New Testament. This, also, means that whatever the Bible says is right and it is never wrong. This would mean that we accept the Biblical presentation of miracles as being true and accurate and, hence, there is no need to explain them away or in any way minimize them by calling into question their historical accuracy. We take the miracles, as presented in God's Word, at face value.

It is further understood that man, as the creation of God, has the ability to reason properly, that is, man is capable of drawing the proper conclusions from the evidence that God has given him. It is understood that God holds man morally responsible for the decisions that he makes. Man's failure to freely choose the right and reject the wrong will result in his forfeiture of the blessings that God has in store for him, both now, as well as in eternity.

Further, it is important to clarify what this research actually means by the term "miracle," since the very word itself is used loosely by so many. First, this paper uses the term to refer to the direct operation and intervention of God in the physical realm, whereby He intentionally sets aside the normal physical processes which He has created and continues to maintain. He has done so to accomplish events which, on their own, i.e., in the physical world, man could never accomplish. Simply put, it is the Divine operation of God directly upon the world. For instance, the creation of the world by the word of God (Heb. 11:3), Jesus' miraculously calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:23-27), and Jesus' walking on the water (John 6:16-21) are but illustrations of what the Bible refers to as a miracle.

It is clear that water on its own will never turn into wine; it simply is impossible for such to occur all on its own. Such could only take place with Divine intervention. An axe head will never float all on its own (2 Kings 6:5-6), but God, Who can do all things—those things that are consistent with His own nature and that are capable of accomplishment—can and has made such to happen.

One final clarification is necessary pertaining to the general topic of miracles and that is that the age of the miraculous has passed, and that God does not work in miraculous fashion today, as He once did.

The Miraculous Catch Of Fish (Luke 5:1-11)

The Background Of The Miracle

The multitude had come to hear Jesus; as Mark states, “the common people heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37). One cannot help but wonder what would have been accomplished if Jesus had not had to face the objections, criticisms, and obstacles placed before Him by the Jewish rulers of His day. In spite of opposition by the enemies of truth, the people wanted to hear Jesus teach, and a multitude had once again assembled by the lake Gennesaret. Two fishing boats were found on the shore. They were most likely smaller in size, as one would infer by the fact that both nearly sunk due to the large catch of fish. Jesus entered into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and instructed him to row out away from the shore. Then He sat down in the boat, a common posture for a Jewish teacher (Luke 5:1), and He taught the crowd (Luke 5:3). When He finished teaching, Jesus told Simon to row the boat out into deep water, let down the net, and catch some fish (Luke 5:4). But Peter objected, citing the fact that they had worked hard all night long, and had not caught a thing (Luke 5:5). He referred to Jesus as “master,”

using an original term (*epistates*, any sort of superintendent or overseer, Thayer), which is the first time that this term had been used in reference to Jesus, which is unique to Luke. Simon agreed to do so and complied with the Lord's instruction. The text introduces us to the faith of Simon by using the phrase, "at thy word." In effect, Simon is saying, "the idea of launching out into the deep for catching fish seems futile, especially after toiling all night without success, but we will do as you have said." When they do, they find that they have caught so many fish that their nets began to break, that is, were at the breaking point, not being able to hold any more (Luke 5:6). Signaling for their partners, who were in the other boat, to come and help them, together they filled the two boats so full that they both began to sink (Luke 5:7). As Simon saw this happen, he knelt down in front of Jesus, asking Jesus not to come close to him, as he acknowledged the fact that he, Simon, was a sinner (Luke 5:8). Peter, along with everyone else, was completely surprised at the amount of fish that was caught, and they were told by Jesus not to be afraid; from now on they would be bringing in people, rather than fish (Luke 5:10). With this statement they pulled their boats upon shore, left everything, and went with Jesus.

The Purpose Of The Miracle

There are a number of revealing considerations about this paragraph of Scripture. First, it is important to keep in mind that Luke does not record for us the sermon that Jesus gave on this occasion. He gives the details to the catch of fish, which means that, in this instance, the focus of our attention is to be on the miracle, that is, what Jesus did, rather than on what Jesus said. Luke has written a treatise designed to reach the Greek with the message of Jesus (See Luke 1:1-4). As a physician by profession, he

asserts the genuineness of Jesus' miracle, which is a characteristic of the book. Luke mentions 20 miracles; six are unique to Luke. Each of the miracles Luke records is treated as being factual, and he treats them as being historical reality. Second, Luke is giving some detail of the circumstances whereby these men were called to be apostles. Consider the fact that it is at this point in the book that Luke, a Gentile, is presenting the work and ministry of Jesus. It is a ministry that is filled with purpose of teaching (Luke 4:16-44), as well as one with proof of Divine power (Luke 5:1-6:11). This is not the first time these men have met the Lord, as John explains. Now, they not only hear the Divine nature of the message which Jesus brings, but they see firsthand the Divine power of God behind this message. It is by means of this great catch of fish that Jesus proves Himself to these men Who and what He is--the Son of God--and because of this proof, they will soon be His apostles. Therefore, an important purpose that Luke has in mind is to give some detail to the call of the apostles and the reason they left their fishing gear and followed the Lord, which was both understandable and reasonable.

Lessons To Be Learned From The Miracle

Peter, after toiling all night long unsuccessfully, was now told by the Lord to row the boat out into the deep water, and let down the nets to catch some fish (Luke 5:4). However, Peter seems to say, "We have already been fishing all night, but if you say so, we will do it again" (Luke 5:5). Peter's statement in the verse seems to indicate that the command of the Lord did not seem reasonable to him, especially after working so long unsuccessfully. He seems to be saying, "We have been doing this all night; why try again?" Nevertheless, Peter complies with the Lord's request. A number of important elements come to mind

about this incident. First, the commands of God are never to be judged by us as being relevant based upon whether they seem reasonable to us or not. For instance, marching around the city of Jericho seven times and blowing the trumpets may not have seemed very reasonable to a general strategizing on how to conquer a city, yet that is the way God said to do it. When Joshua and the children of Israel did as God commanded, they received the promised blessing of, in this case, conquering the city of Jericho (see Joshua 6:17-21). God has said that forgiveness and remission of sins is to be found in one's freely choosing to repent and being baptized (Acts 2:38). "I just don't see any connection between forgiveness and baptism," some one responds. "It just doesn't make sense to me," someone else may say. One must always keep in mind that whatever God says is right, and one cannot improve upon it. The command of God is to be obeyed, regardless. It is not whether our finite perspective sees the command as making sense: that is not the issue. When we pass our own judgment upon the commands of God as to their value, or what may seem reasonable or unreasonable to us, then digression is at hand. Neither can man pass judgment upon the commands of God by saying, "I will obey this command, but that one I will not obey," nor can we somehow ignore what we simply do not want to deal with from the Word of God. The issue is that God has commanded it, and one must obey the command to be pleasing in the sight of God.

Second, there needs to be a clear understanding of what obedience to the commands of God actually means. Biblical obedience to God's commands means doing what God has said, for the reason God has said it, in the way God has said, if and when God has specified a way. For instance, God has commanded that one be baptized. The Scriptures teach by explicit statement that one is to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38); they further

teach that Biblical baptism is an immersion in water (Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12). One sees, in this instance, that, for one to properly comply with the Biblical command to be baptized, the following must be accomplished:

One must obey what God has said (in this case, be baptized).

One must obey what God has said for the reason God has said (in this case, for the remission of sins).

And one must obey what God has said, for the reason God has said, in the way God has said (in this case, immersion in water).

If, for instance, one wants to be baptized, but not for the reason God has given--perhaps, to impress one's friends or one's parents--then, obviously, they have not obeyed the Divine command properly. Perhaps one is willing to be baptized, but is really only willing to be sprinkled, rather than immersed. It is clear that that individual has not obeyed the command of God relative to salvation. There may be times when a command is given, but a reason for obeying the command is not given, or the way to obey the command is not given by God. In such a case one would be free to obey the command of God in the most expedient method that does not violate what we know from the Scriptures. Living in a time when it is not "politically correct" to talk about commands and one's obedience to them, there is a great lesson to be learned in this miracle with regard to obedience.

Peter's fear and confession (Luke 5:8-9) give rise to a number of invaluable lessons. First, consider the fact that, when Peter saw what happened (the miraculous catch of fish), he fell down at Jesus' knees, a gesture of worship and adoration. As one carefully considers the Scriptures, he realizes that this is a common reaction of those who realize that they have come into the presence of Deity. Remember Isaiah, as he received what might be termed

his inaugural vision, where he was permitted to see something of the glory of God and heaven (Isa. 6:1-4). His reaction was, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). The glory of the Lord appeared to Moses and the seventy elders (Exod. 24:9-17). At the time Solomon dedicated the temple, "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:11). Peter's reaction was a common one, as he came to realize Who and what Jesus really is: the only begotten Son of God. May we recognize the need for reverence when it comes to matters that are holy. May we embrace a reverential respect for the name of God, for the Word of God, and for our worship of God. To approach such important matters with a flippant and half-hearted attitude is the common posture of our time, yet such should never be the case.

Second, only God is worthy of our worship (Deut. 6:4-6, 13; Deut. 10:20). This has been the singular lesson of the Bible from beginning to end. The ancient Hebrews suffered captivity in Babylon for their failure in this regard, and modern man is not immune from the temptation of placing his allegiance and affections in the wrong place. It has been said that the gods of the ancients were metal, but the gods of modern man are mental. Anytime that we put something or someone between God and us, then we are guilty of idolatry. Third, God expects man to worship Him and to worship Him properly. As one will notice, Jesus did not rebuke Peter for his recognition and adoration, which is an implicit statement as to His Divine nature. In other words, Peter understood the meaning and purpose of the miraculous catch of fish, that being, to prove to him and to the others that Jesus was indeed God in the flesh. Once again, God has not left man without Divine instruction as to the proper way man is to approach God in worship. The

New Testament has always been and continues to be the Divine pattern for acceptable worship. To deviate from this plan is to go beyond what God has written, causing one to be guilty of sin (1 Cor. 4:6), and thus rendering one's worship of God vain or worthless (Matt. 15:9). To add to our worship that which is not authorized by God is not of faith (Rom. 14:23), since faith comes by hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Therefore, any modern or ancient deviation from the Divine pattern of worship, explicitly given in the Scriptures, is a departure from the will of God, and is sin.

The Miraculous Catch Of Fish (John 21:1-13)

The Background Of The Miracle

John tells of another occasion where Jesus performed a similar miracle of catching a great number of fish. With the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection from the dead having been accomplished, Jesus made a number of post-resurrection appearances. At that time Jesus appeared to His disciples along the shore of the Sea of Galilee (sometimes referred to as the sea of Tiberias, see John 6:1). The Sea of Galilee is a very familiar place for these men. So much of the work of Jesus, both before and now after His resurrection, was in and around this area. He had told them to go up into Galilee and to wait for Him there (See Matt. 28:7, 10). Simon was there, along with Thomas and Nathaniel, as well as James and John and two other disciples (John 21:2). It was Peter, who was so often fervent in spirit, yet at times failing, that had a heart that loved the Lord, but would, also, be one who followed afar off (Matt. 26:58). There was Thomas, who at first questioned the Lord's resurrection from the dead; there was Nathaniel, who was a doubter at the very beginning, and then there were James and John, who were once

referred to as “the sons of thunder” by Jesus. We cannot be sure who were the other two disciples. The apostles were true to the instruction to wait for Jesus in Galilee. Perhaps, while waiting Peter was impatient and announced that he was going fishing, and the other six followed him. Peter, perhaps, was somewhat restless; however, one should not read too much into this fact of going fishing. Jesus did not condemn them for going fishing, but directed them to a miraculous catch. Peter should no more be condemned for seeking food than Paul should be for applying his trade of tentmaking for support.

The night’s work of fishing must have been a frustrating one, as John mentions the fact that they had not caught a thing that night (John 21:3). It was early the next morning that Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize Who He was (John 21:4). Jesus shouted to them, “Have you caught any thing”; they responded, “No.” The Lord’s question is, no doubt, designed to get them to realize the fruitless night’s labor. In doing so He lent emphasis to the miraculous event. Jesus told them, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find” (John 21:6). They did, and the net was so full of fish that they could not drag it up into the boat.

This is the last recorded miracle of the Lord and the only miracle after His resurrection. Jesus is still 100 yards or so away from the boat, being on shore; it is still too dark to visually recognize Him. It is by this fact of the miraculous catch that John realized that it was Jesus. Consequently, John tells Peter, “It is the Lord.” Peter believed, as soon as John said this to him. He immediately put on the clothes that he had taken off while he was working, and jumped into the water. The text says that the boat was about a hundred yards from shore (John 21:8). The rest of the disciples stayed in the boat and dragged in

the net, which was full of fish. When the disciples got back to shore, they got out of the boat and went to the fire which Jesus had built while preparing fish and bread for them to eat.

The text does not say where Jesus got the fish He was preparing over the fire. To say this too was miraculous is without any Biblical basis. Jesus told them “bring of the fish which ye have caught” (John 21:10). Peter draws the net which was full of large fish (one hundred fifty three) to land. The number 153 is given to emphasize the marvelous nature of the miracle. John remarks about how many fish there were; yet the net did not brake (John 21:11). Jesus told them to come and eat, but none of the disciples dared ask Who He was; yet they knew He was the Lord. Jesus took the bread in His hands, gave some of it to His disciples; He did the same with the fish.

The meal that the disciples were invited to partake must have brought a great deal to their minds. Perhaps, they were thinking of the earlier occasion, when they had caught a large quantity of fish (Luke 5:1-11). Perhaps Peter, while warming himself by the fire, remembered another fire by which he had warmed himself during the night when he betrayed and actually denied the Lord himself. As they were eating the bread and the fish, perhaps, they remembered the occasion when Jesus took the loaves and fishes and miraculously fed the five thousand. One can understand why the apostles would sit silently and eat with the Lord, as they reflected upon the work of the past three years. This was, of course, the seventh of ten post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Jesus had appeared to the apostles when Thomas was absent (John 20:19-23), and then a second time with Thomas present (John 20:24-29). John makes the point that this was the third time that Jesus had appeared to His disciples, after He was raised from the dead (John 21:14).

The Purpose Of The Miracle

One will recall Luke's statement regarding the last forty days of the Lord's early life: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). What John has included here in the miraculous catch of fish is part of that forty-day experience designated as "infallible proof." It was part of a series of experiences which the apostles had with the Lord that were compelling and undeniable proofs of both His nature and His mission. Consequently, the miracle's purpose was to build faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the resurrected Christ and to demonstrate the Divine assistance they would have during their labors in the name of Christ. One should keep in mind here that Christ is presenting Himself to His apostles in His resurrected form. The miracle itself was proving that Jesus Christ had been raised in power. It should also be kept in mind that Jesus performed the miracle before they realized Who He was, so that there would be no room for others to say that the apostles had ascribed to Jesus the power of the miracle through friendship or some sort of collusion with Him. Christ remained with them, was with them at the meal, conversed with them, and thus convinced them that He was the Lord, Who died and is now alive again.

Therefore, the miraculous deeds performed by Christ, such as this one, the miraculous catch of fish, were based in historical fact before eyewitnesses with the purpose of bringing us to faith and trust in the person, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christ. John tells us that he was an eyewitness and his testimony is true. The book ends much in the way it began—teaching that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In fact, there were so many sayings of Jesus and so many deeds that it would

have been impractical to have recorded them all (John 21:25). The record we have is sufficient to bring all that will to faith in Christ.

Lessons To Be Learned From The Miracle

The lessons to be learned from John 21 are of inestimable value to all. I will mention only two due to the limitations of space.

When Jesus called to the apostles, as they had been fishing through the night, He asked a haunting question, “Children, have ye any meat?” In other words, “Have you caught any fish to eat?” Their answer is no (John 21:5). To make a spiritual application of the question, one day the Lord will ask His disciples, “Have you caught any fish?” What will our answer be? You will recall that both in John, as well as in Luke, that both instances involved carrying the Gospel to the world. In Luke, Jesus said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10). Here, in John, Jesus discussed with Peter the matter of feeding the sheep, and the apostles followed Him to the ascension having received the great commission of going into all the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-16; Luke 24:46-48). They were told that they would be witnesses of Him “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). They took this responsibility seriously. It takes but a casual reading of the book of Acts to learn of the many instances of literally multitudes of people hearing the Gospel message and obeying. There were many who would reject the message of the apostles, of course, but yet the ancient world was being challenged with the message of Christ, and many who heard it gave up their heathen ways and became Christians.

Is our responsibility to take the Gospel any less than was theirs? Do we not have the great privilege and

responsibility to challenge our respective communities with the message of Christ? Indeed we do, and we must be about the task of doing so. Paul's admonition was to "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). The Gospel is God's power to save sinners, and in it lies the hope of the world (Rom. 1:16). Since the establishment of the church (Acts 2), there has been the need for each one to work in his own respective way to teach others the Gospel, and that need still exists today. We must ask ourselves the question, "How aggressive have I been in teaching others the Gospel?" When He asks me on the day of judgement, "Have you taught any one the Gospel message?" what will I say?

Closely related to this point is the fact that there is the ever-present need to oppose error that would compromise the true Gospel of Christ. A counterfeit gospel is not a gospel: it is a farce. It is only the genuine Gospel of Christ that will save from sin (Gal. 1:6-8, 11). If one's purpose is to better the **social** conditions of the community, then something other than the Gospel can do that job, (though there is naturally a social benefit when a community turns from sin and obeys the Word of God). If one is running for a political office, then another message will do that job. If on the other hand, salvation of souls is in one's mind, then the Gospel of Christ is the **only** message that will do. If I am going to be involved in the salvation of myself and others, then the Gospel of Christ must be my message (Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 10:14-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 1:21).

You will recall that, prior to the miracle, the apostles had toiled all night, yet they had caught nothing. When they responded to Jesus' instruction on how to fish, casting their net on the right side (John 21:6), their net was miraculously filled. When the apostles did as they had been instructed, they received an abundant catch of fish. So it is with the child of God today, as a member of the church

of the Lord. When we do as God has instructed, then we will experience the satisfaction of knowing that we have been obedient to the Lord, as well as experience the reward of faithfulness in the life to come. The Lord's church faces a multitude of pressures coming from the world to conform to the present cultural way of doing things. For instance, there is the view to expand the woman's role in the work of the church to include a public presence in the worship. Even though God has revealed what our respective roles are, as men and women belonging to the Lord, still there are those who want to do things their way, rather than the way God has legislated. Women taking a public position of reading Scriptures, leading the congregation in prayer, serving at the Lord's table are but a few illustrations of what has become, for some, a common procedure.

When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, women, as well as men, came into it in great numbers (Acts 5:14). There were no distinctions made in conditions of membership between the sexes. Furthermore, the importance of women to the whole church is reflected by the concern which the early church had for widows who needed care and help (Acts 6:1-6). The good works of women are frequently mentioned in Scripture. Dorcas is cited as an example of faithful, loving service (Acts 9:36-39). Lydia is revealed as being a woman of great hospitality (Acts 16:11-15). Phoebe is described as a "servant of the church that is in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). Paul describes the qualifications for women who were to be devoted fulltime in Christian work and to be supported by the church. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, these qualifications included widowhood, being sixty or more years of age, having no kin of their own to support them, and being "well reported of for good works." These good works were then stated as (1) bringing up children, (2) showing hospitality to strangers, (3) washing the saints' feet, (4) relieving the

afflicted, and (5) diligently following every good work. Women's' role in the private teaching of God's Word is also referenced in Scripture. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, privately taught Apollos. Titus 2:4 commands older women to train younger women in Christian living. The Scripture teaches that men and women are equally valuable in the eyes of God; however, it also teaches that men and women are to fill different roles in the church. For instance, in the Lord's plan for church government, each congregation is to be led by elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1). In listing the qualifications for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), and for deacons (1 Tim. 3:12), being the "husband of one wife" is mentioned. This obviously excludes women from these roles; only men are to be elders and deacons. Although women can teach privately, as shown in the example of Priscilla, women are forbidden to teach men publicly (1 Tim. 2:12). The common practice today of women being accepted as preachers is not a practice approved in the New Testament and should not be practiced in the church (1 Cor. 14:34).

There are other changes being advocated. For instance, in our worship of God, changes are sought, which are more of a bending to cultural pressure than conforming to Biblical precept. Once again, the trend of the times is to have an entertainment atmosphere in which to worship. "Bigger is better," we are told, though there is certainly nothing wrong with the growth of a congregation of God's people making it a more powerful influence for Truth in a community. However, bigger for the sake of being bigger, causing brethren to change their attitudes toward doing things that are not correct and right just to bring more people in, is not Scriptural. When we think about what people want in worship, and change things accordingly, we have failed to understand the Truth and purpose of New Testament worship. The truth of the matter is that

worship is not brought to us; it is not something we receive; worship is something that we give (please see Psm. 106:1; Psm. 116:17; Heb. 13:15-17; Rev. 14:7). Certainly there are benefits to be received from our faithful worship of God; however, worship is the giving of our praise to God in the way and manner God has prescribed in the New Testament.

Simply put, we do not have the authority to take it upon ourselves to change the instructions that the Lord has given us. If we want to be successful, that is, to be pleasing in the sight of God because of our faithful obedience to His Word, then we will follow His instructions in doing things God's way, rather than ours.

Summation

This chapter has been involved in studying two important miracles of Christ that are of similar nature, but different in place and time. Each of these miracles presents a picture of Jesus as being loving, kind, and caring, yet at the same time, purposeful in His mission, omniscient in His wisdom, and omnipotent in His power. It is no wonder then that the miracles of Christ became one of the first lines of evidence given to a hostile world, as the apostles went everywhere preaching the Word. They removed all doubt and filled the heart with faith that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

CHAPTER 19

The Healing Of The Syrophoenician Woman's Daughter

Keith Cozort

Introduction

THE **POWER LECTURESHIP** HAS been a tremendous blessing to our brotherhood throughout the years. The balanced stand for truth is appreciated by those who truly love the Word of God and the brotherhood. The elders of the Southaven congregation, brethren Larry Everson, Bill Pierce, Coleman Simpson and Con Lambert, are to be commended for their determination to “ask for the old paths...and walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). Also, brother B. J. Clarke is to be complimented for his continued efforts with this fine congregation and as Director of the **POWER** Lectureship. The brethren of this congregation are also to be commended for the fine fashion in which they make the lectureship speakers and attendees feel truly welcome throughout the week. Mere words cannot express the sincere appreciation my family and I have for this congregation and your labors. May your number greatly increase both here and abroad!

This year's lectureship theme is **The Miracles of Jesus Christ**. This is an excellent theme and serves as a complement to last year's lectureship theme: **The**

Parables of Jesus. This year's lectureship will be of help to strengthen the faith of all those who attend to hear the verbal presentation of these lessons, and to all those who will read the printed manuscripts in this volume.

The miracles of Jesus served a very important purpose. They provided powerful proof "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). These miracles demonstrated that the claims Jesus made about Himself were in fact true. As Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews proclaimed, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). These miracles, and those performed by the apostles, would confirm and verify that what was being proclaimed was in fact the inspired Word of God. Mark records, "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). The miracles were God's "stamp of approval" of the messenger and his message.

The text for "**The Healing Of The Syrophenician Woman's Daughter**" is Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. Let's notice the context of this event and then we'll examine this great miracle of our Lord.

The Pious Pharisees And Scribes

Immediately preceding the record of the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, in the books of Matthew and Mark, we have the record of certain Pharisees and scribes who came from Jerusalem to the land of Gennesaret (Matt. 14:34). The land of Gennesaret is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

These Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For

they wash not their hands when they eat bread” (Matt. 15:2). These Jerusalem Jews, having witnessed the disciples eating their meal without first having washed their hands, become fault finders. They are not overly troubled with the disciples’ hygienic practices, or the lack thereof, but are rather perturbed because the Lord’s disciples are not following “the tradition of the elders” as it related to supposed ceremonial uncleanness.

One could become unclean by touching something dead or even, as they claimed, by touching a Gentile:

For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables (Mark 7:3-4).

The washings Mark refers to were not washings resulting from the dishes or body parts being soiled or dirty. Rather, the tradition of the elders demanded, “immersing them when they needed no washing, immersing them for an imaginary religious purification.”¹ These traditions had become extremely important to the scribes and Pharisees:

Belief in the traditions of the elders was the fundamental peculiarity of the Pharisaic system. They held that these traditions, or oral expositions of and additions to the law, were revealed to Moses along with the law, and were communicated by him orally to the elders of the people, by whose successors they had been handed down through each successive generation. They regarded these traditions as equal in authority with the written word.²

These oral traditions were eventually written down and became known as the Mishnah: “Unfortunately, the *Mishnah* became more important and more authoritative

than the original Law of Moses.”³ By asking the question, the Pharisees and scribes are also implicating Jesus as One Who ignores the tradition of the elders. Since He is allowing His disciples to do these things without rebuke, Jesus becomes guilty of complicity.

There are those in the religious world today whose staunch hold to tradition is just as strong as the Pharisees and scribes of the first century. It is believed that if the Bible and tradition become at odds with one another, then tradition must be held to tenaciously. Brother O. C. Lambert, in his two volume exposé of Catholicism, quoted the following from the November 8, 1958, issue of **The Question Box Column**, in the **Brooklyn Tablet**:

The Vatican Council has decreed as an article of Faith that Tradition is a source of theological teaching distinct from Scripture and that it is infallible...Whereas much of the teaching contained in the books of the Bible could not be determined without Tradition, Tradition as a source of Faith would suffice without Scripture.⁴

Therefore, to these religionists, tradition is better than the Scriptures. The Bible is of no real value, as far as they are concerned, when compared to tradition.

Jesus answered the scribes and Pharisees’ question with a question: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). In Mark’s account, Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees, saying, “For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men” and “ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:8-9). They were ignoring God’s command to “honor thy father and thy mother” (Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10; Exod. 20:12) by their tradition of “Corban.” Corban means, “‘a gift,’ ‘a sacrificial offering,’ lit. ‘that which is brought near,’ viz. to the altar... It is the most general term for a sacrifice of any

kind.”⁵ As a result of the tradition of the elders, Corban became a way to “get around” or by-pass the law of God as it related to financially taking care of one’s parents in their old age. The practice was to dedicate one’s possessions to God by calling them “Corban”:

Anything dedicated to the temple by pronouncing the votive word “C.” forthwith belonged to the temple, but only ideally; actually it might remain in the possession of him who made the vow.⁶

Therefore, the man retained possession of that which had been dedicated to the temple, or God, and he was free to use it as long as he desired, but he could not give it to anyone else, such as his parents by assisting them financially, because it was Corban. Thus, the law of God, in making sure that the elderly are provided for by their offspring when they are no longer able to provide for themselves, has been rendered ineffective by the tradition of the elders. Jesus will also state, “and many such like things ye do” (Mark 7:13), thereby showing He could give any number of other examples from their traditions which demonstrated their nullifying effect on the Word of God.

Jesus will then teach that real defilement is not caused by eating with ceremonially unwashed hands but rather by that which originates in the heart and comes out of the mouth (Matt. 15:11-20). Jesus has no use for these “blind leaders” who will cause others, who are also blind, to fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:14).

The Place--Phoenicia

Jesus will travel to the Mediterranean coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre is located about 35 miles north of Mt. Carmel and Sidon is about 20 miles north of Tyre. These cities are located in the province of Phoenicia, which

means, “palm land.” Phoenicia was a narrow strip of land near the northwest corner of the Mediterranean Sea. It was about 28 miles in length and averaged about 1 mile in width.

This is the only reference in Scripture to Jesus leaving Canaan, except when His parents took Him to Egypt as an infant in order to flee from the wrath of king Herod (Matt. 2:11-15). This will end up being the northernmost point of His recorded travels.

The Petition Pronounced

Our Lord enters into a house and desires that it not be made public, “but he could not be hid” (Mark 7:24). Mark further indicates that the reason Jesus could not be hid was because of a certain woman who “heard of him, and came and fell at his feet” (Mark 7:25).

This woman is unnamed; by heritage she is a Greek Canaanite, therefore a non-Jew, a Gentile; by her nationality she is a Syrian of Phoenicia. All of these descriptions would normally indicate that a “good” Jew would have absolutely nothing to do with her. He would become ceremonially unclean if He came in contact with her. Yet, “the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18) will once more ignore the tradition of the elders and have contact with this Gentile woman.

This woman has a young daughter who is possessed of an evil spirit, a demon. Her cry is, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil” (Matt. 15:22). She is fully aware that they are of differing nationalities. Yet, she is in need of the Master’s help for her daughter.

We do not read of anyone being possessed by evil spirits or demons before the time of Christ. Some may point to king Saul’s having an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:14-23) and claim he was possessed of demons but it was not demon

possession. This evil spirit came upon him as a result of his refusal to obey the commands of God. Therefore, “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him” (1 Sam. 16:14). King Saul’s evil spirit could be pacified or calmed with the music David played on his harp. The evil spirit even departed from king Saul for a while as a result of David’s playing. The evil spirits, demons, of the New Testament were not so easily calmed.

The majority of the accounts concerning demon possession are recorded during the life of Christ:

we find numerous cases of demon possession which the Lord and His apostles healed by the exercise of miraculous power. Reading in the book of Acts, we find few cases of demon possession (Acts 5:16; Acts 8:7; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:12). As we examine the epistles, we find, as in the Old Testament, a complete absence of references to demon possession. This seems to indicate the cessation of demon possession toward the close of the apostolic age.⁷

The exorcism of these demons was one of the means whereby Jesus demonstrated His power and authority (Mark 1:27). They were subject unto Him and had to comply with His demands (Matt. 8:28-32). He even had the authority to command them to depart into the abyss (Luke 8:31): “Evidently this was to be a place of eternal consignment, from which they could not return.”⁸ This power and authority could not be used by an unauthorized individual, as the seven sons of Sceva discovered (Acts 19:13-17).

These demons often caused many cruel things to happen to the person in whose body they resided. The father of a son possessed by a demon states:

wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and

pineth away...ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him (Mark 9:18, 22).

When the demon departed from the individual it often caused great pain and suffering to the physical body of the one possessed. Mark records, “the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead” (Mark 9:26).

Is it any wonder that this loving mother would be seeking assistance and relief for her daughter?

The Prince Of Peace Holds His Peace

To most people’s amazement Jesus “answered her not a word” (Matt. 15:23). One would probably expect to hear such castigating remarks as, “How cruel can one man be?” “I thought He was a man of love!” “With such actions He expects people to believe He is the Son of a loving God?” Jesus is going to be making a point. It will be made to the mother, to the disciples, and to the scribes and Pharisees, if they are still present.

Jesus is, in effect, treating the Syrophenician woman the way the Pharisees and scribes thought all Gentiles should be treated. The Gentiles, they believed, are “unclean” and are not worthy of our time and efforts. Jesus will once again attempt to teach the second greatest commandment of the old law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18). To illustrate this command Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The priest and the Levite ignored the man who was beaten and robbed by thieves. The Samaritan, whom the Jews despised, showed himself a neighbor to the man laying by the roadside. If Jesus is to follow the example of the Pharisees and the tradition of the elders, He will only be able to turn a deaf ear to the mother’s cry for mercy.

The Practice Of Patience Is Lacking

The apostles call upon Jesus to “send her away; for she crieth after us” (Matt. 15:23). It is not clear from the text whether they are wanting Jesus to send her away granting her petition or if they desire Him to send her away refusing to grant her petition. Some believe the apostles were asking Jesus to send the mother away without granting her request. If that is the case, then they were truly hard-hearted, considering the situation in which this Syrophenician woman found herself. Such attitudes toward a young girl who could receive help from no other person but Christ would indicate the extreme prejudice plaguing the nation of Israel. It would be heartless, to say the least. Again, such attitudes were descriptive of many of the Pharisees and scribes who were supposed to understand the law and its teachings.

There seems to be some indication that they simply wanted Jesus to quickly get rid of the nuisance by granting her wish. Jesus had desired some privacy, and this woman was keeping Him and the apostles from achieving such. If this is so, then it appears that they are unconcerned about granting her mercy or compassion. They are simply wanting to rid themselves of an annoyance.

Of course, neither scenario is overly complimentary for the apostles. But I would hope that they had at least a small amount of sympathy for the daughter.

The Primary Plan Of God Proclaimed

Jesus knew He would eventually grant the Greek woman’s request but He seems to expect the apostles to contemplate their own attitude toward the situation. Therefore He states, evidently answering the apostles’ request for the Syrophenician woman’s daughter, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Jesus is still making His point concerning

the unrighteous attitude of the scribes and Pharisees toward the Gentiles which has been brought about as a result of the tradition of the elders.

While it is true that Jesus' main responsibility was to the lost house of Israel, that did not mean He could not show any kindness to a woman in need even though she was a Syrophenician Gentile.

The Prostrated, Prayerful Mother

The Syrophenician mother will then come and worship Jesus. The term "worship" means, "to do reverence or homage by kissing the hand; in N.T. to do reverence or homage by prostration."⁹ She will prostrate herself before Jesus in reverence by paying homage to Him. Matthew, the apostle and penman of the book, will make sure we understand that she was not worshipping Jesus before this time even though she was making the same request.

This mother pleads with Jesus, "Lord, help me" (Matt. 15:25). She recognizes Jesus' ability and power to grant her petition. Her faith in Christ is similar to that of Peter's, when, after many of Christ's "disciples went back, and walked no more with him," the Lord asked the apostles, "Will ye also go away?" Peter then answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:66-69). This Syrophenician mother is not ashamed to beg for Jesus' help. He is her only hope for relieving her daughter's grievous condition.

The Prosperity Promised

Jesus answers her pleading with, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:26). The word "meet" means "suitable or becoming." Therefore to throw the children's food to the dogs was

unthinkable, unsuitable, and unbecoming. When Jesus said the food should not be cast to the “dogs,” He was not expressing the prejudicial sentiments of the Pharisees. Rather, He is simply using an illustration to say the time is not right for attention to be given to the Gentiles. Mark’s account reads, “Let the children first be filled” (Mark 7:27). Jesus implies there will eventually come the time when those who are not “the children” would be fed as well. As brother Winfred Clark stated, “the door of hope is left open for the Gentiles.”¹⁰ The Gospel, the “good news,” would be taken to those non-Jews also in due time.

The Persistent Pleading

The woman, evidently detecting the “crack in the door,” continues her pleading for Jesus’ assistance. Even though many would have considered being referred to as a “dog” to be a “slap in the face,” this Canaanite mother pays it no mind. She, evidently, does not “wear her feelings on her sleeves.” She must have realized that if her daughter is going to receive the exorcism of the demon from her body, as she desires, then she must be willing to endure whatever supposed insults or supposed mistreatment which may take place for her daughter’s sake. Brother McGarvey states:

By using the word dogs, Jesus did not mean to convey the impression that he shared the Jewish prejudices against the Gentiles; a construction which would be contrary to Luke 4:25-26; Matt. 8:10-12.¹¹

Her response to Jesus’ statement is, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (Matt. 15:27). She agrees with the basic sentiment which Jesus has expressed about giving good food to the dogs. But, she states, it is also true that the “little dogs,”

which she is willing to be designated and described as such, are allowed to eat the crumbs which fall to the floor “even while the meal is in progress.”¹² By such, she is indicating that Jesus’ ability to remove the demon from her daughter would simply be a crumb and not a full meal.

The Prize For Persevering Faith

This mother’s persistent and persevering faith is going to be praised and proclaimed by the Lord of hosts. Jesus said, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matt. 15:28). Surely no greater words could have been spoken in the ears of this concerned mother. The result which the Syrophenician woman desired will now be granted. The Great Physician will heal the hurting, demon-possessed daughter of this Canaanite mother.

There was no doubt in this mother’s mind that Jesus was able to heal her daughter. Neither is there any indication she doubted His words concerning her daughter’s being delivered from the demon: “And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matt. 15:28).

Jesus did not have to see the daughter for her to be healed. He did not have to touch her for the demon to leave her. He did not ask about the daughter’s faith in His ability to cast out the demon from her. None of those things mattered. Jesus, the Son of God, was able to cast the demon from the young daughter of the Syrophenician woman, and such He did.

The Practical Profit

There are certainly several practical lessons to be learned, and by which we may profit, from the account of the healing of the Syrophenician woman’s daughter.

First, Jesus teaches an important lesson concerning prejudice. Many of the Jews, including the

scribes and Pharisees, were prejudiced against anyone who was not Jewish. They had developed laws and interpretations of laws which stigmatized and discriminated against all non-Jews. Jesus, through the parable of the good Samaritan and the healing of this Syrophenician woman's daughter, is attacking the ungodliness of such treatments. Unfortunately, the same mindset is prevalent in our society and around the world. We continue to see these same prejudices carried out in Palestine, but we also see the same attitudes in our own country. Our Lord still teaches, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

It is heartbreaking to say, but true none the less, that we see the same attitudes demonstrated even within the body of Christ. When brethren will not treat their fellow brethren as they should or when they look down on them because of their skin color, heritage, nationality, education or lack thereof, and even where they may have been born, we are seeing the same ungodliness which was demonstrated by the scribes and Pharisees. What is the reason for the problems we see between brethren? Brother Richard Melson writes:

The root of the problem is the failure of mankind to understand one another, and to overcome pride, greed, and the lust of the flesh which are contrary to the expressed will of God (1 John 2:15-17).¹³

I would also suggest that the problem is not just one sided. It exists on both, or all, sides! As James, the half-brother of Jesus, stated, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (Jas. 3:10). May we always remember that Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Second, Jesus teaches the same lesson He taught in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

Jesus' purpose in giving the parable was to teach "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). The Syrophenician woman demonstrated the same kind of persistence and determination in seeking relief for her daughter. After the parable Jesus asked, "shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:7-8). Our Heavenly Father is desirous of our petitions being expressed to Him (Phil. 4:6). He is able to help and comfort but He wants us to make our request known to Him.

Third, another lesson to be learned from the Syrophenician woman's daughter being healed is that we must be willing to go to the right person for assistance and help. There was no other person to whom this woman could have gone in order to have the demon removed from her daughter. Jesus was her only hope. Many are willing, even eager, to go to someone other than Jesus. They go to psychics, astrologers, even internet chat rooms, when they are in need of help. We must be willing to go to the right source for assistance.

Fourth, we often let petty things get in the way of receiving the good which is available. The Syrophenician mother could have gone away "in a huff" when she heard Jesus' statement about not feeding the dogs with the children's food. She caught the implication of His statement. She could have expressed her distaste for the **apparent** cutting remark, but she used Jesus' statement as an opportunity to once again make her point of needing His help. She was not going to let this **apparent** attitude, which had been expressed and demonstrated in times past by the scribes and Pharisees, to keep her from her goal. Her daughter was worth anything she might have to endure, as long as she could have the demon cast out.

Fifth, we need to be careful of unrighteous judgment toward others. Jesus taught that we are to “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). We are to be those who will examine the evidence and draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence (1 Thess. 5:21).

The healing of the Syrophenician woman’s daughter is an account which demonstrates our Lord’s willingness to be fair and kind to all mankind, no matter what their background. May we ever strive to live more in accordance with Peter’s admonition:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil (1 Pet. 3:8-12).

Endnotes

1 J. W. McGarvey, **Commentary On Matthew And Mark** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1875), p. 306.

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3 Warren W. Wiersbe, **The Bible Exposition Commentary** (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), p. 53.

4 O. C. Lambert, **Catholicism Against Itself**, Volume 2, (Shreveport, LA: Lambert, 1965), pp. 70-71.

5 William Baur, **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, ed. James Orr, Volume 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983 reprint), p. 709.

6 Ibid.

7 Darrell Conley, **The Gospel Versus Occultism**, (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1997 reprint), p. 32.

8 Ibid, p. 33.

9 Harold K. Moulton, **The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised**, ed. Harold K. Moulton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), p. 351.

10 Winfred Clark, "The Servant Of Jehovah's Reaction, Reasoning, Response And Reputation," **The Book Of Mark**, Spiritual Sword Lectureship, ed. Jim Laws (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1989), p. 219.

11 McGarvey, p. 401.

12 Ibid.

13 Richard D. Melson, **The Church Must Overcome Racial Barriers** (Dayton, OH: manuscript), p. 6.

CHAPTER 20

The Healing Of Ten Lepers

Bobby Liddell

Introduction

THE *SOUTHAVEN CONGREGATION* HAS made a contribution of inestimable value to the education and edification of multitudes through the annual **POWER** Lectures. Again, this year, the selection of topics and the direction of the lectureship have worked together to result in a blessing to all who have had the privilege of partaking. The godly elders of this faithful church are men whose hearts are set on the furtherance of the Truth and the salvation of precious souls. Under their oversight, these lectures get better every year. The capable ministers have labored together with scores of zealous workers to make this a pleasant and rewarding experience. Brother B. J. Clarke has shown himself to be a man of unusual ability, amazing stamina, and constant devotion to our Lord and Savior as he has directed the lectures. Therefore, it is a privilege and honor to take part in this lecture series and to commend it to all.

Luke, in his inspired Gospel, recorded the account of Jesus' cleansing of ten lepers:

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers,

which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole (Luke 17:11-19).

As we contemplate this factual chronicle of these events, which took place one day near the end of the earthly life of Jesus, we are first saddened by the lamentable plight of these men called lepers. Just saying the word “leper” causes us to recoil from the thought of the dreadful, disfiguring, and deadly effects of the disease which beset these poor victims.

Then, continuing in the report, our hearts are lifted as we read how they “lifted up their voices,” and implored the Master for mercy. Their paths had crossed with the very One Who could heal them. Miraculously, the Lord cleansed them. Surely, we would think each of the ten, so spared from the loathsome existence which had been his, would rejoice and praise God, giving to Him the honor and glory due for such a marvelous change wrought in his life. After all, they were spared and given life. However, only one, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks. We can hardly believe the ingratitude and thoughtless thanklessness of the others. Their silence speaks loudly, clearly, and lamentably through the centuries. We contemplate the sadness of the absence of their heartfelt thanks when we read the words of Jesus, “Where are the nine?”

Immediately, our hearts race to the thought: “Have we expressed our gratitude to God as we should? Or, are we as one of the nine?”

The Setting Of The Miracle

After the great miracle of Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus, and the response of many of the Jews’ believing on Him, the chief priests and Pharisees began to plot against the Messiah:

Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death (John 11:45-53).

Jesus knew of His impending suffering and death upon the cross:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

However, it was not yet time for Christ to die; thus, He went to a “country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim” (John 11:54). From there, He subsequently went on His way to Jerusalem, where the Son of God would die, “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” crucified as the Savior of man (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9; Rom. 5:8-9). His journey would have taken Him from where He was in Ephraim “through the midst of Samaria and Galilee” (Luke 17:11). At the time of the events under our consideration, the Lord had been in Perea, the area beyond the Jordan, for approximately three and one-half months.¹ Thus, He entered into a “certain village.”

The pitiable cry for mercy from these ten men who were suffering from leprosy provided the opportunity for Jesus to extend His mercy and manifest His compassion through their miraculous healing, to demonstrate His power as true Deity incarnate, and to teach much needed lessons to all men—lessons which still apply today. Of the genuineness of this miracle, there was no question. None could doubt they were lepers in genuine need of healing. Nor could any doubt they were healed—by Jesus. Even His enemies could not successfully refute the evidence of ten men cleansed from their leprosy.

The Lamentable Cry Of Ten Lepers

These men were lepers!

Leprosy is one of the most dreaded and terrible diseases known to man. It starts with sores; then, it eats away at bodily tissues until the body itself begins to be consumed. The nose, the lips disappear; fingers decay and fall off; joint after joint separates, eventually, the vital organs cease to function and death follows.²

Their disease was, at the time, incurable by man. Therefore, there was virtually no hope for them. Not only

were they doomed to a slow disfiguring of their physical bodies, caused by the gradual falling off of their flesh, they also were consigned to the position of social outcasts. Under Old Testament law, they were not allowed to draw near to others, but had to “dwell alone; without the camp”:

Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead (Num. 5:2).

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be (Lev. 13:45-46).

Leprosy was contagious; thus, they were separated from others to avoid spreading their infection. That is the reason why, sad and alone, these poor men “stood afar off” (Luke 17:12). Yet these pitiable men “lifted up their voices” to cry out to Jesus. Because of their being separated from the presence of others, standing afar off, they found it necessary to call out loudly in order to be heard: “Because lepers could not associate with others, they usually congregated together for the sake of association; and, in this instance, there were ten of them.”³ From the sad spectacle of these men, grouped together in their pain and distress, came the sorrowful sound of their wail: “We are told that the leper’s voice is dry, harsh and squeaky.”⁴ Obviously, their appeal was out of desperation. Christ was their last and only hope.

Their outcry indicated they had hope in the One Whom they called “Master” (cf. Luke 8:24; Matt. 23:8). They must have heard of the miracle-working ability of this one called the Son of the Highest, the Son of God (Luke 1:32, 35).

No doubt, the accounts of His healing others had come to their ears. Previously, He had healed a “man full of leprosy” (Luke 5:12-14), and the news of this wonderful event had gone far and wide. The inspired physician’s account shows the impact: “But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities” (Luke 5:15). A glimmer of hope must have shone forth from the day these pitiable lepers first learned of such power upon earth. A spark had been ignited within them, fanned by their desperation and fueled by their expectation. If only they could find Jesus, could this man from Nazareth (Luke 4:16), Who said He came down from Heaven (John 6:38), actually heal a leper? Would He heal them? Was it possible they might one day be clean?

Note also their unashamedly appealing to the Lord for mercy. What position had these men occupied before the life-changing onset of leprosy? We do not know; however, we do know that leprosy set them all on the same level. Kings (2 Kings 15), noblemen (2 Kings 5), and commoners alike (2 Kings 7) shared a mutual fate as lepers. It is generally believed that, while one of these men was named as a Samaritan, the others were Jews (Luke 17:16). Even the haughty Jew could no longer look down upon the Samaritan as unclean and unfit for his company when they both had leprosy (John 4:9). Let this be a lesson to us. As Jesus approached, they all realized they all needed His mercy.

Likewise, sin puts us all on level ground. Paul concluded Jew and Gentile were guilty (Rom. 3:23). None of us can correctly look down upon the other, as did the Pharisee upon the publican, and boast of our righteousness while despising others:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous,

and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

Thus, commonly afflicted and in need, they all begged for mercy from the Master. They realized their plight and that it was no time for pride to prevent their seizing the only possible opportunity they had for healing. Today, many forfeit the healing from sin, which Christ offers, because of pride. Are we too proud to admit sin has made us unclean, outcast, and doomed to death? Is it too much for us to bow humbly before the Master and beg for mercy?

The Way Whereby They Were Healed

The lepers' cry to the Master for mercy did not go unheeded. Without Christ's touching them, they were healed. Their faith was manifested in that they were not healed the moment He spoke, but responded to His test of their faith, in their obedience to His command to show themselves to the priests (Jas. 2:17-18). That is, they left Him lepers and, by their faith, they went on their way to the priests; thus, while going, they were healed. Notice they were not promised healing by Jesus, but, heeding His instructions, were healed. So-called "healers" today often make a great display of popping their gullible and unsuspecting dupes on the forehead, initiating within them

the response for which they have been programmed, that is, causing them to swoon and fall on the ground. This is supposed to be dramatic evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit working through the fake healer to heal miraculously. Jesus did not stoop to such self-serving showmanship, nor was He a devilish deceiver lying to men and tricking them out of their money. He had the power today's swindling charlatans and money-loving impostors falsely claim.

None can legitimately deny that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and had power to perform miracles (cf. Matt. 9:6-8; 15:30-31; 21:14-15; Mark 6:49-51; Luke 4:35-37; John 2:11, 23; John 3:2; John 6:2, 14; John 11:47; et al.). Therefore, John, by inspiration, penned:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

In preaching Christ to those assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost, Peter proclaimed:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

There is no doubt that Jesus was the mighty miracle worker Who had come down from Heaven. The evidence is too great and the credible witnesses too many for one to deny His power. There is also no doubt that Jesus could have healed these men in whatever way He chose:

The marvelous diversity of methods in Jesus' miracles is a mark of their divine originality.

Some were healed in one circumstance, some in others; most were healed instantaneously; one or two were healed in stages; some were touched by Jesus, others were not; some were commanded to tell it, others forbidden to tell it; some upon the basis of their own faith, others upon the faith of friends; some were healed in his presence, others in absentia; and, true to such diversity, there is a unique angle here, in that they were commanded to go show themselves to the priests (a necessary requirement of the Law, before they could be pronounced cured and reenter society); and they were healed enroute! No forger could have imagined a circumstance like this.⁵

One who recovered from leprosy was to show himself to the priest, and offerings were to be made in order for the priest to proclaim him clean (Lev. 14:1-32). Therefore, since Jesus lived under the Law of Moses (Gal. 4:4), and kept it perfectly (1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15), He commanded them, “Go shew yourselves unto the priests” (Luke 17:14): “Though actually clean, through the miraculous power of Christ, these lepers had to be made legally clean by compliance with the Law of Moses in order to be allowed association with the people.”⁶

The Gratitude Of One

Jesus asked, “Were there not ten cleansed?” (Luke 17:17): “All were ready to receive a blessing; all cried for mercy; but nine were not as anxious to give praise and thanksgiving.”⁷ There were ten who were lifted from despair because of their earnest cry and their faith in Jesus—and it seems nine of them were Jews. However, only one returned to give thanks and glorify God, “and he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:15-16). Only one had a “voice of prayer (which) became a voice of praise. With a loud voice he had begged for mercy; with a loud voice he glorified God”⁸:

They were all probably happy; but one of them was both happy and grateful; when he realized that he had been healed, knowing that the Lord was the healer, returned to where the Lord was, shouting and glorifying God. When he came to where the Savior was, the cleansed man fell at the Lord's feet, pouring out his thanks. This he did in reverence and honor and to show the deep gratitude that he felt in his heart. In stating that the man who returned was a Samaritan, it is implied that the nine others (who did not turn back) were Jews. The ones who did not return had stood the test of faith, but they failed in the test of love. Many of us are more disposed to follow the example of the nine than the one. We are often more ready to ask for blessings, than to thank God for the ones we enjoy.⁹

One alone was grateful. How like men today! All men receive blessings from God (Matt. 5:45), but how many are thankful? Most reject Him, rejecting His Word (John 12:48), and attribute their lives to blind chance (organic evolution), and their prosperity to their own cunning and wisdom. Many curse Him and say in their hearts, "There is no God" (Psm. 14:1). Even among those who have known the spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3), many are not thankful enough to fall at His feet with words of grateful praise, nor by faithful service to live lives which glorify God (Matt. 5:16). What a deplorable shame!

Why did not the nine return? Before we condemn them, let us consider how often we beseech God in our entreaties to Him, but fail to thank Him for answered prayer. For example, how often do we pray that God will bless the sick, but fail to thank Him for those who have recovered? In addition, how many manifest their gratitude by liberal giving? By faithful attendance? By zealous work?

Of the thankless nine, Coffman wrote:

One waited to see if the cure was real.
One waited to see if it would last.

One said he would see Jesus later.
One decided that he never had leprosy.
One said he would have gotten well anyway.
One gave the glory to the priests.
One said, "O well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
One said, "Just any rabbi could have done it."
One said, "I was already much improved."¹⁰

A Comparison Of Leprosy And Sin

The tragic conditions and consequences of leprosy have been compared to sin, and rightfully so. **First, consider that leprosy makes one unclean** (Lev. 13:3; Lev. 10:10) and, according to the Law of Moses, separates him from the clean. The only ones who would company with these leprous men were other lepers (cf. 2 Kings 7:3). They were unable to be with friends and family whom they loved and for whose company they longed. They could not move freely in society for they could not go where non-lepers went. They were condemned as unclean and outcast.

Sin makes one spiritually unclean and causes separation of a different sort. Isaiah, some seven and a half centuries earlier, had written:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Sin separates one from the Lord. More than that, sin separates one from those washed and made clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5; Rom. 6:3-4). Sin puts one in company with sinners! It keeps one from the fellowship of the faithful (1 John 1:7-10; Psm. 1:5) and keeps one out of Heaven (Rev. 21:27; Rev. 22:14; Rev. 14:13), causing him to face the punishment of God's wrath (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 25:41). One in sin is condemned as unclean and is an outcast from the good and pure.

Second, leprosy robs one of hope. There was no hope for these men according to the medical knowledge and treatment options of their day (cf. Lev. 13:1-14:32). If they were healed, it would not be by the power of man. If there were available medical knowledge to heal leprosy, would not Azariah (also known as Uzziah), the king of Judah, with his power, money, and influence, have sought and received medical treatment to heal him? Certainly, he would (2 Chron. 26:16-21; 2 Kings 15:5). However, no such treatment was available. The hopelessness of human remedy for leprosy is shown in a very vivid way by the plight of Naaman and his miraculous healing:

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-3).

Thinking to help his honorable captain, the king of Syria sent Naaman, with a letter, to the king of Israel:

And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me (2 Kings 5:6-7).

Note the king of Israel's response when asked to heal Naaman of his leprosy: "Am I God...to recover a man of his leprosy?" He understood man had no such power! However, when Naaman went to the prophet Elisha, the instructions given him were, though at first rejected by him, just what he should do in obedience to God in order to be cleansed: "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (2 Kings 5:10).

When Naaman did what God, through the prophet, commanded, he was made clean—not by any power within the muddy waters of the Jordan—but by the power of God.

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean (2 Kings 5:14).

Even the noble and wealthy man Naaman had no hope of relief and healing apart from the power of God.

Likewise, sin robs one of hope. Hope is found in Christ, "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). Without Christ, there is no hope (Eph. 2:12). For sin, there is no hope of a human remedy. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, declared, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). When many of Christ's disciples had deserted Him, Jesus asked the twelve, "Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68). Thus, John the Immerser, upon seeing Jesus coming, rightly proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Christ is the One in Whom is salvation and eternal life; thus, in Him is hope. As Paul wrote, so we live, "In hope of eternal life, which

God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2). Too many seeking healing from sin, like Naaman, go to the wrong one looking for cleansing. It is to Christ we must go, and the Word of God we must hear. Paul penned, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

Third, leprosy brings death. Death from leprosy came over an extended period of time; thus, the one so afflicted knew there was no escape from its debilitating clutches. It was just a matter of time until the unseen icy fingers of death snatched the soul from the body (Jas. 2:26). Sin also brings death. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). To the Ephesians, he penned, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). It is possible to be alive physically, but dead spiritually (1 Tim. 5:6), and, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20).

Fourth, the only hope for healing from leprosy was God’s mercy. Thus, the ten cried out, lifting up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (Luke 17:13). Healing for the sin-sick soul also depends on God’s mercy. God is described as “a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Neh. 9:17). The psalmist understood his need to appeal to God’s mercy for forgiveness of sin: “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee” (Psm. 41:4). Under the new covenant, God has declared, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12).

Conclusion

The sin of ingratitude is ugly and far too common. If our hearts are filled with thankfulness for God’s great

blessings, we will express our gratitude in word and deed (John 14:15; Prov. 23:7; Matt. 12:34). We are commanded, “Be ye thankful” (Col. 3:15). Paul wrote the Philippians, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). To the Ephesians, he penned, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20).

The grateful Samaritan was made whole physically and spiritually. Jesus said to him, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole” (Luke 17:19). As Cox wrote, “Gratitude for a blessing prepares the heart for another. Gratitude opens the door of the heart—and God enters.”¹¹ Nine men were, that day, healed of leprosy but were still sick in their souls. They “had stood the test of faith, but they failed the test of love.”¹² Their desperate need had brought them to Jesus, but in their abundant health, they went away from Him and did not return. How like so many today who need Him in their hour of want and desperately turn to Him crying out for mercy, but who so quickly forget Him when their need has been supplied. Ingrates forfeit future blessings because they do not appreciate the ones they receive. As men retreat from the leper, so the righteous should draw back from the repulsive sin of the ungrateful. Someone wrote: “Were thanks with every gift expressed, each day would be Thanksgiving; were gratitude in every heart, each life would be thanksgiving.”

Endnotes

1 “The Thankful Samaritan,” **The Lesson Annual on Uniform Bible Lessons** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1956) p. 219.

2 J. Noel Meredith, “Exhortations For Servants,” **Luke**, ed. William S. Cline (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1988), p. 414.

3 Ibid.

4 “The Thankful Samaritan,” p. 220.

5 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on Luke** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1975), p. 375.

6 Meredith, p. 415.

7 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1977), p. 332.

8 Frank L. Cox, **The Miracles of Jesus** (1970), p. 47.

9 Meredith, p. 415.

10 Coffman, p. 376.

11 Cox, p. 47.

12 Meredith, p. 415.

CHAPTER 21

The Healing Of The Nobleman's Son

David Jones

Introduction

WE ARE THANKFUL TO the elders and to B. J. for the invitation to again participate in the annual **POWER** Lectureship program. We continue to thank God for the sound teaching which goes forth from this location. In a day and age when many congregations have chosen to compromise with the Devil and denominationalism, it is encouraging to find a congregation such as Southaven. The good which has been done, and Lord willing, will be done in the future, will only accurately be measured in heaven.

The subject of this year's lectureship is one which is misused and abused frequently. It is sad indeed to hear the religious world erroneously speak of "miracles." It is even sadder to hear brethren make remarks which teach that they believe miracles still are possible today. We pray these lectures, both oral and written, will make a great impact on the ignorant, unlearned, and rebellious ones who spread Satan's venom around the world. When we consider the subject of miracles, it is necessary to define our terms. Brother Guy N. Woods offered this definition of a miracle and it is one which is absolutely correct:

an event which the force of nature, including man's own natural powers, cannot produce and

which must, therefore, be attributed to supernatural sources...a miracle, therefore, involves the exercise of powers above and beyond those common to man and which can originate only with God.¹

People today attribute events, which are extraordinary in nature, to the miraculous; however, these people do not Scripturally understand the meaning of the word. A miracle was/is an event which received its power only from God.

The subject of this lecture is the healing of the nobleman's son. Our text is found in the great book of John. First of all, we need a clear understanding of the purpose of this record. John informed us of why this book was written:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

John's record is a confession as to the Deity of Christ. Contained within John's record are seven miracles which are peculiar to the book of John. These demonstrate the power and Deity of Christ. Gnosticism was rearing its ugly head at the end of the first century, and God inspired John to write in an effort to combat this damnable heresy. So in this setting, we will expose our text and emphasize the major lessons.

Exposition Of The Text

John 4:46

“So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.”

Jesus had previously been in Cana of Galilee and performed His first miracle (John 2:1-11). Cana was also

the home of Nathanael (John 21:2). A certain nobleman came from Capernaum to Cana to beseech the Lord on behalf of his sick son. In his **Fourfold Gospel**, McGarvey comments upon this nobleman: "literally, 'king's man,' a word which Josephus uses to designate a soldier, courtier, or officer of the king. He was doubtless an officer of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee."² Adam Clarke says of this man:

the Vulgate translates *regulus*, a little king. This officer belonged to Herod Antipas, who was then tetrarch of Galilee. This officer, whoever he was, appears to have had his ordinary abode at Capernaum, and hearing that Christ was at Cana, he came express from Capernaum thither, to entreat him to heal his child.³

So here was a man of authority, a person of means, and yet all his resources could not heal his son. He had to humble himself and come to the Great Physician.

This nobleman's home was in Capernaum, which also became the home base of Jesus' work. Matthew 9:1 and Mark 2:1 confirm that Capernaum was referred to as "His own city." Yet, His miracles did not produce many people in that city who believed. Jesus rebuked them severely:

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day (Matt. 11:23).

What a stinging condemnation that was! All one has to do is consider how punished Sodom was, and yet Jesus says it will be more tolerable for them in judgment than Capernaum.

Brother McGarvey makes a timely assessment of this verse:

The nouns in this verse are suggestive. We have a "nobleman," yet neither riches nor office lifted him

above affliction; a “son,” yet approaching an untimely death before his father; and both these parties came to sorrow in “Capernaum,” the city of consolation. Neither circumstance, nor age, nor situation can guarantee joy. We must still be seeking Jesus.⁴

John 4:47

“When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.”

No doubt, the fame and reputation of Jesus had preceded Him, and this nobleman had heard of the power Jesus possessed. This one of authority was seeking the right help for his son. The time had grown late and the man was desperate. It is worth noting that the Greek text literally says, “went away unto,” expressing the idea that the father had been by the son’s side constantly, and only left his side to come to Jesus.⁵

John 4:48

“Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

Brother Guy N. Woods says of this verse:

The Savior wanted men to accept Him because of what he was; because the scriptures prophesied of Him, and because of the evidence His teaching provided. The reply Jesus made was not a refusal of the request; it was a necessary lesson to the nobleman to prompt him to a deeper knowledge of, and greater appreciation for the Lord and His work.⁶

Jesus had just come from a place called Sychar (John 4:5), where He had encountered a Samaritan woman who believed on Him. She had gone out and told others and they also believed. John recorded:

And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (John 4:41-42).

These had believed on Him because they believed His words. Brother McGarvey points out:

To the thoughtful they were signs or attestations that the one who performed them acted under the authority and approval of God; to all others they were mere wonders, which startled by their strangeness. Jesus was fresh from Sychar, where many required no other sign than his words.⁷

Adam Clarke writes of this verse:

Our Lord does not tell this man that he had no faith, but that he had not enough. If he had had none, he would not have come from Capernaum to Cana, to beg him to heal his son. If he had had enough, he would have been contented with recommending his son to our Lord, without entreating him to go to Capernaum to heal him; which intimates that he did not believe our Lord could do it at a distance.⁸

John 4:49

“The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.”

Apparently the nobleman believed that Jesus had to actually be present in order to perform the miracle. The fact that Jesus had power over distance and disease was proof of His Deity. The miracles which John recorded were carefully selected by the Holy Spirit in order to show characteristics and aspects of the Deity of Christ. The father did not take time to argue the point of his faith; he simply begged for his son's life. He was beseeching the One Who could give him back his life and he insisted that Jesus go and heal his son.

John 4:50

“Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.”

Now the nobleman’s faith was truly put to test. If he argued with Jesus’ demand, he would be arguing against the One to Whom he came for help. Since he had enough faith to come to Jesus in the first place, he had now trusted Jesus could heal his son from a distance. Merrill C. Tenney’s words on this verse are appropriate at this point:

If he took Jesus at His word, he did so with no assurance beyond that word that Jesus would do anything for him. If he refused to take Jesus at His word, he would insult the very man upon whom all his hopes depended, and so forfeit whatever benefits He might confer. With a short and simple command Jesus put the nobleman in the position where he would be compelled to show real faith if he had any to show.⁹

So the nobleman started the long journey back home, but he went in hope that his son would be healed by the Christ. Once again Adam Clarke sheds light on our subject:

Had our Lord gone with him, as he wished, his unbelief could not have been fully removed; as he would have still thought that our Lord’s power could not reach from Cana to Capernaum: in order to destroy his unbelief at once, and bring him into the fullness of the faith of his supreme power, he cures him, being apparently absent, by that energy through which he fills both the heavens and the earth. Here it may be observed, our blessed Lord did what this man requested him to do, but not in the way in which he wished it to be done.¹⁰

John 4:51-52

“And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of

them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”

What is the “seventh hour” that they met? Would John have written about Roman time (midnight to midnight) or about Jewish time (sunset to sunset)? The nobleman probably had between fifteen and twenty miles to travel from Cana to Capernaum. However, since he more than likely had made the trip from Capernaum to Cana in one day, he was weary and took the time to refresh himself before beginning the trip back. Brother McGarvey says:

We take it to mean 1 P.M., for they would use the Jewish method of computing from sunset to sunset. If both parties had started at once, they would have met before sundown, as each had but eleven miles to traverse. But it is more reasonable to suppose that the wearied but now-believing father sought some refreshment and a brief rest before returning, and that the servants tarried awhile to see if the child's recovery was permanent. This would lead to their meeting after sundown, at which time, according to the invariable custom, they would call the previous period of daylight “yesterday.”¹¹

His fever left immediately and, no doubt, the father was overjoyed at the news that his son was going to live.

John 4:53

“So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house”.

About the nobleman and his faith, McGarvey is very accurate:

We note here a growth in the faith of the nobleman. He first believed in the power of Jesus' “presence,” then in the power of Jesus'

“Word,” and finally he believed generally in Jesus, and his household shared his belief.¹²

The word which was spoken by Jesus caused the fever to leave the son. John’s record of this miracle proves the power which the “Word” of God has. The Gnostics said that Jesus was not Deity, but some created being. This miracle was a confession as to the nature of the Christ. The miracle confirmed the nobleman’s faith and increased it greatly. Now he and his house (family) believed because of the word of Christ. This is in harmony with what Paul wrote: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is established by hearing the word of Christ and in this text, the nobleman believed because of Christ’s word.

John 4:54

“This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee” .

Although there is some controversy among commentators as to just which two miracles are talked about in this verse, it seems to this writer that the miracle recorded in John 2:1-11 is the other miracle mentioned. Jesus went from Judea into Galilee both times. He did stop in Samaria and convert the Samaritan woman, but that was not in Galilee as the text says.

Exhortations From The Text

There are several lessons we glean from this text which should help us in our everyday life as we serve the Master.

First, we see in the nobleman that he came to Jesus at a desperate time (John 4:47). We do not know how much he had spent on trying to heal his son, nor how much he had done personally in his attempt. At the time he came to Jesus, he was desperate for help.

It is a shame that people today really do put Jesus off until the time is desperate. Many times people forsake the assemblies, spending their living on their "gods." Then, when financial problems hit them severely, in desperation, they turn to Jesus. Too often, when the financial crunch passes, so does the need for the Lord. We see this also in people's attitude when sickness and disease come to visit. Numerous are the cases where one will cry unto the Lord when all else has failed. Vain promises are uttered when one faces death, but if that moment passes, often the promises are never fulfilled. At other times, one will sin and then must face the consequences of that sin. Prayers fly fast and furious from lips which are frightened and filled with fear. Remorse is often expressed in hopes of God's mercy being extended to the sinner. When the crisis is over, far too many go right back to the life of sin which snared them before.

We see examples of this in Scripture. Pharaoh was one who asked for relief when faced with certain plagues, but after God lifted the plague, Pharaoh would turn further from God. Moses recorded:

And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: entreat for me. And Moses said, Behold, I go out from thee, and I will entreat the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow: but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord. And Moses went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the Lord. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; and he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; there remained not one. And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go (Exod. 8:28-32).

On another occasion we read:

And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked...And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the Lord had spoken by Moses (Exod. 9:27, 34-35).

Saul was another person who appealed to God only to go back on his word. Samuel wrote: "And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:24). From this point one would think Saul might truly repent and live such as to bring glory to God. However, following David's killing of Goliath, Saul sought his life like a hunted animal. Saul admitted his sin only in an act of desperation and therefore, did not truly repent.

The nation of Israel also serves as an example of this. Following Joshua's death, they did evil and God oppressed them time and time again. When the oppression became very severe, they would cry to God and God would respond. A judge would be raised and deliverance would come. But, as soon as the judge died, they were back in sin again. As a result, the time of the judges was a dark and depressing time in Israel's history.

The Bible teaches us that godly sorrow leads us to repentance: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor 7:10). Godly sorrow results when one is truly sorrowful that he has sinned against God. Whether caught in his sin or not, the one with godly sorrow

will repent and ask for forgiveness. This individual will be the one who is granted God's grace because he is truly penitent. He will not just cry unto the Lord when the time gets difficult; he will cry unto the Lord when he realizes he has sinned.

We need to learn that both the blessings of God and severity of God should motivate us to repent:

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Rom 11:22).

Second, we notice that the Lord pointed out the fact that some emphasize the physical over the spiritual (John 4:48). That is, the Lord said they would not believe unless they saw the signs and wonders. There are those today who say, if they could just see a miracle, they would believe. However, heaven wants mankind to believe based upon the Word of God, which has already been confirmed. Jesus once said to Thomas: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Thomas had been absent when the Lord appeared. When told of the Lord's appearance, Thomas said he would not believe unless he saw the nail prints in the Lord's hands. When the Lord appeared, Thomas saw and fell at the Lord's feet. In answer to him, Jesus said that those who would believe, having not actually seen Him, would truly be blessed. That which will cause faith is the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We should believe because we read of the miracles, knowing it was through them that God

confirmed His Word: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20). It was also through miracles that God confirmed His Son:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

The apostles proved their authenticity in the same manner: “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). We do not actually need to see them today; we just read them in the God’s confirmed Word (John 20:30-31).

Third, we must take God at His word and trust Him with our souls (John 4:50). The nobleman took Jesus at His word and started his journey home, trusting that his son would be healed. Today, we must trust God, but it is not a blind trust. Paul tells us, “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2). God cannot lie so we can trust His Word. The Hebrews writer said: “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18). Through His Word and His oath, we have confidence God will keep His Word. In fact the Bible says God is faithful: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). God is not slack concerning His promise (2 Pet. 3:9).

God has given us some great promises (2 Pet. 1:3-4) which have come through His Word. We have the hope of eternal life in His Son (1 John 5:11). We have salvation in

His Son (2 Tim. 2:10). We have forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). In fact, we have all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:3). We can trust all these promises to come true because we can trust God. He has confirmed His Word and now we can know that we are in Him and saved (1 John 2:3-5). Just as the nobleman could trust that Jesus meant what He said, we can trust Him to mean what He said also. It is comforting to ponder the promises He made: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). If we live a life which is a confession of our faith in Him, we can live with Him forever.

We can also trust God's promises to punish the disobedient. Jesus said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Hell is just as sure as is heaven. Those who are faithful will be saved, but those who are not faithful will be cast aside. While many like taking stock in the promises of heaven, we need to remember the warnings about hell also. Paul wrote about those who would be eternally separated from God (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

The healing of the nobleman's son provides for us several lessons which ought to help keep us focused. We need to remember that we should feel our need for God before we get into desperate situations. In fact, realizing our need may keep us out of many of those situations. We also need to know that faith is produced by a study of the Word of God. We do not need the miracles to occur today to believe in God. Miracles are not going to happen, but faith is created each day by God's Word. And we need to also be reminded that we can trust what God has said. He has said what He meant and meant what He said. May God help us to obey His Word, trust Him to the end, and then be received up into glory.

Endnotes

- 1 Guy N. Woods, **The Spiritual Sword**, Volume 5, No. 3 (Memphis: Getwell church of Christ, 1974), p. 13.
- 2 J. W. McGarvey, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth), p. 157.
- 3 Adam Clarke, **Clarke's Commentary NT**, Volume 5B (Ages Software).
- 4 McGarvey, p. 157.
- 5 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1984), p. 91.
- 6 Ibid, p. 92.
- 7 McGarvey, p. 158.
- 8 Clarke.
- 9 Merrill C. Tenny, **John: The Gospel of Belief** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 98.
- 10 Clarke.
- 11 McGarvey, p. 159.
- 12 Ibid.

CHAPTER 22

The Raising Of The Widow's Son

Michael Hatcher

Introduction

T*HIS WRITER CONSIDERS IT* an honor to be asked to be on this lecture program. The Southaven congregation has been known for its faithfulness and its great work for the Lord. The books of the Southaven lectures adorn my bookshelves and are on my computer, and this one will be also.

“The Miracles of Jesus” is a wonderful theme. **Miracles** denote the power by which these works were performed. Two other words also refer to these great works of power: they were **signs** in that they pointed the ones who saw them to have faith in Christ, and they caused **wonder** in those who saw them. The miracle of Christ's raising the widow's son certainly caused all who saw it to wonder or have amazement at the marvelous power of God.

Background

The previous day Jesus had entered into Capernaum and was asked to heal the Centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10). He now comes into Nain, a small city about twenty to twenty-five miles southwest of Capernaum, with many following Him. This shows that Jesus was daily doing good works: good works characterized His life. Peter informed Cornelius “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the

Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). He, being our perfect and sinless example, set the pattern that we should follow of daily sacrifice and good works:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb 13:15-16).

We, as Christ, should be “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16).

Many who were following our Lord were His disciples. If these were the only ones witnessing this miracle, then one may question its validity. However, there were others who were following our Lord in addition to His disciples, as He had attracted a following because of His works. In addition to these, there was a crowd of people in the burial procession. These would be the relatives, neighbors, and friends of the deceased son and his mother from Nain. It might also include professional mourners and musicians. The two crowds met near the gate of Nain: “one walked with the dirge of death: the other, with the Lord of Life.”¹

Those attending the funeral would have possessed knowledge that the boy was actually dead. Through the years there have been many who tried to fake the ability to raise someone from the dead by having someone play dead. This could not have worked in this situation because the people knew the young man and knew he was dead. Additionally, since Jesus was just entering into the town, He had not seen the lad previously, which would prevent any collusion.

They were taking the body of this youth to the burial place, which was outside of the city. It was important that ceremonial pollution by contact with dead bodies be

avoided. Thus, the Jews buried their dead outside of the gates of the city and some distance from them. The exception to that rule was the house of David (cf. 2 Kings 16:20; 2 Kings 21:18, 26).

The Jews made public display of their bereavement. We are told that, when devout men buried Stephen, there was "great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2). However, the death of a child is an even greater tragedy, and in this case it was an only son: "The death of an only child represented to them as to us the extreme of sorrow (Jer. 6:26; Zech. 12:10; Amos 8:10)."² To add to the extreme tragedy of this case, the mother of the departed child was a widow. No doubt he would have comforted her during the time of the loss of her husband, but more important she would be dependent upon him for her support. The Spirit instructed Paul to write: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). This responsibility would fall upon this son of the widowed woman. However, he was now deceased and would not be able to fulfil this obligation.

The Miracle

That which evoked this miracle was the compassion of our Lord. Miracles were for the purpose of confirmation:

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:20).

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:3-4).

However, in this case the purpose seems to be the showing of pity to this widow:

But the miracle in this instance was not wrought so much to attest our Lord's commission, or to show his power, as to do good. As Jesus had no other business in Nain but to do good, we may well believe that he went there for the express purpose of comforting this forlorn mother.³

This is one of the many times the Scriptures refer specifically to the compassion of Jesus. We can observe His compassion in several areas: meeting physical necessities of life (Matt. 15:32; Mark 8:2), healing the sick (Matt. 14:14; Matt. 20:34; Mark 1:40-41), comforting the bereaved (seen here and John 11:35), teaching the truth (Matt. 9:36), and, while not specifically stated, His desire to save (Matt. 23:37; Luke 22:31-32; John 10:11-18). This very well illustrates that our Lord can be touched by those cares which touch us: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Each time our Lord was touched with compassion, He always acted; He never ignored the situation or walked by on the other side (Luke 10:30-32). We often sing the song "Does Jesus Care?" with the great answer: "O yes, He cares; I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief." This was the case with this widow: Jesus cared.

Jesus tells the woman, "Weep not." What a strange thing to say to someone who has lost a loved one and especially considering it is an only begotten⁴ son. It is only natural to weep at the loss of a loved one. As noted previously, great lamentation was made over Stephen when he was martyred for the cause of Christ (Acts 8:2). At the death of Lazarus, Mary and Martha both lamented greatly over his death (John 11). Likewise, Jesus, seeing

their sorrow, also wept (John 11:35). However, Jesus knew He was the resurrection and the life. At the death of Lazarus, He told Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). He knew what He was going to do so he could tell this crying mother to "Weep not." He planned to raise the son to life, even as He did with Lazarus.

People who lose loved ones who are in Christ also will weep, but not like the sorrow of those in the world. Paul explains:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The Christian is victorious over death and Satan:

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

While we still sorrow for our loss, we know there is a victory and at the resurrection of the dead they will be able to spend eternity with the Holy Three along with all those who are faithful through the years.

Jesus then goes to the bier or the coffin. “The so-called ‘bier’ among the ancient Hebrews was simply an open coffin or a flat wooden frame, on which the body of the dead was carried from the house to the grave.”⁵ The body would be wrapped in linen cloths lying on the bed. Jesus then touches the bier. Normally touching the bier would cause the person to be ceremonially unclean for seven days (see Num. 19).⁶ However, in this case, instead of Jesus being made unclean, He raises the dead.

When Jesus touches the bier, those carrying the young man stopped. Matthew Henry points out: “Hereby he intimated to the bearers that they should not proceed; he had something to say to the dead young man.”⁷ McGarvey states that Jesus was known to the people: “Jesus was, no doubt, known to many in Nain, and it is no wonder that those who bore the bier stood still when he touched it.”⁸ If they knew Jesus and His miracles of healing and casting out demons, it would not be surprising for them to expect Jesus to do something on this occasion.

He then states to the young man: “Arise.” It would be foolish for this author to tell a dead person (young or old) to arise. There would be no power behind the statement. The same is true for all those who claim to perform miracles today. They, generally, will not even attempt to raise someone from the dead because they realize they have no power to do such. They are very good at psychosomatic illnesses and fostering hoaxes upon people, but they will not document any miracle today. A few years ago, Doug Fournier and his wife had their new baby girl die at six weeks of age. He packed the dead body into a cooler filled with ice, got into his car, and drove 350 miles from

Gainesville to Pensacola, Florida, to bring her to the Brownsville Revival (Brownsville Assembly of God). Some of the staff prayed for at least two hours to bring her back to life. While they have spoken of raising someone from the dead, they could not accomplish it. There simply was no power to perform such a task. Jesus had the power to perform this resurrection. He had to specify the young man. Likewise, when He raised Lazarus He had to specifically call Lazarus by name: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). If He had not specified, then all the dead would have come forth. The same is true on this occasion. This miracle clearly shows that Jesus has power or authority over the unseen world as well as the seen world: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). On the last day all will hear His voice and come forth:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

Upon our Lord instructing the young man to arise, he sits up and begins to speak. This shows that he is not only alive, but healthy and strong. One thing we are impressed with concerning this resurrection is that, while the young man spoke, nothing is recorded of what he spoke. Today when someone has a "near-death experience" they come back telling all sorts of stories about a bright light, floating around a room, talking to God or someone else who tells them they must come back, and such like. However, this young man was really dead and was being taken to the cemetery to be buried. When he comes back to life, the Scriptures do not relate anything he said—simply that he spoke. Likewise, "of the seven occasions of

the dead being raised in the Biblical record, **not one word** is recorded of their revealing anything about the afterlife.”⁹ If I desire to know what the afterlife is like, then I must go to the only place which reveals the afterlife. The only place where we may find out about what takes place after our life here on earth is over is in God’s revealed Word.

Jesus then delivered the young man to his mother. Matthew Henry states:

[H]e would not oblige this young man, to whom he had given a new life, to go along with him as his disciple, to minister to him (though he owed him even his own self), much less as a trophy or show to get honour by him, but **delivered him to his mother**, to attend her as became a dutiful son.¹⁰

The shysters of today would have forced the young man to accompany them all around and made a big play on the emotions of man to bilk more money out of people. They would use the young man to arouse the emotions of their audience to enable them to perform more so-called “miracles.”¹¹ Instead, Jesus delivers the lad to his mother to attend to her needs as a dutiful son.

Jesus had instructed the mother to “weep not.” She now had reason not to weep. Her son who was dead is now alive. In the parable of the prodigal son and loving father, when the son returned home, the father (who represents God) said, “And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:23-24). They no longer needed to weep over the lost condition of the son, they could now be merry: “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:32). So it is with all who faithfully respond to the great invitation of our Lord (Matt. 11:28-30).

When one submits himself in humble obedience in becoming a Christian, we observe mourning (for sin) turned to rejoicing. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian, we are informed: "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). When the Philippian jailor obeyed, he then "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:34). Jesus taught "that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). Likewise when one sinner repents today, we should rejoice greatly.

The Results Of The Miracle

The first thing mentioned is that the people feared. This is from the Greek word *phobos* and means to be terrified or scared. Vine says that this word "First had the meaning of flight, that which is caused by being scared; then, that which may cause flight, (a) fear, dread, terror, always with this significance in the four Gospels."¹² It is no wonder that those present feared. They realized they were in the presence of One Who was truly great; they would have been intimidated by Jesus. Place yourself in their shoes for a minute. How would you feel if, while on the way to bury a young man, someone stops you and raises him from the dead? No doubt we would all be fearful. Here is a Man Who has control over life and death.

This young man rose from the dead, but he rose to die again. This One Who raised him from the dead and proved that He had power over death and life was also raised from the dead to die no more. As such, He is the firstborn from the dead: "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence"

(Col. 1:18). The result is that He is the firstfruits, the guarantee that we will be raised from the dead:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept...But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

He proved that He has power over the grave and hades; thus, when He calls us on the last day, we will be raised.

The miracle caused them to glorify God. "Glorified" is in a tense¹³ which indicates they kept on glorifying God. Again, it is no wonder that they would continue to glorify God when such a marvelous miracle has just taken place. Here is the only begotten son of a widowed mother having died, basically leaving her destitute, and now raised from the dead. It is, thus, no wonder that they gave praise, adoration, and magnified God for this marvelous act of compassion toward this bereaved mother.

Their conclusion to this miracle was twofold. First, they concluded that a great prophet was risen up among them, and second, that the Lord had visited His people. Israel had been promised a great prophet. In speaking for God, Moses wrote:

The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken...I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him (Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

Expectation was at an all-time high, as there had been about 400 years of silence from God. Thus, when John the

Baptist comes on the scene the priest and Levites asked him: "What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No" (John 1:21). However, he pointed to that prophet: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Whether or not the crowd realized that this was the Messiah (the prophet) or not, they knew that He must be a great prophet.

They realized that God had visited them. Vine says "visit" means, "primarily, to inspect (a late form of *episkopeo*, to look upon, care for, exercise oversight), signifies (a) to visit with help."¹⁴ They realized that God had looked upon them, especially this widowed mother, with care. After the angel tells Zacharias that he will have a son who will be the forerunner of the Lord and then John is born, Zacharias says, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:68-69). Zacharias knew that God was visiting them, or caring for them, regarding salvation, in sending His Son to save man from their sins. When man today obeys the Word of God in being baptized for the remission of his sins, he then can escape the torments of hell and receive eternal salvation. Truly, God visited His people, caring for them to save.

The two crowds spread this miracle abroad so it was known throughout all Judea and the entire region. "Rumour" (as translated in the King James) is the Greek word *logos* which means "word." Likewise, we can understand the spreading of such a wonderful feat, the dead raised to life again. No doubt, each one of us, if we had witnessed this miracle, would have been spreading it to all we know. How much more should we spread the good news of salvation found in Christ?

Previously in this chapter we noted that the purpose of this miracle seemed to be simply the compassion of the

Savior on this widow. As noted there, the purpose of miracles was that of confirmation (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). While this miracle primarily was to show compassion, it also confirmed Jesus as the Son of God. When John the Baptist sent two disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the one, part of the response of Jesus was to tell John that the dead are raised (Luke 7:18-23). Upon Jesus asking His apostles whom they thought He was, Simon Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of God: “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Jesus responded by saying, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17). One of the ways the Father revealed that Jesus was His Son was through the miracles which Jesus performed. Thus, this miracle, while showing the compassion of our Lord, is based in the purpose for miracles—confirmation.

Some Practical Applications

One of the great lessons that we learn is our need to show compassion on others. Seemingly, Jesus performed this miracle because of the compassion and tender mercies within Himself for His creation. We also need to be a compassionate people. Peter wrote, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Pet. 3:8). John shows the importance of it by saying, “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). Compassion “literally means ‘to suffer with’ and signifies the ability to place one’s self into the situation of another and feel as they feel, suffer as they suffer.”¹⁵ Jesus had the passion to suffer with this

widow and would not shut up His bowels of compassion from her; neither can we shut up our bowels of compassion for others.

The result of our compassion should be the doing of good works. Peter summarized the life of Christ by telling Cornelius “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Jesus’ life consisted of good works and He calls us to do good works also. Paul said that Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). Paul also said, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Paul summarizes by saying, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Tit. 3:8). The life of Christ is a perfect example of the type of life we should live: going about doing good works.

Conclusion

While Jesus raised this young man from the dead, we need to realize that all will be raised from the dead on the last day. Then we will stand before the Judge of all the earth and give an account of the things we have done in the body, whether it is good or bad. If we have lived a faithful life according to God’s Word, then we will be given a home with God in heaven throughout all eternity. If we have not obeyed the Gospel, then an eternal

separation from God will be our final destiny. Live so you will have that joyous home in heaven.

Endnotes

1 Bobby Liddell, "The Mercy of the Savior," **Luke**, ed. William S. Cline (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1988), p. 173.

2 J. W. McGarvey, **The Fourfold Gospel**, Logos Library System (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1999).

3 Ibid.

4 The Greek word here is *monogenes*, which is properly translated "only begotten."

5 George B. Eager, "Bier," **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, ed. James Orr, Logos Library System (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999).

6 Ceremonial uncleanness was not in itself sinful, and Jesus, by touching the bier, did not commit sin (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22).

7 Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible**, Logos Library System (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

8 McGarvey.

9 Liddell, p. 177.

10 Henry.

11 There are no Bible miracles today. See Michael Hatcher, "Miraculous Divine Healing Today Error," **God Hath Spoken, Affirming Truth and Reproving Error**, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1999), pp. 447-490.

12 W. E. Vine, **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**, Logos Library System (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1981).

13 It is a third person, plural, imperfect, active indicative. The imperfect carries with it the idea of keeping on doing something; in this case, they keep on glorifying.

14 Vine.

15 Elvis E. Cochrane, **The Epistles of Peter**, Shield Bible Study (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1965), p. 47.

CHAPTER 23

The Healing Of The Man Blind Since Birth

Mike Benson

Introduction

STUDENTS OF THE BIBLE have noted a conspicuous absence in the sacred text: there are no examples of the healing of the blind in the Old Testament. They have also discovered a similar omission in the New Testament: there are no examples of the disciples healing the blind.¹ Scripture indicates that the granting of sight to the blind is associated with Jehovah (Exod. 4:11; Psm. 146:8). Prophecy reveals that this would be a **messianic** activity:

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness (Isa. 29:18).

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped (Isa. 35:5).

To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house (Isa. 42:7).

This emphasis is “brought to light” in the Gospel record. Healing the blind is a divine function—an endeavor for God’s own Messiah (Acts 10:38).²

As Jesus neared the end of His earthly ministry, He was met with growing devotion, as well as growing opposition. Because of His teaching, many of the Jews

believed in Him (John 8:30). By contrast, some Jews, especially the Pharisees, were determined to kill Him (John 8:37, 58-59). The miraculous healing of the man born blind in John chapter nine is significant because (1) it, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, provides irrefutable evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus (cf. John 20:30-31; Heb. 2:2-4), and (2) it further exposes the tension that this fact created between the Lord and the Jewish authorities.

The purpose of the lecture will be to address this miracle in its appropriate context. Our study will adhere to the following outline:

- . **The OCCASION of the healing** (John 9:1-2).
- . **The MOTIVATION for the healing** (John 9:3-5).
- . **The DEMONSTRATION of the healing** (John 9:6-7).
- . **The REACTION to the healing** (John 9:8-34).
- . **The SUMMATION of the healing** (John 9:35-41).
- . **Some APPLICATIONS from the healing.**

The OCCASION Of The Healing

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:1-2).

Affliction

The man had been blind since his birth.³ Of the six healing miracles associated with blindness in the Gospel record, this is the only case of one's suffering from congenital blindness (cf. Matt. 9:27-31; Matt. 12:22-23; Matt. 15:30-31; Matt. 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; Mark 10:46-52). Luke mentions two instances of individuals who had been unable to **walk** since birth (cf. Acts 3:2; Acts 14:8), but only John refers to anyone who was unable to see since birth.

Imagine—this man had never seen a smile, he had never witnessed a sunset, nor had he ever been able to enjoy the vibrant colors of spring. He had no colorful

“mental snapshots” from his childhood which he could call to memory; he had known only darkness. And yet, despite the severity of his handicap, the blind man, as we shall see, was not the only individual in this chapter who suffered from a sort of “darkness.”

Question

The man’s plight provoked the disciples to raise the question of the relation between sin and suffering. It was widely believed among the Jewish community that suffering, especially blindness, was due to sin.⁴ The disciples evidently accepted this view, but in the present case were confused as to its application.⁵ There was real difficulty in seeing how the man might have sinned within his mother’s womb.⁶ On the other hand, it was also hard to understand how anyone could suffer such a terrible punishment for the transgressions of his parents.⁷ Either position had certain inherent theological problems.

The MOTIVATION For The Healing

Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:3-5).

Glorification

Jesus responded to the disciples’ inquiry with an appeal, not to the cause of the blindness, but to the **purpose** its eradication would afford. First, He noted that neither the man nor his parents were responsible. By this, Jesus did not mean that neither the man nor his parents were sinners (cf. Rom. 3:10, 23). Rather, He meant that the man’s blindness was not some sort of Divine penalty

administered by God because of a specific sin in their lives. Second, He taught that instead of wrestling with the origin of the affliction, the disciples should focus on the means by which the blindness would be brought to an end. The existence of this misfortune was an opportunity for the work and glory of God to be demonstrated through His Son (cf. John 11:4; 2 Cor. 12:9-10). Barclay observes:

For John the miracles are always a sign of the glory and power of God. The writers of the other gospels had a different point of view; and regarded them as a demonstration of the compassion of Jesus. When Jesus looked on the hungry crowd he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd (Mark 6:34). When the leper came with his desperate request for cleaning Jesus was moved with compassion (Mark 1:41). It is often urged that in this the Fourth Gospel is quite different from the others. Surely there is no real contradiction here. It is simply two ways of looking at the same thing. At its heart is the supreme truth that the glory of God lies in His compassion, and that He never so fully reveals His glory as when he reveals His pity.⁸

Certification

Jesus then emphasized His Deity by the statement, “I am the light of the world.” When He made a claim to be Divine, the Lord often supported it with a miracle which was similar to the claim itself (e.g., “bread of life”—John 6:10-14, 35; “resurrection and the life”—John 11:25, 43-44). The affirmation in conjunction with the forthcoming healing fulfilled messianic prophecy and certified Christ’s role as giver of sight and light (John 8:12; Luke 2:32) to the blind.

The DEMONSTRATION Of The Healing

When he had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He

anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing (John 9:6-7).

Operation

Jesus spat on the ground, made a clay, and then applied it to the man's eyes.⁹ On another occasion, He cured a blind man by actually spitting in his eyes and then touching them (Mark 8:23). In either case, the Lord's saliva had no immediate relationship with healing; it was His Divine will and power which effected a cure:

Sometimes Jesus used certain things in connection with His miracles that could have no logical effect in the case. There was an important point in such performances. Had something been used that might have a physical relation to the result desired and obtained, it might have been claimed that such was the cause. But since these things could have nothing to do with the actual problem, the conclusion is clear that the result was obtained through divine power.¹⁰

Prescription

After anointing the blind man's eyes with clay, Jesus then instructed him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. This pool is only mentioned here in the New Testament. Its name was derived from the fact that its waters were "sent" into the pool by a channel:

South of the temple mount is a basin hewn out of the rock in part and partly built of masonry, fifty-three feet long, eighteen feet wide and nineteen feet deep, which is identified as Siloam. A stream, rising in the fount of Siloam, passes through the reservoir, which is used for domestic purposes.¹¹

This pool is located in the southeast part of the city where the Tyropoean Valley joins the

Kidron. Its waters come from the Gihon Spring by way of the tunnel built by Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30). At the Feast of Tabernacles the waters of Siloam were used to symbolize the blessings of God upon the people, and Jesus had related the symbolism to Himself (John 7:37-38). John wants his readers to see that the blessings which the man was to experience really came from Messiah, the Sent One. In Isaiah 8:6 these same waters were used to describe God's provision for His people.¹²

John regarded Jesus as the spiritual Siloam. The blind man received his sight as he washed in the pool, but actually received it through the miraculous power of the Sent One.¹³

Accommodation

The blind man found his way to the pool and washed as he was told. He did not stop to reason and ask questions, but promptly complied with the Lord's Word. His obedient response brought about the bestowal of his vision. Scripture simply--and wondrously--says that he "came back seeing."

The REACTION To The Healing

Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know" (John 9:8-13).

Speculation

When the man returned home from washing at the pool, his neighbors immediately noticed something

different about him. His general appearance and/or newfound freedom of movement revealed that he was no longer sightless. But was this “the” man, or merely an impostor? Some were certain of his identity, while others would only concede that he bore a likeness to the beggar they knew so well.¹⁴ Guy N. Woods’ comments on this verse are helpful:

The verb “saw” [“seen” NKJV] translates a Greek word that is really stronger than this English word. It is the present active participle of *theoreoo*, which means to scrutinize minutely, to look at intently. The neighbors and others examined him closely; but, not knowing of the miracle and assuming that it was not possible that he who had always been blind was now seeing, they wondered if it were not a case of mistaken identity. Others impressed by the striking resemblance, but unable to conclude that the blind man was now seeing, decided the remarkable similarity that they had seen had misled them and that he was actually some other.¹⁵

Admission

The man settled the discussion with a clear affirmation. He was, in fact, the man who had been blind.

Interrogation

They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was the Sabbath when Jesus made clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” Therefore some of the Pharisees said, “This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, “What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet” (John 9:13-17).

Having been convinced of the man's cure, the neighbors escorted him to the Pharisees. Not surprisingly, the news of the healing wrought by Jesus aroused the ire of these religious leaders because it occurred on a Sabbath day. Their initial concern addressed the means by which the man had received his sight. The Greek text indicates that they continued to press the man for answers. His reply was succinct and to the point: "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Division

This simple truth created a schism among the Pharisees. Some immediately concluded that Jesus was a lawbreaker and thus deserving of censure.¹⁶ "This Man is not from God," they declared. The authorities were so deeply entrenched in their own self-devised religious traditions that all they could see was an alleged Sabbath violation.¹⁷ Of course, if the breach of the Sabbath was a legitimate concern, why didn't they also indict the healed man? Zerr observes:

We should note that the man said **I washed**, which was as much of a manual act as what Jesus had done. But in all of the controversy over this case, not one word will be said against the man for what he did on the Sabbath day.¹⁸

Other Pharisees conceded that a supernatural act had been performed. While they refused to acknowledge the Lord's Divinity, they could hardly deny the authenticity of the miracle, for the healed man was standing in their midst (cf. John 10:21; John 11:37). As for the healed man himself, he readily announced that, in his opinion, Jesus was a prophet (cf. John 4:19): "The nature of the work done was of sufficient force to establish that Jesus had been sent by God."¹⁹

Apprehension

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him" (John 9:18-23).

The parents of the healed man, when questioned by the Pharisees, verified the facts of the case. This was their son; he had been born blind. However, the couple declined to offer any further information for fear of the repercussions. They knew that to credit Jesus with the miracle would mean certain excommunication from their peers:

Expulsion from the religious community of Israel, whether permanently or for a shorter period, would involve forfeiture of social and business relations, to say nothing of religious privileges, and was a penalty to be dreaded by any Jew.²⁰

So rather than relinquish their station within the community, the parents evaded the last question and deferred it to their son.

Cross-Examination

So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said,

“Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.” Then they said to him again, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?” Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.” The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out (John 9:24-34).

For a second time the authorities called in the healed man and interrogated him. They insisted that he “Give God the glory.” This was an intimidation tactic—a way of saying, “make a full confession,” or “tell the truth” (cf. Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5). If the Pharisees could pressure the man into admitting some sort of fraud, or if they could find some inconsistency in his story, they could discredit Jesus. To further “prejudice the witness,” they then boldly asserted, “We know that this Man is a sinner” (cf. John 8:46). But the beggar held to the integrity of his initial account and defended the Lord’s actions by virtue of his ability to see: “Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know; that though I was blind, now I see.” Lockyer notes here:

Contrast...the “we know” of the Pharisees (John 9:24) and the “I know” of the man (John 9:25). It would take a chapter in itself to discourse upon

the official pride, the utter formalism, the deliberate bias, and the absolute falsehood on the part of those who were determined to reject Christ.²¹

Castigation

The authorities continued to press the beggar for answers, but he “turned the tables” on his opponents and with biting sarcasm suggested that they desired to be Jesus’ disciples. Angered by his insult, the Pharisees, in turn, accused him of being Jesus’ disciple and then defended their own sense of honor by claiming allegiance to Moses²²: “We are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”²³ They were sure about Moses, but unsure about the Messiah (cf. John 3:10)! At this point the man countered with some of his own theology. He argued that the Pharisees, of all people, surely ought to have known the identity of the One Who could open blind eyes!²⁴

The blind man comes up with an interesting piece of reasoning. He begins by referring to “the” marvelous thing: more astonishing even than his miraculous cure is the ignorance of the Pharisees in the face of convincing evidence. He marshals his arguments: (1) Jesus opened his eyes; (2) God does not hear sinners (they had said, “We know that God spoke with Moses” and he retorts with another “we know,” this one referring to God’s refusal to bless sinners); (3) God hears the devout who do His will; (4) In all the history of the world no one has opened the eyes of a [man born] blind; and (5) If Jesus were not from God He would be powerless.²⁵

The Pharisees had no adequate rebuttal to such forceful logic. They had but one recourse left, and that was to cast the troublesome beggar from the fellowship of the synagogue.²⁶

The SUMMATION Of The Healing

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains (John 9:35-41).

Revelation

Jesus learned of the man's plight and sought him out (cf. Luke 19:10). He then asked him if he believed in the Son of God.²⁷ Up until this point, the man believed Jesus to be a prophet, endowed with miraculous power. When the Lord disclosed His identity as the Messiah, the healed man responded with an outspoken confession of faith and humble worship. Guthrie notes, "The occasion was momentous for the man, far more important than the moment his sight was restored...His spiritual as well as his physical eyes were opened."²⁸

Condemnation

By contrast, the Pharisees, who claimed spiritual sight, exposed the darkness of their hearts as they faced the Messiah's work and teaching. They inquired, "Are we blind also?" Jesus answered in the affirmative. Because they had rejected Him and the evidence of His Deity, they were without sight and therefore under judgment.

Some APPLICATIONS From The Healing

1. **Note the FACT of the miracle.**²⁹ The neighbors asked, “How **were** your eyes opened?” (John 9:10, emp. mine throughout, MB). The Pharisees asked, “How can a man who is a sinner **do such signs**?” (John 9:16). The parents admitted, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means **he now sees** we do not know” (John 9:20-21). The Jews asked, “Can a demon **open** the eyes of the blind?” (John 10:21). The man himself affirmed, “Though I was blind, **now I see**” (John 10:25). *Despite the objections of liberal scholarship, the testimony of all involved demands a verdict—the miracle occurred just as John through inspiration described it. Do you believe?*

2. **Note the BLINDNESS of the disciples.** They did not look at the beggar as an object of mercy, but merely as an impersonal subject for academic discussion (John 9:2); they were blind to his needs. *While the overriding purpose of the church is to meet spiritual needs (cf. Matt. 28:18-20), let us also be watchful for opportunities to meet physical needs (cf. Gal. 6:10; Jas. 2:14-17).*

3. **Note the BLINDNESS of the Pharisees.** Despite the overwhelming evidence, they refused to accept the truth. The light was available, but they chose to walk in darkness (cf. John 3:19). *In the United States somebody goes blind every twenty minutes. It is far worse to go spiritually blind (cf. 2 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 3:15-17; Eph. 1:18).*

4. **Note WHEN the blind man received his sight.** **The blind man washed in the pool as he was told.** Even though his eyes had been anointed, the healing would not have occurred had he not obeyed the Lord’s command. *Where conditions are prescribed, they must be met before blessings can be bestowed (cf. 2 Kings 5:10-14; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).*

5. **Note the CHARACTERISTICS of unbelief.** It (a) sets false standards; (b) always wants more evidence, but never has enough; (c) does biased research on a purely subjective basis; (d) rejects the facts; and (e) is self-centered (John 9:13-34).³⁰ *Compare the attitudes of the Pharisees with those of the “spiritual elite” within the modern change movement. Do you see any parallels?*

6. **Note the PROGRESSION/ILLUMINATION of the blind man’s faith.** He recognized Jesus as (a) a man (John 9:11), (b) a prophet (John 9:17), (c) from God (John 9:33), and finally as (d) the Son of God (John 9:35-38). *Are you maturing in your faith and knowledge of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:18)?*

7. **Note the NATURE of the healing in contrast with modern-day so-called faith healing.**³¹ *In every measurable sense, the healing miracles of Christ were superior to present-day endeavors (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-13).*

8. **Note the COURAGE of the blind man.** He was not afraid of what the Pharisees would think (John 9:30-35), and was willing to suffer the consequences of his convictions (John 9:34). *Will you “stand up” for Jesus (cf. Deut. 31:6; Jer. 6:16; Eph. 6:13)?*

9. **Note the NATURE of truth.** Truth divided the neighbors (John 9:8-9). Truth divided the Pharisees (John 9:16). Truth divided the blind man and his parents (John 9:11, 15, 21). *If the truth divided friends, religious leaders and families in the first century, we should not be surprised nor overly alarmed that it continues to do so in the twenty-first century (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; Luke 12:51; Luke 14:26). When members threaten to take their membership (and money) elsewhere, it is often because they cannot bear the truth. Truth divides!*

Conclusion

Several years ago, a program appeared on television which featured blind skiers being taught how to slalom snow ski. Paired with sighted coaches, the blind skiers trained on snowy flats and learned how to make left and right turns. When turning was finally mastered, the blind skiers were then taken to the slopes and encouraged to put their newly-developed skills into practice. Sighted partners skied alongside them and shouted directions, “Right!” then “Left!” The blind were solely dependent upon the word of those who could see. As long as the blind skiers adhered to the directives of their partners, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line at the bottom of the hill.³²

Mankind too is blind and incapable of negotiating this course/world on his own (cf. Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23). Like the skiers and the man born blind, we must rely on the Word (Psm. 119:105) of the One who is truly sighted to finish the course.

Endnotes

1 Leon Morris observes: “The nearest we come to it is when Ananias laid his hands on Saul of Tarsus and that Pharisee’s temporary blindness disappeared (Acts 9:17-18); but this exceptional case is not on all fours with the giving of sight as Jesus gave to it.” Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John**, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 442.

2 “We should probably understand the writers of our Gospels to be telling us that the giving of sight to the blind shows us Jesus fulfilling messianic prophecies and doing things that God alone can do.” Leon Morris, **Reflections on the Gospel of John** (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), p. 346.

3 Greek, *tuphlos gennethei*--“blind he was born.”

4 “There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.” Rabbi Ammi as quoted by Morris, p. 425.

5 “The view [the disciples, MB] expressed is a persistent one and is held by many today even though the book of Job is a clear refutation of it and Jesus also taught that it rested on a false premise” (Luke 13:1-5). Guy N. Woods, **The Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1981), p. 183.

6 Some Jewish theologians believed in prenatal sin and quoted Genesis 25:22 in support of their views. Arthur W. Pink, **Exposition of the Gospel of John** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975 reprint), p. 473.

7 “That children benefited or suffered according to the spiritual state of their parents was a doctrine current among the Jews.” Alfred Edersheim, **Sketches of Jewish Social Life**, Updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 150. “Rabbis were firmly of the conviction that it was quite common to have the sins of the parents punished by various defects in the children, defects for which the children would have to suffer all their lives.” Morris, **Reflections**, p. 347.

8 Ibid, p. 39.

9 Some in the ancient world believed in the curative power of saliva. R. H. Lightfoot, **St. John’s Gospel** (Oxford: University Press, 1956), p. 202.

10 E. M. Zerr, **Bible Commentary, New Testament** (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1947), p. 224.

11 B. W. Johnson, **The New Testament Commentary**, Volume 3 (Christian Publishing Company, 1886), p. 150.

12 Homer A. Kent, Jr., **Light in the Darkness** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 133.

13 John repeatedly refers to the fact that Jesus was “sent” by the Father. Cf. John 3:34; John 4:34; John 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; John 6:29, 38-40, 44, 57; John 7:16, 18, 28-29, 33; John 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; John 9:4; John 10:36; John 11:42; John 12:44-45, 49; John 13:20; John 14:24; John 15:21; John 16:5; John 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; John 20:21.

14 The Greek construction in verse 8 suggests that the blind man positioned himself at a familiar location in the city.

15 Woods, p. 187.

16 “By making clay [kneading, MB] He had been guilty of working on the Sabbath when even the simplest acts constituted work. It was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath.

Medical attention could be given only if life was in actual danger. Even then it must be only such as to keep the patient from getting worse, not to make him any better.” William Barclay, **The Gospel of John**, Revised ed., Volume 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 44-45.

17 “They tried to observe the day in the letter and constantly broke it in spirit.” Johnson, p. 151.

18 Zerr, p. 225.

19 H. Daniel Denham, “Opposition to the Son,” **John: A Commentary--Exegetical, Homiletical**, 6th Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation, 1989), p. 198.

20 Kent, p. 135.

21 Herbert Lockyer, **All the Miracles of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 223.

22 a. Ironically, “the Jews showed their ignorance of the very document and writer they pretended to respect. Any true disciples of Moses could be disciples of Jesus also, for Moses prophesied favorably of Him” (Deut. 18:15, 18). Zerr, p. 226. Cf. John 5:45-46. b. “In Jewish estimation, Moses stood next to God. To forsake Moses for another prophet was to be an apostate.” J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Foundation, 1914), p. 465.

23 a. Note how the Pharisees contradicted themselves (cf. John 7:27; 8:48-52). b. The Pharisees “imitate the beggar’s own words, ‘I do not know--I do know’ (John 9:25), but they reverse the two, ‘We--we know (emphatic ???s)--we do not know.’ In the first assertion, ‘We know!’ speaks the voice of arrogant authority, seconded by the other assertion, ‘We do not know!’ spoken with the same authority. What we know, that alone counts; what we do not know, regarding that nobody dares to pronounce. And knowledge is our personal prerogative; whoever does not bow to us and our knowledge knows nothing, and whoever presumes to know anything we do not know is a fool. Even to this day the skeptic, the agnostic, and a certain type of scientist take the same attitude. It pretends to intellectuality, but at bottom the intellect is made to voice only the attitude of an ungodly heart.” R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), p. 696.

24 “It seemed incredible to the healed man that the Pharisees would not know this man who had opened his eyes! How many people were going around Jerusalem, opening the eyes of blind people? Instead of investigating the miracle, these religious leaders should have been investigating the One who did the miracle and learning from Him.” Warren W. Wiersbe, **Be Alive** (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), p. 114.

25 Morris, **Reflections**, p. 360.

26 a. “There were two kinds of excommunication. There was the ban, the *cherem*, by which a man was banished from the synagogue for life. In such a case he was publicly anathematized. He was cursed in the presence of the people, and he was cut off from God and man. There was sentence of temporary excommunication which might last for a month, or for some other fixed period.” Barclay, p. 47. b. The healed man was the first recorded person to be thrown out of the synagogue because he followed Jesus. John 16:1-3.

27 NU says “the Son of Man.”

28 Donald Guthrie, *Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), p. 240.

29 “The reality of factuality of the miracle was not under question. The question concerned how it was done and what the character was of one who would do such a work on the sabbath. These were paramount with the Pharisees. The neighbors were curious; the parents were afraid; the Pharisees were designing; the man was positive. But all bare witness to the fact of the sign.” Homer Hailey, **That You May Believe** (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1973), p. 108.

30 John MacArthur, **The MacArthur Study Bible** (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 1601.

31 Recommended reading: H. Daniel Denham, “Miracles of Christ Contrasted with Fake Healing Today,” **John: A Commentary--Exegetical, Homiletical**, pp. 203-211. Waymon D. Miller, **Faith Healing--Fact or Fiction?** (Tulsa: Plaza Press, 1990), pp. 159-176. Ted J. Clarke, “The Nature and Character of New Testament Miracles,” **Fulton County Gospel News**, Volume 30, No. 7 (July/August 1996), p. 8.

32 David Holwick, www.sermoncentral.com

CHAPTER 24

The Healing Of The Lame Man At Bethesda

Billy Bland

Commendation

APPRECIATION IS EXTENDED TO the elders of the Southaven church of Christ, brethren Larry Everson, Con Lambert, Bill Pierce, and Coleman Simpson, and to the lectureship director, B. J. Clarke for the invitation to be a part of the 9th Annual **POWER** Lectureship. This year's theme, "The Miracles Of Jesus Christ," constitutes a vital and intriguing study in the Word of God. It will help to instill faith in a good and honest heart (Matt. 13). The miracles endorse (or back up) the message of Jesus Christ. They forevermore prove the Deity of our Savior and the reliability of His Word.

Introduction

"The Healing of the Lame Man at Bethesda" is the topic of this lecture and is recorded in John 5. This particular miracle is mentioned only in the Book of John. John 5:3-4 has some textual criticism that need to be addressed. However, whatever the outcome of such criticism, the intent of purpose of the miracle and its surroundings should not be overlooked. In this lecture, attention will be given to (1) **The Setting of the Miracle**, (2) **Textual Considerations Surrounding the Miracle**, (3) **The Reaction to the Miracle**, and finally (4) **Lessons from the Miracle**.

The Setting Of The Miracle

The chapter begins after Jesus had healed a nobleman's son. The text simply states, "After this." It does not reveal how long "after this," neither does it matter in that it has no bearing upon the events that follow.

Jesus leaves Galilee and goes "up to Jerusalem" (John 5:1). Any way one goes to Jerusalem he is going "up," for it is higher in elevation. One of the reasons for going to Jerusalem was because there was "a feast of the Jews." There is no way to know whether this was the feast of Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Purim, etc., though most all believe that it is the Passover.

There was in Jerusalem by the "sheep market" (or gate), a pool called in the Hebrew tongue "Bethesda." The sheep market or gate was likely a gate where sheep would enter and there could be kept for sacrifice. The word "Bethesda" means "house of mercy." Here at this pool lay "impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water" (John 5:3). The reason for this, according to John 5:4, is, "For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." This would indeed be an "house of mercy." This pool had 5 porches where people could gather and be protected from the rain or the sun. On this occasion there was a man who had an infirmity for 38 years. Jesus, knowing the man's situation, asked, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man replied that when the water was troubled, he had no one to help him into the pool, but while he would be getting into the pool, another would step into the pool before him: "Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath" (John 5:8-9).

Textual Considerations Surrounding The Miracle

The textual criticism of this section surrounds John 5:3-4. The question is, “Do these verses belong in the text?” It is thought by many that the latter part of John 5:3 and all of John 5:4 are actually later additions to the text. These verses read:

In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

Concerning verse 4, W. T. Hamilton simply stated, “This is omitted by most early manuscripts.”¹ Robert Dodson noted, “The end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 are thought to have been added to explain verse 7. Cook writes, “The whole passage is omitted by the oldest representatives of each group of authorities.”² Norman Geisler and William Nix write:

Sometimes marginal notes were incorporated into the text under the misapprehension that they were part of the text. A. T. Robertson suggests that this is the explanation of the angel’s disturbing the water (John 5:4).³

B. F. Westcott had this to say:

The words from **waiting for...he had** are not part of the original text of St. John, but form a very early note added to explain John 5:7, while the Jewish tradition with regard to the pool was still fresh. Some authorities add the last clause of v. 3 only; others v. 4 only; others add both, but with considerable verbal variations...the last clause of v. 3 and the whole of v. 4...is omitted by BC*, Memph, Theb, Syr, vt., and one Latin copy

(q). The last clause of v. 3...is omitted by A*L; while it is contained in D, I, 33, (latt), (Syr), and the great mass of later authorities. The whole of v. 4 is omitted by D, 33, and by some Latin copies, and is marked as spurious in very many MSS,: while it is contained in AL, (Latt), (Syr.), and the great mass of later authorities. The passage is not referred to by any writer except Tertullian...earlier than Chrysostom, Didymus, and Cyril of Alexandria. Thus the whole passage is omitted by the oldest representatives of each group of authorities. And, on the other hand, the whole passage is not contained in any authority, except Latin, which gives an ante-Nicene text. It is also to be noticed that the passage is inserted in the later texts of the Memphs. and Arm., which omit it, wholly or in part, in their earliest form.⁴

Mr. Westcott's obvious conclusion is that these verses were not in the early manuscripts but were added later. Lenski, after quoting John 5:4, said:

[I]s a spurious addition. The final words in John 5:3, "waiting for the moving of the water," may, indeed, state what was true, and may rest on John 5:7, but are textually so doubtful that they must be cancelled (sic). Since the details of these findings really belong not to commentaries but to works on technical text criticism, we here pass these details by.⁵

Robertson in his **Word Studies of the New Testament** stated:

All of this verse is wanting in the oldest and best manuscripts like Aleph, B, C, D, W, 33, Old Syriac, Coptic versions, and Latin Vulgate. It is undoubtedly added, like the clause in John 5:3, to make clearer the statement in John 5:7. Tertullian is the earliest writer to mention it. The Jews explained the healing virtues of the intermittent spring by the ministry of angels. But the periodicity of such angelic visits makes

it difficult to believe. It is a relief to many to know that the verse is spurious.⁶

However, on the other side, Albert Barnes evidently believes that the text is genuine. After stating that he believes that the waters naturally contained healing properties, he stated:

All that is special about them in the record is that this was produced by the ministry of an angel. This was in accordance with the common sentiment of the Jews, the common doctrine of the Bible, and the belief of the sacred writers. Nor can it be shown to be absurd or improbable that such blessings should be imparted to man by the ministry of an angel. There is no more absurdity in the belief that a pure spirit or holy "angel" should aid man, than that a physician or a parent should; and no more absurdity in supposing that the healing properties of such a fountain should be produced by his aid, than that any other blessing should be, Heb 1:12.⁷

Adam Clarke believes that the passage is genuine and evidently that it was supernatural. He writes:

This clause, with the whole of the fourth verse, is wanting in some MSS. and versions; but I think there is no sufficient evidence against their authenticity. Giessbach seems to be of the same opinion; for though he has marked the whole passage with the notes of doubtfulness, yet he has left it in the text.⁸

Matthew Henry also believed in the genuineness of the text, stating "expositors generally agree that the virtue this pool had was supernatural."⁹

Cook believed that the waters could have contained healing properties and that the waters were stirred by the bubbling of a natural spring.¹⁰ Several believe that the account of an angel troubling the water was a Jewish

tradition and that our Lord didn't comment on such, but simply heals the man that is such a dire condition.

Regarding these verses Guy N. Woods had this to say concerning John 5:3-4:

A portion of verse 3, and all of verse 4, of the King James translation, is omitted from the American Standard text because of insufficient manuscript evidence, though it appears in the margin...These words, omitted from the text, are thought to have been added to the margin, following the close of the apostolic age, to explain the healing believed by many to have occurred there as the result of the magical water.¹¹

The Reaction To The Miracle

The man whom Jesus healed had an infirmity for 38 years. He was so powerless that he needed the help of others to put him into the pool, though he had none! It is sad to have a physical infirmity and even sadder to be in that condition and have no one to help you. This man, however, would find a friend in Jesus! "Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath." The effects of the miracle were immediate! He didn't stagger nor have to have physical therapy, but immediately was able to take up his bed and walk.

The reaction to this miracle is seen in the following verses:

The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? (John 5:10-12).

Isn't it regrettable that the Jews could not rejoice and stand in amazement of the healing of this man? Isn't

it sad that they could not see the ramifications of the miraculous power of Jesus Christ? They could not (or would not) reason as did Nicodemus and know that Jesus is a teacher come from God, for no man could do the miracles that Jesus did, except God be with him (John 3:2)! All these Jews could see is that Jesus broke their tradition of the sabbath. Isn't it interesting to notice that, although what particular feast was in Jerusalem on this occasion is not mentioned, what is recorded is that "and on the same day was the sabbath" (John 5:9). Jesus did not break any command of God. Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), and Jesus never sinned (1 Pet. 2:22). Therefore, Jesus did not break the sabbath:

The sabbath day mentioned in verse nine [John 5:9] bore on the Jews strictness forbidding the doing of any work or carrying of burdens on this day (Exod. 20:8-10; Jer. 17:21-22). Jesus disregarded their added traditions that God's law forbade benevolence and mercy on any day. Our Lord did not sin (1 Pet. 2:22) and fulfilled God's law to the letter in all that he said and did (John 4:34)...The Son of man who is Lord of the sabbath (Matt. 12:28; John 5:17) showed them the difference in their humanly made law and God's law.¹²

At first the man did not know that it was Jesus that had made him whole, until Jesus found him in the temple and "said unto him, Behold thou art made whole: go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee" (John 5:14). Upon this, the man went and told the Jews that it was Jesus Who had made him whole: "And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day" (John 5:16).

Jesus responds to these Jews by stating, "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). One witness that Jesus had was that His

Father (God) was working with Him! They should have been able to deduce such. However, their reaction was quite the opposite: “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Jesus continued to give other witnesses to prove His claims. In addition to His Father working with Him (which alone should have been ample evidence), He gives the testimony of John the Baptist (John 5:33-35), the testimony of His works (John 5:36-38), and then the testimony of the Scriptures, including Moses’ writings (John 5:39-47). Their reaction of rejection was not because they did not have sufficient evidence, but because of their spiritual blindness due in much to their own human traditions! Much of Jesus’ reproof was to the Pharisees and scribes regarding their human traditions they had attached to the Law of Moses:

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (Mark 7:6-13).

Many of the Jewish leaders were so tradition bound that they found Jesus as a threat to them. Rather than objectively reviewing the evidence, they rejected the Messiah and their Savior! How many today blindly follow their own traditions, and perhaps the traditions of their fathers, to the rejection of the Son of God?!

Lessons From The Miracle¹³

There are many great lessons for us today from the healing of the lame or impotent man. **First, Jesus is a friend to the friendless.** Here was a man near a pool of water in which he believed he could be healed, if he could be the first to get into the water. However, he had no one to assist him in getting into the pool. One would think that surely a friend or relative of his would be there to help this poor man. Such, however, was not the case. Perhaps this man had been neglected by others for quite some time. However, Jesus would be a friend to this man and would render a great blessing upon him. For 38 years this man had not been whole, but now he is able to walk and carry his bed! Jesus is a true friend today to those that will allow Him to be their friend. He has rendered unto mankind that which no one else can provide. Jesus said:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you (John 15:13-15).

Jesus has laid down His life for us, thereby proving that He is our friend. We are His friend if we do what He commands us. Perhaps, however, someone feels that he has committed things that would render him in a condition

that God would not forgive him. Such is not true. Remember, Jesus has helped the helpless. He has forgiven the immoral and the murderer (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Acts 2:36-38), and He will forgive us and call us His friend, if we will come to Him.

Second, **Jesus walked among the sick**. The people who gathered around the pool of Bethesda were the impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered. Jesus Christ is no respecter of persons. He loves all mankind. Not only did Jesus walk among the physically sick, but He also walked among the spiritually sick. The religious leaders of His day had a difficult time accepting this fact:

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them (Luke 15:1-2).

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick (Matt. 9:10-12).

Jesus Christ is the Great Physician Who went among the spiritually sick.

Third, **Jesus initiated the blessing**. It is most encouraging to know that God is One Who seeks to bless mankind. This miracle was unsolicited by the lame man. He did not come to the pool expecting to be healed by Jesus. Yet, Jesus knew the man's need and **sought** to bless him. God was first in seeking Adam and Eve when they sinned (Gen. 3). Jesus Christ came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God commended His love to us while we were yet His enemies:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely

for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6-10).

God still loves man and is still initiating salvation for man in that He has commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15).

Fourth, **Jesus knew the man's condition:** "When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6). Just as Jesus knew this man's true condition, He likewise knows our true condition. On another occasion the Bible states, "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25). Jesus knows our every temptation and sin. It is comforting to know that we have a sympathetic High Priest. The Hebrews writer stated:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

Jesus is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted like we are, yet He was without sin. Sometimes we may think of God's throne as a

throne of justice (and it is), but in the above text, it is called a “throne of grace.” We are exhorted to go boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Who is it that doesn’t feel his need for mercy when he approaches God? Realizing that we are weak and that we have sinned, we need God’s mercy. But not only mercy for our past sins, but we also solicit His grace to help in time of need.

Fifth, there is something worse than having an infirmity for 38 years. Regarding this man that was healed, the Bible states, “Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14). Losing one’s soul would be worse than physical illness. Jesus taught that the spirit is of much more value than one’s physical body and that salvation should take precedent over all else: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Sixth, Jesus’ power over sickness proves that He is the Son of God. When Jesus healed this man that had been infirm for 38 years, the Jews should have seen that His ability was supernatural and that the Father was working with Him. In fact, Jesus made this very observation to the unbelieving Jews. He stated, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). Jesus’ miracles (His works) gave evidence of His claims:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1-2).

Anyone that wanted to see the truth could have known that Jesus is the Son of God and that His words are true.

True Biblical faith is based on reliable evidence: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

Seventh, **the lame man had to have the desire to be healed**. Jesus asked this man, “Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5:6). If this man had no desire to be healed, Jesus, no doubt, would not have healed him. Likewise, Jesus doesn’t force His spiritual healing (salvation) on any today. Jesus desires all to be saved and invites all to come unto Him, but He doesn’t force any to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is One Who went about doing good works. He blessed many with whom He came into contact, such as the lame man of John 5. However, many felt threatened by Him and doubted His claims. On another occasion they even reached a point where they were going to stone Him: “Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?” (John 10:32).

The **miracles** of Jesus prove that He is the **Messiah** and that His **message** is true:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

Endnotes

1 W. T. Hamilton, **Show Us the Father** (Plainview, TX: Nichols Bros., 1964), p. 53.

2 Robert G. Dodson, Jr., **Studies in John** (Denton, TX: Valid, 1999), p. 107.

3 Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, **A General Introduction to the Bible** (Chicago: Moody, 1986), p. 471.

4 B. F. Westcott, **The Gospel According to St. John** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 81, 94.

5 R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 362.

6 **Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1997), and **Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Broadman, 1985).

7 **Barnes' Notes**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1997).

8 **Adam Clarke's Commentary**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1996).

9 **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Electronic Database, New Modern Edition (Hendrickson, 1991).

10 Dodson, p. 107.

11 Guy N. Woods, **The Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 95.

12 Gary Colley, **John** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1989), p. 111.

13 See the books **Show Us the Father** by W. T. Hamilton and **Sermon Outlines on the Miracles of Jesus** by W. Gaddys Roy for many of these lessons and more.

CHAPTER 25

The Healing Of The Woman With An Infirmity; The Man With Dropsy

Wayne Jones

Appreciation

I WANT TO THANK BROTHER Clarke along with the elders of the Southaven church for the confidence placed in me through this invitation to speak. The name of this church is synonymous with Truth. The stand which this congregation, her preachers, and her elders take for Truth in opposing and exposing error in this part of the world is greatly appreciated. May the Lord richly bless the efforts put forth from this lectureship and any other work in which they are involved.

Furthermore, I want to thank God and the elders here at Southaven for the opportunity that has been presented me to work with this great congregation. I look forward to the work here and the relationships that my family and I will make in the coming days. It is our prayer that the Lord richly bless every effort that we put forth together in His kingdom.

Introduction

Any serious and honest Bible student must conclude that the age of miracles has ceased. God promised through

inspiration that this would happen once the miracles had served their purpose (1 Cor. 13:8-12). From the previously mentioned verses and related passages it is easily proven that the miracles of the New Testament can no longer be performed today because God chose such to be the case. Despite this easily proven fact, many still believe in and claim to have power to perform “modern day” miracles. Whether those who believe in these things are misled, misguided, or willfully ignorant, they are still wrong because the Bible teaches that the miraculous age has ended.

Nevertheless, the miracles of the New Testament deserve proper attention. To an even greater degree the miracles of our Savior deserve proper attention. We only have 89 chapters (28 in Matthew, 16 in Mark, 24 in Luke, and 21 in John) in the New Testament that are devoted to covering the greatest life ever lived by the greatest Man ever born. Many of the verses within these 89 chapters deal with His birth and many deal with His death. Many deal with His prayer life while others relay to us His messages and discourses. Still others are reserved for providing a vivid description of the miracles that He worked. In performing miracles Christ proved His Divinity, compassion and power. He showed power over disease (Matt. 8:1-4) in the healing of the leper, power over distance (Matt. 8:8-13) in the healing of the centurion’s servant, power over the demon world (Matt. 8:16), and power over nature (Matt. 8:23-27) in the calming of the storm. The purpose for these miracles was to confirm the Christ’s Deity and the truthfulness of the message that He came to deliver.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned...And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:15-16, 20).

Consequently, there is a need for us to consider the miracles of Christ. Moreover, there is a need for us to notice the two which have been assigned for this chapter--not only because Christ performed them, but also because the Spirit chose for them to be recorded. According to the pen of John, "many other signs" were done, but not recorded. In short, since the accounts of the woman with an infirmity (Luke 13:10-17) and the man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6) were important enough in the mind of God to include them in revelation, then they ought to be important enough to us to read, study and understand.

The two miracles given for our discussion are taken from Luke's account of Christ's life:

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from

this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him (Luke 13:10-17).

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things (Luke 14:1-6).

The Occasions

The circumstances surrounding the two accounts under discussion are similar in a number of ways. For example, both occurred on the Sabbath day. The doctrine of the “Sabbath” is familiar to students of the Old Testament. It is first mentioned and commanded to be observed in the book of Exodus. When God gave the law through Moses, he instituted, authorized, and commanded the Israelites to observe the Sabbath:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exod. 20:8-11).

In the aforementioned passage, God refers to His own example of rest following the creation of the world and

from that example requires a six day work week from the Israelites with rest to occur on the Sabbath. This was not a universal, time-transcending law, but one given under the Law of Moses and taken away when Christ nailed that law to the Cross. Despite its limitedness over the course of time, it was most certainly a day of importance to those living under the Jewish system.

Another similarity between these two events is that each involved Jesus healing a “common” person while in the presence of a Jewish leader. Of course, this always caused tension between Christ and the religious leaders of His day. Just before He told the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and brother in Luke 15, notice what was said of Christ and who said it: “And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2). The Pharisees’ disdain for such situations was twofold. First, they felt as if they were better people than the publicans and sinners (Luke 18:11). This haughty attitude led them to despise any and all who gave the publicans attention. Second, if Christ was Who He claimed to be, they felt that as **Pharisees** they deserved His attention more than any others. When Christ came proclaiming to love and even seek out the sinner (John 3:16; Luke 19:10), this made the high-minded Jewish leaders upset and envious of Jesus’ attention. Moreover, if Christ was not Who He claimed to be, they felt that they deserved the attention of the people more than Christ. Either way they became envious of Christ. Of course, it was “that for envy they had delivered him” (Matt. 27:18).

Despite the number of similarities, there are also things about the occasions of these two events which are different. For example, the place of the events are different. The account in Luke 13 took place in the synagogue, which was the public place of worship to which many would have had access. The account in Luke 14 took place in the home

of a chief Pharisee. This would have been more of a private, intimate setting which would have allowed for more attention to be placed on every move that the Christ made. Although the second setting is more of a private nature, the man with dropsy was still able to get to Jesus. The following has been suggested as to why such was the case:

This was the scheme of the Pharisee host. The sick man was not one of the invited guests; with the freedom which attends a feast in a large Oriental home, the afflicted man was introduced, as though by chance, with other on-lookers. The skillful plotters stationed him in a prominent position, where the eyes of the strange Guest would at once fall on him...Would he heal him on the sabbath day? Could he? perhaps thought the crafty foes of the Great Physician-Teacher.¹

Another difference between the two accounts is the title or position of Christ's opposition.

In Luke 13 the man opposing Christ was said to be "the ruler of the synagogue." It has been said that "each synagogue had its ruler; it was his duty to take care that all things were done decently and in order in the services of the synagogue."² In Luke 14 it is said that the one opposing Christ was "one of the chief Pharisees." Albert Barnes wrote that this man was

One of the Pharisees who were rulers, or members of the great council or the Sanhedrin ...It does not mean that he was head of the sect of the Pharisees, but one of those who happened to be a member of the Sanhedrin. He was therefore a man of influence and reputation.³

A final difference between the two occasions is the reason for Jesus' being in each. In Luke 13 Jesus was there to teach in the synagogue (Luke 13:10). This was common to the life of Christ. In fact, Luke recorded earlier in his account of Christ that, "as his custom was, he went into

the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). On the other hand, in Luke 14 Jesus was apparently in the house of this Pharisee by invitation. Despite these differences, He was still tempted and tried in each situation by those in charge of the proceedings.

Much more could be discussed, but perhaps these thoughts will set the stage for the examination and understanding of these two miraculous events.

The Miracles

The subject of healing in the first account was a woman who for eighteen years had been “bowed together,” unable to lift herself up. The Bible describes her as having a “spirit of infirmity.” It is possible that Satan either directly or indirectly was responsible for her problems (Luke 13:16): “Her disease was spinal and extending down to the loin; she was so bent down as to be totally unable to raise herself up, or even to look up.”⁴ She was in the most helpless of conditions and had been there for some eighteen years, but there was a Helper nearby. She was coming to worship broken, but she would leave mended. She was coming to worship sick, but she would leave cured:

In a moment when the woman least expected it, her prayers had been answered and she was released beyond her expectation. Jesus struck at the root of evil; the miracle was evident to all and it was most merciful.⁵

It should also be pointed out that we do not have record of this woman’s asking Jesus to heal her. Often was the case when those seeking the healing of the Master would throw themselves at His feet and beg. Such was the case with the lepers of Luke 17, the centurion of Matthew 8, and the friends of the man with palsy of Luke 5. However, some did not ask for Jesus to bestow these acts of kindness

and mercy. They received this healing grace without merit or request. Luke records the account of Christ raising the son of a widow in the city of Nain (Luke 7:11-15). On this occasion, we are not told when or where Christ was begged or even asked to perform the miracle. In fact, Luke reveals that “when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her” (Luke 7:13). In Luke 13:12, we are told that “Jesus saw her.” What do you suppose was His reaction? Certainly, it would be in harmony with Scripture to say that Jesus had compassion on her. It was that compassion for her condition, along with a desire to answer the arguments of the Pharisees (thus, proving His Deity), that prompted Jesus to heal this woman, who (as far as we know) never asked to be healed.

In the other account we have been assigned to address, we find a man who is sick with “dropsy.” Brother Ira Rice describes this as a “common disease causing unnatural accumulation of fluid in parts of the body.”⁶ H. Leo Boles further described “dropsy” as the “accumulation of water under the skin, in various parts of the body, often the result of a previous disease, and generally incurable.”⁷ Certainly, if Christ had power over life, death, distance, and nature, then He had power over a disease that according to human standards was incurable.

The actual record of this miracle is short and to the point: “And he took him, and healed him” (Luke 14:4). There was no need to dwell on this point. Christ had the power to do it so He did it. There is not a doubt or hesitation in Luke’s record of the events. There was no waiting and wondering about the results of Jesus’s actions. Simply put, He healed him. The healing of this man was much like the healing of the woman in Luke 13:10-17--it was immediate, which (and it goes without saying) directly contradicts and exposes many supposed “faith healers” of our time. May

God help them and us to see and accept that, when God performs a miracle, it happens when He says for it to happen without waiting or uncertainty.

However, it could be that little is said about the healing of this man because the miracle is not the focal point of the passage. The focal point of the passage is the reaction that Jesus received from those round about at the time of the healing.

The Reactions

The reaction of those present on the day that Jesus loosed the woman of her infirmity was vocal--especially the reaction of the ruler of the synagogue. He appeared to be angry not only at Christ for healing on the Sabbath, but also at the woman for being healed on the sabbath. He expressed this indignation by addressing those present with these words: "There are six days in which men ought to work: in them come and be healed, and not on the sabbath" (Luke 13:14). Remember that this was a man of authority and influence in the synagogue. Thus, when he spoke, many listened and some did what he said. The statement he made, as recorded above, had no basis in the Law. He had no Scripture to cite as proof of this teaching. It may have been consistent with the traditions of the elders or consistent with his own opinion about how things ought to be done, but those consistencies do not make what he said right.

The ruler of the synagogue reminds us of many in the brotherhood today. Sadly, they stand to teach or sit to write, and the words which they produce sound good and reasonable until you compare them to what the Scriptures teach. When the comparisons are made between their teachings and Scripture, their teachings look much more like opinion and newfound tradition than they look like

Truth. Yet, many willingly and others blindly follow these men and their teachings. May those teaching, and those following, realize the need for Scriptural accuracy in all that we do or say. The ruler of the synagogue did not see such need.

The reaction to the second miracle we are examining was different, but then again it was the same. While the reaction was not vocal, those in Luke 14 believed the same thing that the ruler declared in Luke 13. Since Jesus had the ability and power to know the thoughts of His enemies even before they put them into words, He chose to address this issue before they had a chance to tempt or ensnare him. Jesus realized that the man with dropsy had been placed before Him as a test. If Jesus did not heal this man, they would have questioned His compassion and power. If Jesus did heal this man, they were going to raise the objections we have already noted from the account earlier. In short, these men had no chance for outward reaction because Jesus foresaw their charge and answered them before they had an opportunity to carry out their plan.

In response to both reactions, Jesus exposed their hypocritical attitudes. He even used the word “hypocrite” to describe the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 13:15). Such was often the case with the Pharisees, especially when they were trying to tempt Jesus. If you will recall Matthew 23, you will remember that Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites seven times in a span of 17 verses. On this occasion they were hypocritical because they too had “worked” on the Sabbath. If their animals needed water, they gave it to them. Or if their animals had fallen into a pit, they had gone to pull them out. Those actions were actions of necessity and even of compassion. Yet, they were willing to condemn the Savior for healing on the Sabbath. We must also keep in mind that Jesus was not trying to justify Himself because He broke one of the laws

concerning the Sabbath. There was no law that forbade compassion or even healing on this holy day. If there had been, then Jesus would have never done it (1 Pet. 2:22).

After pointing out the inconsistency of these Pharisees, they had nothing more to say. Of the first account Luke wrote: "And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed" (Luke 13:17). Of the second account he wrote: "And they could not answer him again to these things" (Luke 14:6). Dear friends, these two accounts are two of the many examples of Jesus' being not only the great Physician (in a physical sense), but also of His being the Master Teacher (John 3:2). Jesus spoke with such power, authority, and clearness that even the fiercest of enemies were ashamed and unable to respond to His teachings!

The Lessons

The first and perhaps most important lesson that we learn from these two accounts is the awesomeness of God's power. His works cannot be matched by any other being. Such was proven in the creation of the world, in the flood of Noah's day, in the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and in the confrontation with the prophets of Baal atop mount Carmel. It is this power that causes us to fall before Him in worship and eagerly serve Him each day. God's power will one day destroy the earth and rule in judgment. It is accounts like these that cause us to stop and appreciate the power of Almighty God:

Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah. Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. He turned the

sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him. He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves (Psm. 66:3-7).

In the second place, by the healings of these two individuals, we are reminded of the Deity of Christ. It was needful for Christ to prove Who He was and Who He claimed to be. Many rejected Him without even investigating the facts and looking at the offered proofs. Others looked and still did not believe. These, too, rejected the Christ. However, those with honest hearts should be able to investigate the claim of Christ to be God in the flesh and find that claim to be in harmony with the Word of God. One way to verify this claim is to consider the miracles that He worked (John 20:30-31). The power that Christ displayed over death, disease, and devils is proof beyond doubt that He was the Son of God. It is true that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

In the third place, these passages make us aware of Satan’s persistence. Although these two occasions sound somewhat similar, they are different enough to help one realize that they are two different events. Despite the difference, the attack against Christ was the same. Satan, through the ruler of the synagogue, failed to trap Christ the first time, so he tried again through one of the chief Pharisees. Recall, if you will, the statement made at the end of Christ’s battle with Satan in the wilderness of temptation: “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season**” (Luke 4:13, emp. mine, WJ). Sometimes we may think that this was the only time in the course of His life that Jesus was tempted. This verse negates that notion. Christ was only removed from the burden of temptation for a season

or a certain period of time. Why? Because Satan is persistent in his attacks. These accounts are vivid examples of Satan's desire to devour his prey.

A fourth lesson learned from this account is that speaking the truth always produces the greatest result. On both occasions Jesus spoke only that which was in harmony with the Law of God concerning those matters. What were the results? Simply put, the mouths of His accusers were stopped. The Bible says of those who opposed Christ that "all his adversaries were ashamed" and "they could not answer him again to these things." These things were not done because Jesus had set out to embarrass them or because He took great pride in proving them wrong. They were silenced and ashamed because Jesus concentrated on the truth, which exposed their falsehoods. In our battle against the accusers and false teachers of our day, we must always remain true to the truth. In doing so, and always proclaiming it, they will be ashamed, their mouths will be stopped, and God will be glorified through our faithfulness.

A final lesson given for our consideration is the necessity of being spiritually grounded. If Jesus had not spoken up on the occasion of the woman with the infirmity, some would probably have believed the ruler of the synagogue when he suggested that healing or doing good on the Sabbath was wrong. Although he never gave chapter and verse to prove his claim, some (because of his influential position) would more than likely have believed him just because he said it. Today, the same is true. Denominations fill their pews with people who believe their doctrines simply because they teach them. Even churches of Christ have members that believe what the Bible teaches only because someone told them to believe it. However, these members are often the first deceived by the false teachers and doctrines of men. Why? Because they are not

grounded enough to know the difference between truth and error: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Conclusion

Although the age of miracles has passed us by, we are privileged to have the inspired record of many miraculous events. Our faith is strengthened by the miracles of “great importance” (i.e., the creation, the flood, the parting of the Red Sea, and the resurrection of Christ). Nevertheless, there are many lessons we can learn and much faith we can build through the two Sabbath day healings we have noted in this lesson.

May God help us to remember His Son, the power He possessed, the compassion He showed, the love that He gave, and the miracles that He wrought.

Endnotes

1 H. D. M. Spence, **The Pulpit Commentary**, ed. Spence and Exell, Volume 16: Mark and Luke (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 23.

2 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1991), p. 272.

3 Albert Barnes, “The Gospels,” **Barnes’ Notes: Notes on the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), p. 94.

4 Boles, p. 271.

5 Ibid.

6 Ira Y. Rice, Jr., “The Saviour’s Descriptions,” **Luke**, ed. William S. Cline (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1988), p. 340.

7 Boles, p. 281.

CHAPTER 26

The Stilling Of The Storm At Sea; The Miracle Of Walking On Water

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

IT HAS BEEN A deep delight and high honor to speak on all the previous and precious **POWER** Lectureships and this current one is no exception to that observation. Genuine gratitude is expressed to B. J. Clarke, the fine elders here at Southaven and the entire membership for the invitation to speak again this year and to write a chapter in the book.

A study of our Lord's miracles is an idea whose time has come in a society where modernism prevails. Modernism has always been an enemy to the miraculous events of God's Holy Book. Faith begins or ends with the miraculous. No man can be a believer in God, Christ and the Holy Spirit while denying Biblical miracles in both testaments. Such daring denials place one squarely in the corner of malicious modernism. This is certainly true relative to the miracles of our Lord. He exhibits the supernatural over nature, sickness, disease, death and demons. His miracles were comprehensive in nature and were always performed to confirm His mission as Deity to earth. In every sense of the term He was the Miraculous

Messiah. All of this fundamentally fits His mastery over the element of water--the object of our present study.

Biblical Background Of Watery Wonders

Creation observed such in Genesis 1. The Holy Spirit brooded or moved on the face of those primeval waters (Gen. 1:2). Day number two witnessed the expanse in the midst of waters below and waters above (Gen. 1:6-8). Day number three has the waters connected and the appearing of dry land (Gen. 1:9-10). Day number five has waters bringing forth aquatic life in varied forms (Gen. 1:20-21). All of these were miraculous in nature.

Miracles of Moses were frequently linked with water such as turning Egyptian waters into blood, frogs from the river, hail (frozen water), the locusts cast into the Red Sea, the parting of that same Red Sea at Exodus time and bringing forth water for Israel in the bleak, barren wilderness (Exod. 7:19ff; Exod. 8:2ff; Exod. 9:22ff; Exod. 10:19; Exod. 14:21; Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:1ff).

Watery wonders continue under General Joshua as the flooded Jordan is parted to allow Israel's entrance into Canaan (Josh. 3:16). This muddy stream will be parted twice later at the supernatural bidding of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:8, 14).

Miracles linked with water continue on into the period of the Judges. Samson was a recipient of such in Judges 15:18-19. Samuel caused it to rain at a time when rain just did not fall in Palestine (1 Sam. 12:16ff).

Watery wonders continue on into the period of the kings and later prophets. The miraculous touched Elijah's great contest on Mount Carmel with Baal's false prophets in 1 Kings 18. Miraculously, the heavenly descending fire licked up the water abundantly surrounding the sacrifice on the Carmel altar (1 Kings 18:32-38). As already indicated Elijah and Elisha each parted Jordan's waters

in 1 Kings 2. A number of Elisha's miracles were water-linked such as making wholesome the poisonous waters at Jericho, the abundance of water provided for famished armies, Naaman's leprous cleansing in Jordan's waters and the borrowed axe head that floated (2 Kings 2:20ff; 2 Kings 3:4ff; 2 Kings 5:1ff; 2 Kings 6:5ff). Watery miracles continue with Jonah and the great fish incident in chapter one.

Little wonder then that watery wonders will reflect in Messianic miracles. Water in six jars is turned into nourishing grape juice (not fiery, alcoholic spirits) in John 2:1-11. The demon-infested swine drowning in the waters of the Galilean Sea concluded Christ's miraculous work in northeast Palestine in Mark 5 and Luke 8 as He cast out a legion of demons.

Background And Text Of Stilling The Stormy Sea

Matthew's background reports that Jesus performed impressive miracles in fulfilling what Isaiah predicted, had a great multitude following Him and had shallow people promise loyalty as disciples (Matt. 8:16-21). Mark's background of this miracle has Jesus in parabolic action as Master Teacher (Mark 4:1-34). Luke's background has the faithful women who followed Him named, the parable of the sower, the lighted candle or lamp, a warning about the seriousness of how we hear and the coming of mother Mary and His physical brethren--sons of Joseph and Mary and His half-brothers (Luke 8:1-21).

The inspired scribes, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all record this mighty miracle of stopping the storm at sea (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). Matthew's account reads:

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose

a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! (Matt. 8:23-27).

In supplementary fashion Mark adds that He sent the multitudes away prior to the sea journey, that smaller ships or boats accompanied them, that He was asleep on a pillow in the hinder parts of the ship and that they feared exceedingly subsequent to this supernatural occurrence. The beloved physician adds that this storm of wind **came down** upon the lake. This shows geographical accuracy as this storm came from the winds of the hills above and surrounding this low-lying sea, nearly 700 feet below sea level, only to meet the warm air on the surface of the sea. Storms, in like manner, are produced frequently in the southern part of our country when the cooler air from the north and the warmer air from the Gulf make violent contact. Severe thunderstorms and deadly tornadoes often result from such weather collisions.

The Geographical Setting Of This Miracle

Three important bodies of water are associated with the land of Palestine--the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. They are all connected. Waters above feed into the Sea of Galilee. This sea, in turn, feeds the Jordan River as it descends in very crooked fashion emptying into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea has no outlet and is the lowest lying body of water on earth.

The Sea of Galilee is called the Sea or Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), the Sea of Chinnereth (Num. 34:11),

and the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1, 23; John 21:1). It is pear-shaped. Its dimensions are thirteen miles north and south and eight miles east and west. Its greatest depth is 400 feet. Fresh water from the melting snow of the mountainous area north of it feed into it. It abounded in fish in Christ's day and still does. I recall a visit to Bible Lands in 1970. When we were in that area we witnessed a number of fishermen fishing from their boats. Their boats were filled with an early morning catch. At noon that day we enjoyed a delicious fish meal at a restaurant built right at the edge of this sea. The fish, we were told, had been caught in the Sea of Galilee. Ancient Rabbis used to say that Jehovah created seven seas but the Sea of Galilee was His special delight. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, also paid high respect to this sea.

Jesus loved this sea. Much of His teaching was done in its beautiful vicinity. The Sermon on the Mount was delivered near this sea. Many of His great miracles were performed around this sea or upon it such as stilling it in a time of storm or walking on its stormy bosom.

George W. DeHoff and J. T. Marlin, both warm friends of mine, visited this area many times and led tourist groups there regularly. They both wrote fascinating books about their Bible Land travels which I have read with profit and delight. Brother DeHoff says of this sea and the storms that develop there with fierce frequency:

The Sea of Galilee is subject to violent storms; powerful thermo-drafts are created by the high mountains encircling it. Frequently strong winds funnel through the mountain passes to sweep the sea with sudden storms. Here Jesus miraculously stilled the storm (Mark 4:35-39), and on another occasion walked on the water (Matthew 14:22-34).¹

Brother DeHoff related how he had sailed that sea when its waters were calm and not so calm.² I once sailed

that sea but it was not like the apostles faced on this fearful occasion. It was not exactly smooth the day I sailed it but it was not storm-swept or dangerous to be upon its beautiful waters. I join many others in suggesting that it is one of the most beautiful bodies of water my eyes have ever surveyed.

This storm must have been very severe. Luke says the ship was filled with water and that they were in jeopardy (Luke 8:23). Mark relates how that “the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full” (Mark 4:37). If true of the larger ship, what must have been the lot of the small ships sailing in His company? Matthew describes it as “a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves” (Matt. 8:24). Recall that these men were not sailing novices. At least four of them, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, were veteran fishermen and had been upon its bosom plying their occupation innumerable times. No doubt they were very familiar with these severe storms on this sea. Yet this one struck fear into their hearts. Trench thought they might have hesitated for awhile not willing to awake their sleeping Saviour which may well be the case. But at last the peril was too great. Trench says:

[Y]et at last the extremity of the peril overcame their hesitation, and they did so, not without exclamations of haste and terror; as is evidenced by the double **Master, Master** of St. Luke. This double compellation always marks a special earnestness on the part of the speaker. In St. Mark, the disciples rouse their Lord with words almost of rebuke, as if He were unmindful at once of their safety and of his own: **Master carest not thou that we perish?** for in this, their “we,” they included no doubt their beloved Lord as well as themselves.³

The Romans had their god of the sea--Neptune. The Greeks had their counterpart and called their god of the

sea--Poseidon. But these disciples were not idol worshipers. They had the Sovereign of the Seas in their midst. He had made the Sea of Galilee and all the mountains encircling it. He was the Lord of the wind that had come down in furious form. He was sleeping serenely, so peacefully. How like Him!

Jesus awoke to their cries of alarm. He addressed first of all their lack of vibrant faith (1 John 5:4-5). Their faith was anything but strong and solid, vibrant and victorious on the storm-swept bosom of the Galilean Sea.

Jesus rebuked them for their little faith. They were not like the Capernaum centurion in Luke 7 who had a great faith--one incomparable among Israelites. Then He rebuked the sea and restored it to perfect calmness. Smoothly and immediately they were at the shore (John 6:21).

The Primary Purpose Of This Mighty Miracle

The disciples had seen His mastery over sickness, diseases, demon possession, a great catch of fish, and even death itself. Yet, with all they had witnessed from the Miraculous Messiah they were still not full of faith. They needed to see another dimension of His dynamic works. This was power over the elements at sea. He was the Sovereign of the sea. The winds were under His dominion. As their Maker and Master He rebuked both wind and sea. The wind ceased to blow; the sea became calm causing its billowing waves to subside. This miracle of might would be another chapter in their book of accumulating evidence for His Deity. That book was growing larger all the time.

Reactions From Eyewitnesses Of This Miracle

Matthew said they “marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matt. 8:27). Mark states that “they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that

even the wind and sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). Luke states, “And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him” (Luke 8:25).

Modern reactions are at opposite poles. Bible believers accept this miracle as authentic; it is genuine all the way. Modernists reject it in its entirety. They do not believe that He stopped the tempest from blowing or calmed the turbulent sea by His mighty word of His power. Here is the difference between faith and doubt, between theism and agnosticism, between ardent acceptance and rebellious rejection, between honoring Christ and blaspheming Him.

Practical Applications To Modern Circumstances

The ship of Zion, the Lord’s church, is in the midst of stormy seas. The winds of worldliness, the waves of infidelity, the storms of sectarian teaching abroad in the land, the liberal change agents among us, all beat against this stately ship headed for heaven’s harbor. Each error which inundates our world would love to sink permanently the ship of Zion. But as long as we stay loyal to the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, Satan and his ships of falsehood are not going to sink this solid and stable ship. The Titanic could be sunk and was sunk on its maiden voyage across the Atlantic nearly a century ago. But Zion’s ship is unsinkable as long as the Sovereign of the sea is aboard and at the spiritual helm. Great encouragement comes from what Jesus did in that storm-tossed barque on the bosom of the Galilean Sea.

Another obvious application lies in the grand **how** employed by Jesus in stopping the tempest that raged that day. He stopped it by the dynamic power of His **spoken**

Word. More and more we are hearing that the Word of God is just informational. The whole Bible in general refutes this sophistry and this watery wonder does so particularly. The apostles had the necessary information about the perils they faced! They knew the wind was blowing in furious form; they knew the billows were inundating the ship; they knew they were being tossed to and fro. They could see such, feel such and were endangered by it! Their word could not stop the storm. Had it been left up to them they would have stopped it in its beginning tracks without awaking the sleeping Saviour, the resting Redeemer. They needed the Lord and the power of His Word. He spoke Words of rebuke to the winds and waves. The winds ceased and the waves subsided producing an instant calmness. All this was done with amazing rapidity. Jesus performed this miracle of might by the power of His Word and that Word was far more than informational.

It has been amazingly amazing for centuries what the Catholic and Protestant world has done to denigrate the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. Even more amazing are current attempts among us affirming that the Bible, the Word of God, is just informational and that Christians need the Spirit of God working directly on their hearts in the living of the Christian life. If that is not slanderous and blasphemous toward the Word of God, I am at a loss to know what else would be required to slander the Saviour, blaspheme His Book and disrespect the Spirit of Truth Himself. The change agents among us tell us that the Word of God is all-sufficient in conviction and conversion in getting people into Christ but not all-sufficient in keeping them in the Lord. Why is the Word of God all-sufficient in the former two but terribly deficient in the latter category? At the rate some of our brethren are traveling toward Calvinism, how long will it be before they are full-fledged Calvinists in conviction, conversion, and sanctification?

Consistency will be satisfied only temporarily with partial Calvinism. The direct operation of the Holy Spirit is only one of five major points of Calvinism. Will our changing brethren begin next to flirt with total hereditary depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement and the impossibility of apostasy? The steps are short between accepting one part of lethal Calvinism and accepting the whole poisonous package.

In lyrical comprehensiveness the great song, **Master, The Tempest Is Raging**, captures the force of this watery wonder. The first stanza presents the peril of the raging tempest. The second stanza shows man's utter dependence upon the Lord. The third stanza portrays victory in that the terror is over with elements resting calmly and serenely. Prayerfully, the Sovereign of the sea is requested to remain with us in order that we may "make the blest harbor, And rest on the blissful shore." The chorus reaches a mighty crescendo:

The winds and the waves shall obey Thy will,
Peace be still! Peace be still!
Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons, or men, or whatever it be,
No water can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean and earth and skies;
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, peace, be still!

We owe a debt of gratitude to Mary A. Baker and H. R. Palmer who wrote these worthy and wonderful words and set them to marvelous music.

Background And Text Of Walking On The Water

Luke, the beloved physician, does not record this miracle of might. Matthew, Mark and John do. All three

give as immediate background His feeding the five thousand men plus women and children. John reports that Jesus took one boy's lunch and multiplied it marvelously in assuaging the hunger of thousands of men, women and children. It is nothing but modernism to suggest that they all had food, were hoarding it and when they witnessed the generosity of the lovely lad, they were shamed into producing all that they had concealed and all enjoyed a plenteous repast. This negates the miraculous which is modernism's naturalistic intent. It was a miracle all the way. Matthew and Mark both relate as background Herod's cruel slaying of the just John at the instigating hands of Herodias and her dancing daughter Salome. This preceded the Lord's taking the disciples to a place for rest and later the feeding of the five thousand. John relates that, subsequent to the feeding of the five thousand, the excitable mood of the people was to coerce His becoming a King right there and then. Jesus thwarted this by dismissing the multitude, sending the disciples to sea to cross the northern part of the Galilean Sea, and His own departure into a mountain to pray. The disciples were reluctant to leave Him but He constrained them or insisted they do His bidding. He knew what was best for them; they did not know. Matthew adds about Peter's attempt at water walking. Mark and John do not record this event.

It would be good for the student to read Mark's and John's accounts of this amazing wonder, this supernatural sign. The text in Matthew 14:22-33 reads:

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in

the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

An Analysis Of The Miracle

Jesus, the disciples and the multitudes are all together for the miracle of the loaves. Then there is a parting of these three. The disciples are constrained to depart by ship to the other side of the sea. The multitudes, now worked up into a frenzy for His quick march to the throne of the Messianic Kingdom, were dismissed. They were not the architects of His kingdom and its unfolding time, nature and facets. Jesus departed into a mountain to pray. He needed to be alone with His heavenly Father. The three writers do not follow the departing multitudes. John does later. Instead they depict Jesus in prayer for most of the night and the disciples facing the tempests of the stormy sea. The ship was not skirting the seashore as some have thought. They had rowed about three to three and one-half miles as per John 6 and were in the midst of the sea as per Matthew 14. John and Matthew were no doubt eyewitnesses and they were in perfect position to know whether they were in the middle of the sea or just a few yards from shore. Why all the fear on their part if

they were within wading distance of the shoreline as Peter was in John 21 in one of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ?

During the fourth watch of the night, three a.m. to six a.m., Jesus came walking on the water. He was not walking on the shore as malicious modernism contends. How could the disciples see a figure on the dark stormy night on the shore when they were three or four miles out on the sea? They feared, thinking He was a spirit or a ghost. He spoke an identifying word of cheer assuring them, “it is I, be not afraid.” Peter requested that he be permitted to come down and walk on the water duplicating His Lord’s miracle. Jesus extended a “Come.” As long as Peter’s eyes were riveted on the Miraculous Messiah he remained atop the billowing waves as they beat around him with force and fury. When he took his eyes off Jesus he began to sink and cried for the Lord’s help. Immediately, Jesus saved him from a drowning death and reproved him for having too little in the way of faith. There was no legitimate basis for his doubts. When the Lord and Peter entered the ship, the wind ceased and calmness was restored. John reports that immediately they were at land which seemingly was another miracle (John 6:21). Brother Guy N. Woods thought so as he commented on this passage in his par excellent commentary on John. Incidentally, I regard this to be the best commentary I have ever read on the Gospel of John. I recommend it highly.

Primary Purpose Of This Miracle

Prior to this miracle of might Jesus had fed the five thousand men plus women and children. This should have had a permanent effect upon His disciples. Apparently, it did not. Mark reports after He walked on the sea, “For they considered not the miracles of the loaves: for their heart was hardened” (Mark 6:52). They needed this miracle

to deepen a faith that still was entirely too shallow. John recorded this miracle. He tells us in John 20:30-31 that he chose just such miracles of might and signs of the supernatural that would prove the Deity of Jesus Christ to any rational reader. Ardent acceptance of such faith, a faith that moved obediently and not lethal faith only, would result in the granting of life eternal in that upper and better kingdom on heavenly high. Like His stilling the tempest earlier in His ministry this miracle showed clearly and conclusively His power over nature. He was the Sovereign of the sea--not the Roman Neptune or the Greek Poseidon--popular idols of Roman and Greek sailors in that first century. By this miracle He met the immediate needs of the disciples and added a confirmatory chapter to the great book of His Deity. A fraud or an imposter could have done nothing of this magnitude or marvel.

John is the lone penman that provides another intensely interesting insight of this miracle and aftermath. He wrote:

The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus. And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou thither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth

unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (John 6:22-27).

This miracle and its immediate aftermath permitted Jesus to teach the multitude a greatly needed lesson on the true priorities of life. They were putting temporary loaves on the front burner and eternal life on a distant back burner. They were seeking Jesus as a supplier of bread for the body instead of seeking Him as the Bread of Life which He will discuss in greater detail in the remnant of this chapter.

Here is a miracle that the fakes of our day cannot duplicate. During the early 1970's there was a man in Mississippi who bragged and boasted that on such and such a day he was going to walk the waters of Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson, Mississippi. He received state-wide notoriety. But he never made good his boast. Near the time of his watery execution he claimed that he had been shot in the leg. I wrote in a Mississippi newspaper a refutation and exposure of this quack. I pointed out that a self-acclaimed water walker should be able to do one of two other things: be a bullet dodger or an instant leg healer. He could do neither. That was obvious to every citizen of the Magnolia State. He was a fake through and through! Had he attempted such he would not have stayed atop the reservoir waters as long as Peter did in Matthew 14:28-32. Likewise, he would not have had Jesus there to save him as was the case with the sinking Simon. This modern fake would have sunk with embarrassing rapidity and no one knew it better than the boastful man himself.

Various Reactions By Eyewitnesses

Matthew reports how the ones "in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). This watery wonder was designed to

prove He was truly the Son of God. More was involved than their immediate distress in facing the tempest at sea. Mark depicts the supernatural scene by stating that “they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered” (Mark 6:51). John relates the happening at Capernaum the next day as they came seeking the Miraculous Provider of bread on a massive scale. As touched on in the previous section, Jesus assessed the situation by saying they were more interested in food provision than in faith preparation toward Him and His coming kingdom of redemption. Food for the soul took precedence over meat or food for the body. At the end of John 6, His apostles confess Him as “that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:69). Peter had just suggested the utter futility of going to anyone else since He had the Words of eternal life (John 6:68). This miracle was a great wonder and worked mental and oral wonders of amazement among His disciples.

Practical Applications To Modern Circumstances

The eye of Jesus was upon them during this tempest even as it is upon the sparrow and upon us at all times (Matt. 10:28-31). Hebrews 13:5-6 and Matthew 28:20 are filled with ardent assurances for each of us. They read respectively:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Jesus came with help to His disciples who were in need. He will help us in meeting our needs if we but trust and obey as a lovely lyric suggests.

It is dangerous to take our eyes off Jesus and focus them elsewhere. Trench observed brilliantly and beautifully:

Peter represents to us here the faithful of all times in the seasons of their unfaithfulness and fear. So long as they are strong in faith, they are able to tread under foot the most turbulent agitations of an unquiet world; but when they are afraid, when, instead of "looking unto Jesus," they look at the stormy winds and waters, anon these prevail against them, and they begin to sink; and were it not for their Lord's sustaining hand, stretched out in answer to their cry, they would be wholly overwhelmed and swallowed up.⁴

The writer of Hebrews captures boldly and beautifully our noble need to keep eyes focused on Jesus by saying, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus came to teach men courage, to be of good cheer and not fear. "It is I, be not afraid" were words filled with confidence, conviction and comfort to the disciples in distress and are the same to us today as we face the storms of life and the winds of adversity.

Conclusion

If the self-acclaimed miracle workers of today can duplicate the miracles of Jesus, why do they not station themselves on our Gulf Coast, the Atlantic coast and in the heartland of tornado country and stop all hurricanes and tornadoes in their beginning tracks? Where was the Mississippi water walker when deadly Camille hit the Gulf

Coast more than thirty years ago? Where were such masters of waters when Andrew and Hugo hurricanes hit the eastern coast of our country some years back? Where are such when deadly tornadoes rip through the midwest, southwest, the southeast and the east of our country? Remember that Jesus stopped not only the waves but the wind back of the angry billows. Men start healing churches. When are they going to start storm-stopping churches? How welcome they would be throughout our country and the countries of the world.

Jesus is the valiant captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10) as we embark on the ship of Zion and remain aboard this ship of salvation until the blest harbor of heaven is attained at last.

Endnotes

1 George W. DeHoff, **Lands Of The Bible** (Murfreesboro, TN: DeHoff Publications, 1985), pp. 73, 77.

2 Ibid.

3 Richard C. Trench, **Notes On The Miracles Of Our Lord** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), pp. 89-90.

4 Ibid, pp. 178-79.

CHAPTER 27

Miracles Surrounding The Baptism And Transfiguration Of Jesus

Lester Kamp

Introduction

I AM CERTAINLY DELIGHTED AGAIN to be associated with the good Southaven church, her elders, and brother B. J. Clarke during this Ninth Annual **POWER** Lectureship. This lectureship makes a tremendous contribution to the brotherhood each year. The theme, the topics covered, the book that is produced, and the oral expositions of God's Word all have a great impact for good upon all those who have the opportunity to learn from the material covered. The enormous good accomplished through this lectureship and the many other works of this congregation will only be fully known on the Day of Judgment. It is indeed an honor to make even this small contribution to this year's great lectureship on "The Miracles of Jesus Christ." This is a great series of studies about our Savior which will follow well the study of the parables of Jesus that occurred last year.

It is my assignment to discuss the miracles surrounding the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. These two occasions in the life of our Lord significantly point out the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Ordinarily, a consideration of the miracles of Jesus might overlook these

two events, but both of them contain supernatural activity giving evidence that Jesus is the very Son of God (John 20:30-31). Wilbur Smith defined a genuine miracle in this way:

an event which never could have been the result of the working of the laws of nature as we understand them, but is of such an extraordinary character that it requires for its cause the intervention of a supernatural being, i.e., an event which man himself cannot duplicate, and which cannot be accounted for by any natural cause.¹

We can certainly see that the two events in the life of Jesus which are before us in this study contain the extraordinary and the “intervention of a supernatural being,” namely God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

It should be kept prominently in our minds that these miracles were not done to dazzle the audience but to impress upon the minds of those who saw and heard them that Jesus was (is) God (John 1:1-5, 14) and from God (John 8:42). Though Jesus did many miracles Himself—even more than are recorded in Scripture for our reading (John 21:25)—the miracles which occur in the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus were not done by Him but about Him to manifest beyond question Who He was. The record of these events, when read, considered, and accepted today, will lead accountable men and women with “honest and good hearts” (Luke 8:15)² to believe in Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. These events bare absolute testimony concerning the divinity of Jesus.

The Baptism Of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-22; 4:1, 14; John 1:31-33)

Background Information

Jesus sought out John in order that He might be baptized of him. Likely He walked sixty to eighty-five miles

from Nazareth to the Jordan river, depending upon the exact location where John was baptizing at this time. Clearly Jesus did not consider baptism to be unimportant! This will be emphasized more later.

Not many things are recorded about the life of Jesus which occurred before this event. We know that Jesus was circumcised and presented “to the Lord” in the temple (Luke 2:21-39), that He and His family fled to Egypt and returned to Nazareth (Matt. 2:13-23), that He came to Jerusalem yearly for the feast of Passover, and that when He was twelve He conversed with the “doctors” of the law and amazed them with His knowledge (Luke 2:41-50). The baptism of Jesus is His first voluntary act recorded, an act followed by His temptations in the wilderness and His earthly ministry. Luke notes that Jesus at this time “began to be about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23). The baptism of Jesus is an event of great significance referred to by all four biographers of Christ.

John The Baptist

When this man was born, he was named John by his father because of the instructions that he had received from an angel. After he began to preach and baptize, he was called John the Baptist because he was the first to preach baptism:

It is significant that in the Scriptures the title, Baptist, is never applied to but one person and that is John. No other inspired writer ever designated another as a “baptist.” John the Baptist, means John the Immerser, or one who immerses, and all scholars grant this to be the meaning of baptist. There is no evidence that John was baptized himself, and he was the Baptist because he baptized, not because he had been baptized. Being baptized would not make anyone a baptist.³

John was the son of Elizabeth and Zacharias. He was about six months older than Jesus, his cousin. John’s public work for God began in Luke 3:2. John, being the forerunner

of Jesus, started his public ministry before Jesus. John preached “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3) as he prepared people for the Lord’s coming (Luke 1:17). He preached in the wilderness, in “all the country about Jordan” (Luke 3:3).

When multitudes came to hear him preach and to be baptized of him, his message was clear, plain, and bold. He convicted the people of their sins and gave them God’s prescription for their sins. Hear him:

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Luke 3:7-9).

The response of the sincere among them was like that of those on Pentecost: “What shall we do then?” (Luke 3:10). Many currently preach that salvation is by grace alone and that man does not have to do anything to be saved. Many preach a “comfortable gospel” that requires no change, no sacrifice, and certainly no hardships. “Many preach heaven but no hell; cultured speech, easy life and inoffensive ways characterize the average preacher of the time.”⁴ This preaching is not another gospel, “but there are some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7). These preachers care more for pleasing men than pleasing God (Gal. 1:10). John identified sin in the lives of his hearers and pointed them to salvation. Would to God that we had more preachers throughout the world who, like John, would preach God’s Word so as to convict men of sin and then to show the way of forgiveness! Would to God that all who hear that clear message of salvation would respond as these did here!

John's Baptism

John's baptism was in water. In the context of the baptism of Jesus, John mentions that the Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Ghost, and with fire"⁵ (Matt. 3:11). In fact, John's baptism required "much water" (John 3:23). This fact is important, and we will give more attention to this later.

The Baptism Of Jesus By John

John's baptism was "of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Jesus lived sinlessly (Heb. 4:15), yet Jesus came to John for baptism. Jesus had nothing in His life of which to repent, and, therefore, Jesus did not need the remission of sins. John initially refused to baptize Jesus saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14). Since John at this point had not been given the sign from heaven indicating that Jesus was the Christ (John 1:31-33), we do not know exactly what his knowledge of Jesus was. He, however, knew enough to know that Jesus was not in need of the baptism that he preached. Perhaps because of his physical relationship with Jesus, John had been convinced by observing Jesus in these situations that Jesus' life was unlike any other that he had seen--sinless, without need of repentance and remission of sins! The best explanation for John's refusal is that he had "prophetic insight" regarding the sinlessness of Jesus. Compare this to Elisha's ability to perceive the falseness and greed of Gehazi (2 Kings 5:26). Someone has well observed that "[t]he fact that John realized he should be baptized at the hands of Jesus, rather than Jesus at his hands, shows that John was not baptizing people because they were righteous."⁶ This is a fact that those who call themselves "Baptists" should realize today.

Jesus' response to John's refusal is also significant. Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now" (Matt. 3:15a). The word

“suffer” means “allow or permit.” Jesus was saying to John that what he was preaching was true—his understanding of the purpose of baptism was correct. The baptism of Jesus was to be the exception to the rule, not the rule. We do not ask for allowance (permission) for the rule, but for the exception. Jesus received an exception to the rule of baptism for the remission of sins. The significance of the word “now” in Jesus’ statement indicates that this was to be the only exception to the rule of baptism for the remission of sins.

Further, Jesus states the reason that He would be baptized: “for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15b). Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. The Psalmist declared, “All thy commandments are righteousness” (Psm. 119:172b). John was preaching this baptism of repentance for the remission of sins by God’s authority. This was a commandment of God. Notice Luke 7:28-29:

And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers **rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him** (emp. mine in Scripture references, LK).

God had commanded all Jews to submit to John’s baptism. Not to be baptized would be rejecting the counsel of God. If Jesus had not been baptized by John, He would have sinned. He would have failed in His mission (cf. John 17:4). It could not be said, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He could not have been described as One “who did no sin” (1 Pet. 2:22). So, it was necessary for Jesus to have been baptized of John’s baptism.

Peter later stated, “But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:35). Of some Paul wrote, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). We might then ask: Was John’s baptism man’s righteousness (i.e., man’s work of merit to earn a right relationship with God) or God’s righteousness (i.e., God’s plan for making men righteous)? Clearly baptism is God’s righteousness. To remember God in His ways (commandments) is to work God’s righteousness (Isa. 64:4-5). Jesus said, “for I do always those things that please him (the Father)” (John 8:29).

It is also significant and, therefore, worthy of note to observe at this point what is involved in the act of baptism. In Matthew 3:16a it is written, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.” Now to come up out of the water, one has to have gone down into the water. The pictures which depict this scene with John and Jesus standing on the shore of the Jordan while John pours water over Jesus’ head are obviously false. Not only is the root meaning of baptism violated by such depictions, but also the way in which baptisms are described uniformly in the Scriptures is ignored. Immersion in water is what baptism is. We are told that John baptized “in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23). Much water would not be necessary for sprinkling or pouring. We are told when the action of baptism is described in the case of the Ethiopian, “and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him, and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip” (Acts 8:38-39). Clearly baptism involves both going down into the water—the one being baptized and the one doing the baptizing. This would be necessary only for immersion. Baptism is

called a burial in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12. Anyone who is baptized, just like Jesus, goes down into the water, is buried in water, is raised up again, and then comes up out of the water. Scripture could not be clearer on this matter!

The Miraculous

When Jesus was baptized, we are told, “and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matt. 3:16b). Does this mean that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a dove would come down and light on Him, or does this mean the Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove? Luke’s account settles such a question. “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him” (Luke 3:22). The appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove had special significance to John. He said:

I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God (John 1:32-34).

John saw (we do not know if others saw this on this occasion) the Holy Ghost descend in the bodily form like a dove upon Jesus. God had told John before of this event that he would know Who the Son of God is by this heavenly sign. It happened when John baptized Jesus; so John could then say of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Luke’s record tells us “that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21). Exactly what is meant by “the heaven was opened,” we can only

speculate. But notice how important prayer was to Jesus in His life, and its place in this event:

He prayed not only in connection with His baptism, as shown here, but also when crowds were gathering (Luke 5:15-16); just before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12); in connection with, and after, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:41, 46; cf. Matt. 14:19, 23); when He was about to ask His disciples an important question (Luke 9:18); on the mountain where He was transfigured (Luke 9:28); just before extending the tender invitation, "Come unto me all who are weary..." (Matt. 11:25-30; Luke 10:21); just before He taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer (i.e. the model prayer, LK) (Luke 11:1); at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:41-42); for Peter, before the denial (Luke 22:32); during the night of the institution of the Lord's Supper (John 17; cf. John 14:16); in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32, 35-36, 39; cf. Matt. 26:39, 42, 44; Luke 2:42); on the cross (Luke 23:34; Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46); and after His resurrection (Luke 24:30). These references must be considered as being merely examples of a much more extensive life of prayer and thanksgiving.⁷

If prayer occupied such a prominent place in the life of Jesus, should it not also have such a place in our lives as we follow Him? If we recognize the significance of the baptism of Jesus, surely it does not seem strange that Jesus sought fellowship through prayer with His Father as He began His earthly ministry of teaching and healing.

The Holy Spirit not only descended upon Jesus here, but also "abode upon him" (John 1:32). There is no doubt that this is that to which Peter referred in Acts 10:38: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." John, some time the baptism of Jesus, said, "For he whom

God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:34). Jesus manifested from this point in time that He had the Holy Spirit without measure, limitless.

Then we read, “And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). John not only saw the sign of the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, but he also heard the voice of God declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son! Note here the presence of all three members of the Godhead—the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. As the Son begins “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), there is manifestation from heaven that the Godhead is one in this great work. The entire Godhead is interested and involved in bringing salvation to man!

The Father here says of the Son, “in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). What an encouragement that heavenly affirmation must have been as Jesus marched toward the cross. This was not the only time in the earthly life of Jesus that God spoke from heaven. The words of God are similar to the occasion when He spoke to those on the Mount of Transfiguration (an event that we are about to consider in some detail below). God spoke also near the close of Jesus’ earthly life, as the cross was imminent, in John 12:28, saying, “I have glorified it (i.e., the name of Jesus, LK), and will glorify it again.”

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

Background Information

In order to understand the significance of one of the most notable events in the life of Christ, the transfiguration, it is important to notice some of the things which led up to this occasion. In Matthew 16, Jesus had

had a discussion with His disciples about Who He was. The disciples, namely Peter, had concluded:

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God
(Matt. 16:16).

From this time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day
(Matt. 16:21).

Peter protested strongly; in fact, the Scriptures call it a rebuke (Matt. 16:22). It was utterly unthinkable to Peter that Jesus would die, and die at the hands of the religious leaders. Jesus' response was strong and clear. Peter was presenting "an offense" (an occasion of sin) to Jesus. Jesus told him that he was talking like men who ignored the plan of God for the salvation of man. In fact, Jesus attributed the statement of Peter to Satan. It was quite similar to Satan's attempt in the wilderness to get Jesus to turn away from the cross to accept a crown without going the way of death (Matt. 4:9). Jesus came to die, to bear the sins of humanity on the cross—that was God's plan from before the foundation of the world (Isa. 53; Eph. 1:4).

Following His rebuke of Peter, Jesus then suggested that every one of His disciples would have to die: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Denying self means to put self in the background. Paul stated, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Christ is the supreme example to us (Phil. 2:5-11):

So few of us attain that state of sacrifice of our own ideas, and preferences, and seldom come to the place that we can empty ourselves as Christ did and present our minds to God with no desire to please self at all, but fervently desiring to do His will and to know Him.⁸

A clear statement then is made by Jesus relative to the imminence of the coming of the kingdom that many today cannot reconcile to their man-made, extremely popular doctrine of premillennialism. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28; cf. Mark 9:1).

On this occasion Jesus takes with Him Peter, James, and John. Because these three apostles often went with Jesus for special events, they are often referred to as "the inner circle" of the Lord's disciples. They had also been permitted to see the daughter of Jairus raised from the dead (Mark 5:21-37). In the garden of Gethsemane, they had been taken further and remained closest to Jesus while He prayed (Matt. 26:36-37). All of these events no doubt made a lasting impression on these men; especially was this the case with the event now under consideration. The apostle James was martyred early in the history of the church (Acts 12:2), and so we have nothing in the New Testament written by his hand. But the other two, John and Peter, both wrote about this profound event. John observed, "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). This is no doubt, at least in part, referring to what he personally had beheld on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter stated:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

The purpose of what occurred on this mount was threefold: (1) to encourage Jesus as He faced His own death

(“Jesus was granted a glimpse of the glory which He had laid aside for the work of redemption...and was given an earnest of the joy which awaited Him, when the work which he had come to do was done.”⁹); (2) to encourage these apostles as they faced the reality of the Savior’s death, though they had thought earlier, because of their improper concept of the kingdom, that His death would be defeat and not victory; and (3) to verify for those disciples who would come afterwards that the religion of Christ was not made up by clever men, but was based upon facts which had been witnessed: “The transfiguration of Jesus has been described as the highest point in our Lord’s earthly experience which was shared with his disciples.”¹⁰

Matthew and Mark agree that the time of the transfiguration was six days after the Lord’s discussion with His disciples about His suffering and death that awaited Him in Jerusalem; Luke says “about an eight days after these sayings” (Luke 9:28). Reconciliation of these passages is not difficult when we notice that Luke first suggests that his chronology is approximate by his use of the word “about.” Next it should be noticed that if Luke counts the day of the Lord’s sayings along with the day of the transfiguration then we have perfect harmony among these writers.

Since none of the New Testament writers names the “high mountain” on which the transfiguration occurred all that is possible is mere speculation. Some have suggested Mount Tabor; but, since nothing is said regarding the Lord’s leaving the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, it is likely that this was Mount Hermon, which complies with the description given in the Scriptures. But, “[i]t is not where it happened but what happened that is important.”¹¹

Luke’s account tells us that the reason for the trip into the mountain was to pray. Again it should be noticed that Jesus placed importance on prayer and that there is

a connection between prayer and this great event in the life of Jesus.

Jesus calls that which the disciples saw a “vision” (Matt. 17:9). The transfiguration likely occurred at night for the following reasons: (1) Jesus went to the mountain to pray, which He frequently did at night; (2) the disciples “were heavy with sleep” and we are told that “when they were awake, they saw” (Luke 9:32); and (3) Jesus and the three disciples went down from the mountain “on the next day” (Luke 9:37). It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that this notable event took place at night.

Though this was called a vision by Jesus, we are not to equate this with a dream since the disciples were awake when it occurred. Vision simply denotes “a spectacle, sight.”¹² The disciples actually saw Moses and Elijah, heard them talking with Jesus, and heard the voice of God.

The Miraculous, Notable Event

“Transfigured” is the term used by both Matthew and Mark (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). This word means “to change into another form.”¹³ This word is the same word used in the original Greek by Paul in Romans 12:2, “and be ye transformed,” and in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” Luke does not use the same term, but rather states, “And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered” (Luke 9:29). Matthew says that “his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). Mark says that “his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3). Another has observed:

He appears in His changed, glorified state, unveiled by human flesh, and the disciples beheld the glory of a transformed, changed body. Only the purest, whitest, most brilliant objects such as light, sun and snow can express the brightness of the glorified body. The light which

shone around Saul of Tarsus made him blind (Acts 9:3; Acts 22:6). God dwells in light (1 Tim. 6:16); is light (1 John 1:5) so it is fitting that when Christ is transformed, He appears as light...It is the glory which is said to light up the city of God (Rev. 21:23).¹⁴

“And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him” (Matt. 17:3). There is nothing in any of the accounts to indicate how the disciples came to identify Moses and Elijah. It may have been the result of the conversation they heard; it may have been that Jesus introduced them; or it may have been that “miraculous knowledge may have accompanied miraculous sight.”¹⁵ Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets.

Moses was the great lawgiver of the Old Testament period, while Elijah, one of the most illustrious of the prophets, had endeavored to turn the hearts of rebellious Israel back to God; and was made the type of the forerunner of Jesus (Mal. 4:5-6).¹⁶

Moses had died some 1500 years earlier on Mount Nebo in Moab, not being able to enter the promised land because of his sin. He was divinely buried, and no man knew the place of his burial (Deut. 34:6); Michael had contended with the devil about his body (Jude 9). Elijah had not died, but was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire which was drawn by horses of fire (2 Kings 2:1-12).

Luke tells us the subject that was discussed: “and spake of his decease which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). The word “decease” here literally means exodus:

And so, in the view of Moses and Elijah the death of Jesus, so far from being an intolerable ignominy and crushing defeat, it was a splendid triumph, comparable to the mighty deliverance which Jehovah wrought for Israel when he

brought them out from the land of Egypt, and enabled them to pass through the Red Sea on dry ground. Dr. Smith notes that it is significant that the copies of Luke's Gospel which were in use during the time of Chrysostom, the sentence regarding the Lord's decease ran thusly, "They spake of the **glory** which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."¹⁷

Further details of this conversation are not given.¹⁸

Peter is so struck by the occasion that he speaks. According to Luke, he spoke "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). It would be difficult for us to say, therefore, what Peter meant because Peter himself did not know what he was saying! "Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." It is probable that Peter's motive was to do something which would allow this great experience to continue, perhaps by making accommodations for the three (Jesus, Moses, and Elijah). By his statement he placed all three on the same level.

"And while he thus spoke" he was divinely interrupted: "There came a cloud that overshadowed them" (Luke 9:34). Recall the cloud on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law:

And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel (Exod. 24:15-17; cf. 1 Kings 8:10-11).

A cloud was often associated with the presence of God. The description at Sinai causes us to realize why the apostles were afraid in this situation. The cloud not only indicated the presence of God, but also hid Him from the view of those who saw the cloud.

From the cloud God spoke, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). In addition to what God had said at the baptism of Jesus, He now states, "Hear ye him." The message here from God is the same as the message at the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

The message was and is: Listen to Jesus, heed His commands, follow His Word. God wanted Peter, James, and John to know that they were no longer to listen to Moses and Elijah, but to Jesus only. Furthermore we are told, "And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone" (Luke 9:36). We find in the transfiguration a pointing toward the end of the law and the prophets and the beginning of the authority of Christ. One greater than Moses had come. Moses had spoken of this day:

A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; **him shall ye hear in all things** whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people (Acts 3:22-23; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

This is the message of God here in the transfiguration: "The voice of God, the last to speak, was the voice of imperative duty, which every one who pleases God must recognize and obey."¹⁹ Matthew tells us that "when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid" (Matt. 17:6). At this moment "Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise and be not afraid" (Matt. 17:7).

“As they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (17:9). The three apostles did not comprehend the significance of the things they had seen and heard on the mount. In their confusion and uncertainty, telling others would not have been productive of good. Mark tells us, “And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mark 9:10). After Jesus rose from the dead, they understood. The Holy Spirit made that possible (John 14:26; John 16:13).

Conclusion

From the baptism of Jesus we should learn that baptism is a burial, that Jesus was baptized because God had commanded it, that God was endorsing the work that Jesus began by His audible proclamation, that the whole of the Godhead is united in the plan for the salvation of man achieved through Christ, that John came to know for certain that Jesus was the Messiah because of the sign he saw at the baptism of Jesus, and that God is always pleased by faithful obedience to His Word. Here at the baptism of Jesus we have one of the clearest, most complete revelations concerning the three Persons comprising Deity: the Son incarnate, the Spirit descending upon Him, and the Father speaking from heaven.

From the transfiguration we should learn that “there **is** personal existence between death and the resurrection of the body, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah is insuperable proof of the fact.”²⁰ We should also learn that Christ now has all authority (Matt. 28:18). The law of Moses and the words of the prophets are not binding upon us today. We are to hear Jesus only.

Endnotes

1 As quoted by F. Furman Kearley, "The Miracles of Jesus," **Firm Foundation**, 4:420 (July 6, 1976).

2 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

3 **The Lesson Annual on Uniform Bible Lessons** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1955), p. 302.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 304.

5 It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss the meaning of baptism "with the Holy Ghost" or the baptism "with fire." Suffice it to say that both of these baptisms are administered by God, and neither of these baptisms is a condition of salvation. Those who received the baptism of the Holy Ghost were the apostles on Pentecost (and perhaps the reception of the Holy Ghost by Cornelius and his household might be considered such—though there are some key differences between what these people received and what the apostles received on Pentecost). Those who will receive the baptism with fire will be the lost on the Day of Judgment; this is the same as "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14).

6 **Lesson Annual** (1955), p. 306.

7 William Hendriksen, **New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), pp. 217-218.

8 **The Lesson Annual on Uniform Bible Lessons** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1956), p. 39.

9 **The Annual Lesson Commentary 1966** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1966), p. 137.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

11 **Lesson Annual** (1956), p. 39.

12 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, Volume 4 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), p. 190.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

14 **Lesson Annual** (1956), p. 40.

15 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing), p. 419.

16 **Lesson Commentary**, p. 136.

17 Ibid, p. 138.

18 The brevity of the record of this event in Scripture; the absence of words like awesome, fantastic, breathtaking, and the like; and the absence of details that men would certainly have included all point to the fact that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

19 **Lesson Commentary**, p. 137.

20 **Lesson Annual** (1956), p. 41.

CHAPTER 28

Miracles Surrounding The Death, Burial, And Resurrection Of Christ

Tracy Dugger

Introduction

THAT *THE BIBLE EXISTS* is without dispute. That it is the inspired Word of God, infallible and inerrant, is contested by many in our society. The New Testament, as well as the Old, contains characteristics which can only be explained by Divine authorship. The Bible is of such nature that man could not have produced it. Therefore, the only conclusion warranted by the evidence is that the Bible is the product of God and thus is the inspired Word of God. Robert Milligan asks, “If the Bible is not the inspired work and Word of God, how can we account:”¹

1. For its unity and harmony?
2. For its great simplicity, and at the same time, for its absolute incomprehensibility?
3. For its unparalleled theology?
4. For its superior code of morality, and its ameliorating influence on society?
5. For the supernatural character of Christ?
6. For the existence, history, and prevalence of Christianity?
7. For the many plain and unmistakable instances of fulfilled prophecy?
8. For the harmony of the Bible with the progress and discoveries of modern science and philosophy?

Where is the book, writing, or speech originating with man that comes close to the Bible, much less is its equal? Professor M. Montiero-Williams, former Boden professor of Sanskrit, spent forty-two years studying Eastern books and said in comparing them with the Bible:

Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table; but place your own Holy Bible on the right side—all by itself, all alone—and with a wide gap between them. For...there is a gulf between it and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and forever...a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science of religious thought.²

What writing has been made that makes the Bible obsolete? If the Bible is of human origin, why have not men of modern times produced literary compositions surpassing it? Why do they not give us a better record on origins than Genesis 1-2? Why not give us something superior to Psalm 23, the Sermon on the Mount, or 1 Corinthians 13? Why not give us a superior model to imitate than Jesus Christ? Why is there nothing to offer when death approaches, or at a funeral when it has visited? As Robert Taylor well stated:

There is no virtue in Voltaire and his infidelity. There is no holiness in Hume and his blatant brand of infidelity. There is no majesty in Mill and Matson and their philosophies of unbelief. There is no enduring faith in Flew and his atheistic rantings. There is no salvation in Sagan and no comfort in his cosmic proclamations. Atheism is a miserable mirage.³

There exists indisputable historical evidence that Christianity, as recorded in the New Testament, is founded on fact. These facts are not some special kind of religious or mystical fact, but are the cognitive, informational facts

upon which all historical and legal decisions are based. Harvey Everest well stated:

The New Testament found in possession of the Church, exhibiting no marks of spuriousness, and in the absence of any proof to the contrary, if a legal document, would be received as genuine in any court of justice. **Simon Greenleaf**, a noted jurist and the author of a well-known work on evidence, says: "The first enquiry, when an ancient document is offered in evidence in our courts, is, whether it comes from the proper repository; that is, whether it is found in the place where, and under the care of persons with whom, such writings might naturally and reasonably be expected to be found; for it is this custody which gives authenticity to documents found within it. If they come from such a place, and bear no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes that they are genuine, and they are admitted to be read in evidence, unless the opposing party is able successfully to impeach them. Now this is precisely the case with the sacred writings. They have been used by the Church from time immemorial, and thus are found in the place where alone they ought to be looked for. If it were the case of a claim to a franchise, and a copy of an ancient deed or charter were produced in support of the title, under parallel circumstances on which to presume its genuineness, no lawyer, it is believed, would venture to deny its admissibility in evidence, nor the satisfactory character of the proof."⁴

That Jesus Christ lived more than eighteen centuries ago; that He died, rose again, and taught such and such doctrines, are things proved by the same kind of argument as that by which we know that Augustus was Emperor of Rome.⁵

In this writing we will examine the historical facts which affirm that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were surrounded by miraculous events. New

Testament writers are extremely valuable witnesses, for many of them were actual **eyewitnesses** of the things they reported. Peter stated, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16; see also 1 John 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; John 20:30-31; Acts 10:39-42; 1 Pet. 5:1). Other New Testament writers, not actually present, reported the accounts of eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). McDowell comments:

They certainly knew the difference between myth, legend, and reality. A professor of a world literature class in which I was speaking asked the question, “What do you think of Greek mythology?” I answered with another question, “Do you mean were the events of the life of Jesus, the resurrection, virgin birth, etc., just myth?” He said, “Yes.” I replied that there is one obvious difference between these things applied to Christ and these things applied to Greek mythology that is usually overlooked. The similar events, such as the resurrection, etc., of Greek mythology were not applied to real, flesh and blood individuals, but rather to mythological characters. But when it comes to Christianity, these events are attached to a person the writers knew in time-space dimension history, the historic Jesus whom they knew personally. The professor replied, “You’re right. I never realized that before.”⁶

Being absent during the occurrence of these events, we are dependent upon the testimony of others. Since this is the basis of our belief, we must understand the strength of reliable testimony. Pharr explains:

This is the case regarding our knowledge of and belief in anything that is not within our own personal experience. We believe that George Washington was the first president on the basis of the testimony of witnesses. So also we believe

in Jesus because of the testimony of witnesses. The difference is that the witness to Christ in the New Testament has been examined more minutely, studied more critically, than any other evidence ever presented to the world, and has stood the tests, with millions believing the testimony (See John 15:27; Acts 1:8; 1 John 1:1-2; *et. al.*).⁷

New Testament writers had firsthand knowledge of the things they reported and sometimes appealed to the fact that their audience likewise had this firsthand knowledge (Acts 2:22; Acts 26:24-28). Even most first century Christians, like ourselves, had to rely upon testimony of the witnesses for their faith. What these witnesses said to them (either oral or written) is the same thing they said to us (John 20:24-31; Rom. 10:14-17).

The following are criteria listed by Everest by which historic statements are tested:

1. When the witnesses are honest, competent, and had opportunity to know.
2. When the witnesses agree in the general statement, though they may differ on minor points.
3. When there is no known motive for imposture.
4. When the facts recorded are strongly against the faith or interest of the narrator.
5. When such witnesses are numerous.
6. When the facts recorded and existing facts are related as cause and effect.
7. When the facts recorded are sustained by existing monuments, coins, games, or other public institutions.⁸

Our assignment is to deal with the miracles relating to the arrest of Christ (Luke 22:49-51), His death by crucifixion (Matt. 27:50-54; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:44-45), and His resurrection from the dead after three days (Matt. 28:1-15; Mark 15:42-16:14; Luke 23:50-24:9, 31, 36; John 19:38-20:29). Prior to this we must first discuss the term “miracle.”

The word “miracle” is used very loosely today. How some use the term “miracle” is not the same way the Bible uses the term. As God’s people, we want to be careful to use Bible names for Bible things (1 Pet. 4:11). Often the word “miracle” is used to refer to a wonderful or uncommon event. For instance the birth of a baby is sometimes referred to as “the miracle of birth.” Or, when spring arrives with its new plant life, some refer to it as “the miracle of nature.” Or, when one narrowly escapes death, they remark of a miraculous deliverance. These are not true miracles in the Biblical sense of the word. A miracle is an occurrence contrary to the usual course of nature. It is of Divine origin, performed by God Himself or by men of God Divinely directed. A miracle is an observable event that has set aside laws of nature; an occurrence of a Divine force superior to nature. A definition of a miracle, requiring this writer’s memorization as a student, was the supernatural intervention of God in which the normal laws of nature were temporarily suspended. Raising Lazarus, who had been dead four days (John 11) and restoring a man’s hand (Mark 3) are examples of authentic miracles. The birth of a baby is a wonderful thing, but it is not a miracle. A baby being born is the normal working of things according to the laws of nature. Now, if a person were to be created from the dust of the earth (as was Adam), then we would have an authentic miracle. I heard a man describe a sailor on an aircraft carrier who lost an arm to a plane propeller. The man exclaimed that it was a miracle he survived. No, it was no miracle, although it might have been an uncommon instance of survival. Everything termed a miracle today is by no means a miracle in the Biblical sense of the word.

Miracles served a two-fold purpose in the first century: to reveal and confirm the Word of God. The first purpose for the advent of miraculous power from the Holy

Ghost was in the form of inspiration. The process of inspiration could only take place by a miracle; it is a supernatural act. Today, when we want to know what God says we open up the New Testament and read. Initially, first century Christians did not have a completed written New Testament to consult. To determine God's Will in those times, they had to consult a person who had been endowed with the miraculous gift of knowledge or prophecy. The apostles were such persons, as were prophets in the church (Eph. 4:7ff). Thus, one of the purposes of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit was to reveal the Word of God (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Word of God has been completely revealed (Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 12:48).

The second purpose of the miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit was in the realm of authentication--confirmation of God's Word. If someone is preaching today, how are we to know if they are telling the truth? We confirm the message by consulting the Bible, by searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1). But suppose we did not live in the twenty-first century but in the first century. How could we confirm the truth of the message? We could not open up our New Testaments--they had not yet been completed. The speaker **confirmed** his message by signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit!

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following (Mark 16:20).

For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:2-4).

Speakers proved that they were speaking Truth. Signs and wonders authenticated the message. Nicodemus correctly stated the matter to Jesus in John 3:2: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” These miracles in turn produced faith in hearers [as well as the readers (John 20:30-31)].

Did the miracles accomplish their purpose to confirm the Word spoken in the first century? Has the Word been confirmed? Yes! We can be sure about the confirmation of the New Testament! Remember, only new revelations need confirming. Since there are no new revelations today [as evidenced by the all-sufficiency and completeness of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17)], then there is no purpose for confirmation and therefore no need for miracles. A document once sealed need not be sealed again. Truth once confirmed is confirmed forever (John 20:30-31). In Romans 15:8, Paul stated, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” Jesus confirmed Old Testament promises. Are they still confirmed? Yes. There is no need to return again to confirm the Old Testament for us today (Rom. 10:6-8). This is why Paul predicted that miraculous gifts would cease when the completed New Testament was preserved in writing (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

In our study of the miracles surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ, we must remember that each sign and wonder had the purpose of proving something. God provided ample authentication for believing Jesus’ claims (John 20:30-31).

Arrest (Luke 22:49-51)

Luke 22 is the inspired physician’s account of the events preceding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As the Jewish Passover is drawing nigh, the chief priests and

scribes are at work plotting a devious plan to murder Jesus. They find opportunity in a willing participant – Judas. He greedily agrees to betray the Savior for thirty pieces of silver. This, he thinks, will bring him happiness. Later, Jesus and His disciples observe the Passover, and Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper in anticipation of His death on the cross. Even during the Supper, Jesus predicts Judas’ dirty deed. Jesus then speaks of the way to greatness in His kingdom – humble service to others. He makes known His concern for Peter’s weakness and, following the prediction of Peter’s triple denial, Jesus discusses a subject bearing on our text. In Luke 22:35-38, Jesus explains how He at first sent His disciples out under the limited commission without care for their physical necessities, “for the workman is worthy of his meat” (Matt. 10:10b). “But now” things would be different under the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). They would face many dangers, be among strangers, and at times be without necessities. And interestingly enough, they were told to buy a sword. Within that same day Jesus would not permit them to use their sword in preventing His death or to spread the Gospel (Matt. 26:51-52), but there must have been some purpose that Jesus allowed them to possess one at all. What is the purpose of a sword? Not to roast hot-dogs at a campfire, but as a weapon of protection.

Jesus then enters into the Garden of Prayer (Gethsemane) in agonizing anticipation of His upcoming suffering and death. The inspired physician records, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Judas then draws near with the betrayal kiss, identifying to the mob whom to arrest. The disciples, ready to defend the Lord, asked, “Shall we smite with the sword?” (Luke 22:49). Peter excited by the mob wants to use one of the two swords mentioned in Luke

22:38. Before Jesus answers, Malchus' right ear lay on the ground (John 18:10). McGarvey suggests: "The blow was aimed at the head of the servant, and would have probably proved fatal had he not dodged and escaped with the loss of an ear."⁹ The Lord needed not physical defense of His life for as we often join our voices together and sing, "He could have called ten thousand angels" (Matt. 26:53). This servant of the high priest being bereft of an ear, Luke records the following miraculous event: "And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22:51). After instructing His disciples to permit His seizure, Jesus reaches out to restore Malchus' ear.

The situation was grim. The Lord knew what was before Him and yet He performs an act of kindness to those who are His enemies. One more chance has availed them to allow the Divine works of God to convince that He was the Christ (John 20:30-31). However, following a few words from Jesus, He is arrested. His arrest is illegal, being arranged by Judas, an accomplice and traitor, and not as the result of a legal mandate of the court, thus violating the Jewish system of jurisprudence.¹⁰ Carrell insists: "Hebrew law made it mandatory for arresting officials to inform the subject as to the reason for his arrest. When the mob seized Jesus, they did not once show lawful authority from the high priest."¹¹

Although atheistic evolution contends we arose from reptiles, we still wait for the ability to grow new extremities. Ears do not grow back. However, God's miraculous power can restore. We demand modern **miracle-workers** do it this way. When an appendage has been ripped off, torn off, or in this instance, cut off, we demand to see the same. When it is affirmed that they have what they had in the first century, then we beg them

to do what they did (2 Cor. 12:12). The emergency room at any major hospital is a good place to wait for such testing (1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21).

Crucifixion

(Matt. 27:50-54; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:44-45)

As was true with His arrest,

the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ are the greatest miscarriages of justice in all the annals of history. The legal proceedings for a fair and impartial trial were so flagrantly violated that the crucifixion of the Christ can only be styled a judicial murder.¹²

Following His agony on the cross, Jesus “cried...with a loud voice, [and] yielded up the ghost” (Matt. 27:50); His spirit left His body (Luke 23:46). As a result, great miracles occurred and we are told to behold them:

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many (Matt. 27:51-53).

Five amazing occurrences immediately surrounding the death of the Savior are introduced: the three hour period of darkness during the day, the rending of the Temple veil, an earthquake, the splitting of rocks, and the bodily resurrection of dead saints.

Three Hours Of Darkness

From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon), darkness spread over the land. Mark records that Jesus was crucified the third hour [nine in the morning (Mark 15:25)]. Thus He had been on the

cross for three hours before the darkness and other events occurred. These are the most important hours in human history, for this is when the Lamb of God was offered as the perfect sacrifice, taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29). This darkness was during the time of day in which the sun's heat and light were usually the greatest. The Bible does not inform us as to how far this darkness reached—probably only the land of Judea. We derive our English word “eclipse” from the word Luke used (*eklipontos*, Luke 23:45) to describe the event. This darkness was not a normal event. It was the wrong time of the year for an eclipse because the moon was full at the time, as it always was on the first day of the Jewish Passover. McCord explains:

Since eclipses of the sun...cannot occur when the moon is on the opposite side of the earth from the sun, any attempt to make the darkness over all the earth at the time of Jesus' death a natural eclipse of the sun is rendered impossible. Furthermore, even if a natural eclipse had been possible, it would have lasted only a few minutes, not three hours.

For the saddest event in history, God miraculously removed the cheer of sunlight and placed the mantle of mourning over His world. From high noon to three o'clock God raised, not the half staff, but to the top, Heaven's black flag of grief.¹³

Obviously this period of darkness “was a sign from Heaven (Amos 8:9-10), and it did not go unnoticed.”¹⁴ With the natural elements at His disposal (2 Chron. 25:8; Job 42:2; Psm. 24:8; Matt. 19:26; Luke 9:43), the Almighty previously filled the heavens with angels heralding Jesus' birth (Luke 2:8-14), but now the land is supernaturally shrouded in darkness during the death of His Son.¹⁵

The Rending Of The Temple Veil

Following the death of Jesus, the veil of the temple (Exod. 26:31-33) was torn in two. This heavy temple curtain

hung between the holy place and the most holy place, separating the two compartments. Only the high priest was permitted to pass through, and this only once a year that he might carry out his work on the Day of Atonement. It signified that the way into heaven was not yet accessible:

But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing (Heb. 9:7-8).

When Jesus died on the cross, the way into heaven was then made manifest, the veil being rent from top to bottom. This extraordinary occurrence was under Divine direction. It signified the end and fulfillment of the Mosaical Covenant (Matt. 5:17-18; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 7-10), making the way of heaven accessible to everyone by the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:19-20). If I were a Jew, the destruction of the Temple veil in this manner, during the crucifixion of He Who claimed to be the Messiah, would have raised serious questions in my unbelieving heart.

The Earthquake, Rending Of Rocks, And Dead Saints Raised

At the rending of the temple veil there was seismic disturbance in the form of an earthquake. This quake evidently split the rocks, including the rock-hewn sepulchers where the bodies of dead saints had lain. These dead saints rose from the dead and walked among the people of the city. Who these dead saints were and what happened to them the text does not say:

The exact reason for their resurrection could be none other than for further confirmation of the Word of God (Mark 16:20) to the Jewish and

Gentile world that Jesus was who He claimed to be; the Messiah (Matt. 16:16; John 3:16; Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:16). The text says that they entered into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many. They were permitted to manifest themselves as witnesses to the historical fact of the resurrected Lord (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:20).¹⁶

Clearly God is sending a message that Jesus' death was no ordinary crucifixion. Witnessing all these things and more, the Roman centurion reverently remarked, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Yes, the centurion and those with him recognized the innocence of Jesus and His unjust treatment, but he meant much more than this. The Roman legion knew Jesus was more than a mere man; this man was Who He claimed to be, the Son of God. McGarvey explains:

From the fact that the centurion was of heathen education, and that the words **Son** and **God** are without the article in Greek, some have understood him as meaning, "This was a son of god." But the expression Son of God, with both words anarthrous, occurs frequently in connections which show that it means the same as when the article is used. (Matt. xxvii. 43; Luke i. 35; John xix. 7.) It must be remembered also that these Roman officers, while resident in Judea, made it part of their business to study the peculiarities of the people with whom they had to deal, and that sometimes, as in the case of Cornelius and the centurion of Capernaum (Matt. viii. 8-10), they became converts to the Jewish religion. This man lived in Jerusalem in the midst of the excitement about Jesus; he had this very day heard him charged with blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God; and he had heard the same idea expressed concerning him since he was suspended on the cross (verse 43); and therefore he must have been stupid indeed if he did not know what was meant by the expression. It is almost certain that he knew

what Jesus claimed to be, and that when he saw the miracles accompanying his death, he was convinced that the claim was just.¹⁷

Resurrection (Matt. 28:1-15; Mark 15:42-16:14; Luke 23:50-24:9, 31, 36; John 19:38-20:29)

Jesus said, “I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:17-18). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundational truth of Christianity. There is nothing more important to Christians than His resurrection because it was and is the greatest event that once and for all proves the claims of Jesus Christ and establishes the faith (1 Cor. 15:12-23). Nothing is more crucial in establishing His Deity and Sonship (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection is a major cog in the plan of redemption whereas the other miracles of Christ and His disciples are secondary and subordinate to that plan.

The resurrection of Christ is so important that, when asked for a sign from the Jews of His authority, He gave only one—that which would relate to His resurrection from the dead (John 2:18-22; Matt. 12:38-40). Warfield says that this sign was “His single and sufficient credential.”¹⁸

One of the amazing facts regarding this crowning miracle is its miraculously prophetic nature. Luke records:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:44-48; see also Acts 17:2-3).

No doubt Jesus had reference to such Old Testament predictions as Genesis 3:15 (see Heb. 2:9), Psalm 16:10 (see Acts 2:22-32), and Isaiah 53.

While on earth, Jesus Christ anticipated His own death and resurrection, declaring to His disciples not only that He should die but in what manner. The following passages can be examined for such predictions: Matthew 12:40; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:23; Matthew 20:18-19; Matthew 26:2; Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31; Mark 9:1, 31; Mark 10:32-34; Mark 14:28, 58; Luke 9:22-27; John 2:18-22; John 12:33.

Jesus claimed the power to raise Himself from the dead:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:19-22).

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:17-18).

Who would make such a risky prediction? This writer remembers hearing in February 2000, "If a Democrat is elected for the White House in November, it will not be Bill Bradley; or if it is a Republican, it will not be Dan Quayle." These were not very risky predictions. How risky would it be to predict that a police officer would be killed

in the U.S. in the month of July? The risk of failure greatly increases if the name, gender, and exact circumstances of the death were given. Jesus Christ made **risky** predictions! Of course, in our eyes they were not risky because we believe Him to be the Son of God. If Jesus Christ had failed to be resurrected, He would have lied. He would have been a false prophet without God's sanction (Deut. 18:15-22). His credentials really come down to this one significant point.

That Jesus actually died is essential to proving His resurrection. Many have claimed that He did not die, but was drugged or fainted because of the pain and later revived. Consider the following evidence establishing His death:

1. Jesus refused to take a common pain-killing drug offered to crucifixion victims (Matt. 27:34). This establishes that there is no evidence He was drugged.

2. He was actually crucified. Crucifixion causes a heavy loss of blood which quickly brings death. The record states that Jesus had five wounds from which blood flowed. He remained on the cross from 9:00 A.M. (Mark 15:25) until just before sunset (Mark 15:42).

3. When His side was pierced by soldiers, "blood and water" flowed out (John 19:34). Medical experts contend this was a sign of death, indicating the red-blood cells and the white-blood cells had separated.

4. The experienced Roman soldiers examined Jesus and pronounced Him dead without breaking His legs to hasten death [as was the usual practice (John 19:33)].

5. Pilate inquired of Jesus to make sure He was dead before the body was given to Joseph (Mark 15:44-45). Pilate required certification of Jesus' death and four executioners (specialists) came to examine His body before Joseph was allowed to take Him. Pilate was surprised by the report of the centurion that Jesus was already dead, but was sufficiently convinced by him.

6. The wrapping of the dead body in spices by Joseph and Nicodemus, according to the custom of the Jews in burying, is additional proof that Jesus had actually died. McDowell quotes:

Had there indeed been any Remains of Life in Him, when taken down from the Cross, the pungent Nature of the Myrrh and Aloes, their strong Smell, their Bitterness, their being wrapped around His Body in Linens with a Roller, and over His Head and Face with a Napkin, as was the Custom of the Jews to bury, must have entirely extinguished them.¹⁹

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ points to a single fact—the empty tomb. Jesus was placed in the tomb of Joseph on Friday evening (Matt. 27:57-66). On Sunday morning the tomb was vacant. The women went to see the tomb and saw the stone rolled back. Then they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles (Matt. 28:1-10; John 20:1-10). Of course, the tomb was not completely empty for it had the grave clothes inside. When Peter and John entered into the tomb they took note of the grave clothes and the napkin which was not lying with the grave clothes but was by itself, wrapped into one place:

The Greek there seems to suggest that the linen clothes were lying, not strewn about the tomb, but where the body had been, and that there was a gap where the body had been, and that there was a gap where the neck of Christ had lain--and that the napkin which had been about His head was not with the linen clothes but apart and wrapped in its own place, which ...means still done up, as though the body had simply withdrawn itself.²⁰

There were many witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the apostles (Acts 4:33) and New Testament writers (Matthew, John, Peter, James). Winfred Clark comments:

It is also a fact that the apostles preached the resurrection of the Lord from the dead. If one goes back to the first discussion of the apostles after the Lord's ascension he would find them talking about his (sic) resurrection (Acts 1:22). When you move to the first sermon they preached after being filled with the Holy Spirit, you will find them preaching the resurrection of the Lord (Acts 2:22-32). The same can be said of the second recorded sermon (Acts 3:15). On and on can one go to such passages as Acts 5:30, Acts 10:40-41, Acts 13:23, 30, 32, 33, 37. They gave great emphasis to his resurrection.²¹

The Bible provides at least ten occasions of Jesus' bodily appearance following His resurrection from the dead. These are eyewitness accounts:

1. To certain women returning from the sepulchre (Matt. 28:9-10),
2. To Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre (John 20:11-18),
3. To Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5),
4. To the two disciples (Cleopas and another unnamed) on their way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35),
5. To the ten apostles [less Judas and Thomas (Mark 16:14ff; Luke 24:36ff; John 20:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:5)],
6. One week later to all eleven apostles (John 20:26-28),
7. To several of the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, while fishing (John 21:1-23),
8. To the apostles and five hundred brethren at once on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6),
9. To James (1 Cor. 15:7), and
10. To the apostles at Jerusalem before the ascension on the Mount of Olives (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:3-8).

And what of Paul? Here is a man that was fervent in his denial of the resurrection of Jesus, both in words and in action. Perhaps a more ardent opposer could not be

found. If there was ever a man in the first century knowing all the **arguments** against the resurrection of Jesus, this student of Gamaliel and zealous persecutor of the church did! Yet, in spite of all his endeavors against Christianity, he came to know that Jesus had been raised from the dead by the power of God and became the great apostle who preached that resurrection to the Gentiles. One thing changed this man from Saul the Persecutor to Paul the Persecuted—**the resurrection of Jesus Christ** (1 Cor. 15:1-19).

The kind of evidence that modern science is so insistent upon in determining the reality of any object or event is the kind of evidence that the New Testament gives us regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The repeated contact with the bodily Christ after the resurrection by ear, eye, and touch leaves us only one conclusion—these people were in physical contact with a bodily resurrected Jesus!

What difference does it make? What effect does Christ's resurrection have on us? Consider ten reasons why Christ's resurrection from the dead is important:

1. It proves Jesus' Deity (Rom. 1:4).
2. It gives us a foundation for our faith (1 Cor. 15:12-23).
3. It provides our justification (Rom. 4:24-25).
4. It reconciles us to God (Rom. 5:10).
5. It gives us hope of salvation (1 Pet. 3:21) because salvation is hinged upon His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:17).
6. It gives baptism a purpose (1 Cor. 15:29)²² because baptism is related to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:2-5).
7. It gives Christianity an authentic message to preach. It gives validity to our message (1 Cor. 15:12).
8. It gives us certainty of our own resurrection from the dead; thus we do not have to fear death (1 Pet. 1:3-5; Phil. 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:20-23). Many had been raised from

the dead only to die again, but not Jesus. We can confidently believe in our own rising from the dead, not having to die again, being shackled by death's grip (Rev. 1:18).

9. It gives purpose to Christian living (1 Cor. 15:19).

10. It gives justification to sacrificial service (1 Cor. 15:30). Since Jesus did rise, then there is a resurrection, and sacrifice is worthwhile; there is something to live for.

Let us note some important things regarding the assigned texts for the resurrection of Christ. Each biographer affirms that Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week. Because He was not really in the tomb for a full three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40), some object to the accuracy of the account. The facts are that Jesus was buried Friday evening and arose Sunday morning. Haley remarks:

We have elsewhere called attention to the fact that the Orientals reckon any part of a day as a whole day. In the case before us, one whole and two parts of a day, together with two nights, are popularly styled three days and three nights.²³

Haley further says that this custom is found in other places in the Bible (1 Sam. 30:12-13), and is used in this manner in modern times.

In Matthew's account, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb (Matt. 28:1). Mark does not mention the other Mary but includes Salome and Mary the mother of James (Mark 16:1). Luke says Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women came to the tomb (Luke 24:10). John mentions only Mary Magdalene (John 20:1):

Haley mentions two hypotheses. First, and it is unanswerable, none of the Bible writers say they refer to the same point in time. There could have been two or more groups arriving at different times since they probably lived in different parts

of the city. He says: **“We may therefore suppose that Mary Magdalene arrived first (so John); soon the other Mary arrives (so Matthew); then Salome comes (so Mark); finally the ‘other women’ make their appearance (so Luke).”** But along with this, we should note what he also says: “no one of the evangelists denies that more women were present than those he mentions by name. John does not assert that Mary Magdalene only was present.”²⁴

The women came with spices to anoint and complete the embalming of the dead body of Jesus. Sunday was the only available time to do so because the Sabbath (Saturday) forbade them (Luke 23:56). Although Mark mentions their anxiety about how they would roll the stone from the tomb, only Matthew records the great earthquake moving the stone. Matthew attributes the earthquake to the miraculous manifestation of an angel:

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow (Matt. 28:2-3).

The angel sat upon the stone perhaps to quell any attempt by the soldiers to replace the stone. These supernatural events caused the soldiers to violently shake with fear. Which shook more aggressively, the earth or the soldiers, we do not know:

“Shake” is from the same root word as “earthquake” in Matthew 28:2. For awhile they lay there in a condition of utter powerlessness and discomfiture, motionless as if dead. We see from Matthew 28:11 that, when they came to, they were no longer an organized unit, for only some of them came into the city and reported to the chief priests.²⁵

The angel appeared to the women with the message, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:5-6). The message was that Jesus had risen, just as He predicted, after three days (Matt. 24:35). The angel then invited them into the vacant tomb to examine the place where He had lain. It was vacant except for the grave clothes. No one had removed the body or else the grave clothes would not have been there. The angel instructed the women to quickly inform the disciples of Jesus’ resurrection and His appearance in Galilee. As they were going on their way Jesus appeared to them.

Theories

The appearances of Jesus occurred over such an extended period and in so many different places and to so many people that the positive evidence is overwhelming. He appeared unto one person at a time; He appeared unto multitudes. These appearances were necessary. If He had not appeared, the disciples would have always been in doubt as to what had really happened to the body of Jesus. They checked the tomb thoroughly (Luke 24:24; John 20:6-7). Jesus was not there. The appearances answered their questions. Jesus had risen!

When Paul stated that Jesus had appeared to more than five hundred people at once, he knew that some of them were still living and could deny his claim if it were not true (1 Cor. 15:6). But none ever did.

Ever since Jesus rose from the grave, there have been those who attempt to deny it. In recent years, **modernists** have attempted to disprove Jesus’ resurrection. They automatically deny any miraculous element of the Bible, thus the resurrection. In order to undermine the resurrection, they discredit the Gospel accounts. Thus, various theories have risen to explain away the fact that

Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead. These theories are designed to discredit Christianity. But with honest examination just the opposite occurs. Instead of destroying one's faith, it is strengthened, thoroughly convinced that the resurrection did occur.

The Simon Theory

The argument says that Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled to bear the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26), was crucified instead of Jesus. This is really a pitiful attempt to deny the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross. There is not a shred of evidence supporting this idea. There are far too many witnesses to allow such a mishap.

The Wrong Tomb Theory

The argument says that when the women went to the tomb of Jesus early on the first day of the week, they, because it was dark, went to the wrong tomb. We are further told that when Jesus was buried, the women's eyes had been so clouded by tears they just did not know exactly where the right tomb was located three days later. When they arrived at what they thought was the correct tomb, and being expectant about the resurrection, they simply became overly excited. They then ran to tell the other disciples that Jesus was not there but had risen. And from there the disciples began to preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

However, the following facts are essential to remember:

1. These women were at the tomb when Jesus was buried (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). Mark records that the two Marys "beheld where he was laid" (Mark 15:47). This was less than seventy-two hours before the tomb was vacant. Were these women present at the tomb so little time that they could have not recognized the exact

tomb when they returned? Could they not recognize the tomb of a rich man who had it specifically cut out of rock for his own burial? And were there really all that many tombs (not mere grave-sites) in that place?

2. What about Peter and John who checked out their report? Did they also go to the wrong tomb? When Peter and John arrived at the tomb they found the **grave clothes** lying in the tomb (John 20:6-7). The grave clothes destroy the “wrong tomb” theory. The grave clothes were a mark of the right tomb.

3. If the women went to the wrong tomb, then why did not the enemies of Christ and the apostles find the right tomb and produce Jesus’ body? The Sanhedrin knew where the guards were placed.

4. Would the disciples have braved their lives on the flimsy testimony of some over-excited women?

5. What about Joseph of Arimathea? After all, it was his tomb; he knew the right place.

Let us delve deeper into the subject of the **grave clothes**. When Peter and John looked into the tomb they saw the grave clothes (linen wrappings) and the napkin (face cloth) rolled up in a place by itself (John 20). McDowell reports:

The Greek there seems to suggest that the linen clothes were lying, not strewn about the tomb, but where the body had been, and there was a gap where the neck of Christ had lain—and that the napkin which had been about His head was not with the linen clothes but apart and wrapped in its own place, which I suppose means still done up, as though the body had simply withdrawn itself.²⁶

The way in which these grave clothes were laying caused the apostles to believe in Jesus’ resurrection. When John stooped down and looked in the tomb, he “saw the linen clothes lying” but did not go in. Peter then enters “into the

sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” John then goes in “and he saw, and believed” (John 20:5-8):

The question is: What did he see which made him believe? The story suggests that it was not just the absence of the body, but the presence of the grave clothes and, in particular, their undisturbed condition.²⁷

Now supposing we had been present in the sepulchre when the resurrection of Jesus had actually took place. What should we have seen? ...We should suddenly have noticed that the body had disappeared...the body clothes, under the weight of 100 lbs. of spices, once the support of the body had been removed, would have subsided or collapsed, and would now be lying flat. A gap would have appeared between the body cloths and the head napkin, where His face and neck had been. And the napkin itself, because of the complicated criss-cross pattern of the bandages, might well have retained its concave shape, a crumpled turban, but with no head inside.²⁸

No wonder they “saw and believed.” A glance at these graveclothes proved the reality, and indicated the nature, of the resurrection. They had neither been touched nor folded nor manipulated by any human being. They were like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged.²⁹

They were in no disorder, they were just as they were when Joseph and others had wrapped them round the body of the Lord, only they were lying flat, fold over fold, for the body was gone.³⁰

...if the linen clothes had been lying, one here and one there, as though they had been thrown hastily aside, there would have been no meaning in saying that the napkin was “not lying with the linen clothes,” for the “linen clothes” would

not have defined any particular spot. We again note the introduction of the word “lying” when it was not absolutely required. The napkin was not lying flat, as the linen clothes were, and ...John, perhaps marks the difference.³¹

The enemies of Christ must do better than this. The wrong tomb theory is simply the wrong theory.

No Death Or Swoon Theory

The argument says that Jesus fainted because of the pain and agony. When He was placed into the grave, where the temperature was cool, He revived and later appeared to the disciples. Thus this theory says Jesus never died on the cross; the guards only thought He was dead. He really only swooned and later revived because of the coolness of the tomb. This is the position of the Muslim Koran (Surah IV:157), which explains that Jesus did not die on the cross but He only feigned death. This theory is similar to the **Drug Hypothesis**—Jesus was doped and only seemed dead but recovered later.

The following points answer the Swoon Theory:

1. Jesus did die just as the Gospel record affirms (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30).³² Whose testimony will we accept? Why believe the modernist or Muslim testimony? What is their evidence?

2. The record states that Jesus had five wounds on the cross causing a heavy blood loss. Pilate inquired to make sure He was dead before giving the body to Joseph for burial. Thus Joseph and Nicodemus thought He was dead. Jesus was hurriedly embalmed in about one hundred pounds of spices and bandages and then laid in a guarded tomb (John 19:39-40). Even if He had revived, He would have to roll back the heavy stone, overcome the guards, and escape—no evidence of this!

3. And what of the experienced Roman soldiers at the scene who examined Jesus and pronounced Him dead

(John 19:33)? They made sure of His death by piercing His side with a spear (John 19:34). That blood and water came forth was a sure sign of death, an indisputable medical sign of death indicating that the red and white blood corpuscles had separated. Did the Roman soldiers who were entrusted with His crucifixion make a foolish mistake and think He was dead when He was not? Did Jesus sneak out of the tomb undetected?

4. Could Jesus have been scourged, hanged on the cross, pierced with a spear, deprived of food and water for three days and still have walked for miles to Galilee to encourage His disciples? How could a man who lay in a tomb for hours, without medical attention, loose Himself from yards of grave clothes and pounds of spices, roll away a stone and walk seven miles on wounded feet to Emmaus? How could He appear on the morning of the third day energetic and radiant?

5. And again, what about His clothes? How was He able to wiggle out of the grave clothes which were wound tightly about all the curves of His body and then leave them in perfect order? And why did He leave His grave clothes behind?

6. Regarding the “dope” theory, remember He refused to take the common painkilling drug offered to crucifixion victims (Mark 15:23).

7. If He did not rise from the dead, then He would be a liar and a fraud for He deceived His followers; He led them to believe that He had in fact risen when He did not. Will any accuse Jesus Christ of being a fraud?

Bishop E. LeCamus (La Rochelle, France) responds to Paulus of Heidleberg’s attempt to prove Jesus swooned:

Medical science, which he (Heidleberg--TD) invoked to sustain his thesis, was the first to destroy his system. He was informed that if Jesus had been taken down from the cross while

still alive, He must have died in the tomb, as the contact of the body with the cold stone of the sepulchre would have been enough to bring on a syncope through the congelation of the blood, owing to the fact that the regular circulation was already checked. Besides, a man in a swoon is not revived ordinarily by being shut up in a cave, but by being brought out into the open air. The strong odour of aromatics in a place hermetically sealed would have killed a sick person whose brain was already seized with the most unyielding swoon.³³

The Stolen Body Theory

The strongest argument for the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ is the empty tomb! An empty tomb proves the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When the disciples announced to the world that Jesus had risen from the dead, all that somebody would have to do to disprove their claims is bring the body. But no one ever produced the dead body of Jesus. Technically speaking, an empty tomb itself does not prove a resurrection. But an empty tomb must be explained—either naturally or supernaturally. The empty tomb where the body of Jesus had lain must be explained somehow. When naturalistic theories have been dismissed, the only alternative is that it must have a Divine answer.

The modernist, as well as many Jews, respond: **The reason the tomb was found empty (admitting the body was not there) was because someone stole the body.** This is simply an assertion—no proof. If this be true, then:

1. You have the disciples practicing that which was contrary to their own teaching—a lie; they were dishonest men. Who will contend this?

2. When the Roman guards sealed the tomb (Matt. 27:62-66), how did the thieves get by the guards? Would they risk their lives in breaking a Roman seal?

3. The enemies of Jesus had no motive for removing the body and His friends had no power to do so.

The record given in Matthew 28:11-15 speaks volumes. The very fact that the guards and enemies of Jesus tried to cover up the event by saying that the disciples stole the body is evidence that they knew Jesus had been raised from the dead.

It could not have been the disciples who had stolen the body because they did not expect Him to resurrect from the dead, nor did they understand when He spoke of it. When the news came (the first reports), they were critical, skeptical, and doubtful (Luke 24:11, 23-24, 41; John 20:25).

And again—the grave clothes. Those grave clothes continue to haunt these theories. The very orderliness of the grave clothes is evidence against any stolen body theory (John 20:6-7). Why would the thieves take time to straighten the tomb and leave everything in order?

No robbers would have ever rewrapped the wrappings in their original shape, for there would not have been time to do so. They would have flung the cloths down in disorder and fled with the body. Fear of detection would have made them act as hastily as possible.³⁴

Chrysostom, in the fourth century, stated:

And what mean also the napkins that were stuck on with the myrrh; for Peter saw these lying. For if they had been disposed to steal, they would not have stolen the body naked, not because of dishonoring it only, but in order not to delay and lose time in stripping it, and not to give them that were so disposed opportunity to awake and seize them. Especially when it was myrrh, a drug that adheres so to the body, and cleaves to the clothes, whence it was not easy to take the clothes off the body, but they that did these needed much time, so that from this again, the tale of the theft is improbable.³⁵

If the grave-clothes had been unfolded and unwound from Jesus' body then the 75-100

pounds of spices would have dropped out and been seen by those who looked in the tomb. That nothing is said about the spice favours the supposition that it remained between the wrappers where it was originally laid, and consequently was out of sight.³⁶

It is obvious that the disciples did not steal the body away for some of the close disciples are the ones who came looking for him. Remember also that these are supposed to be the same ones who fled on the night of his arrest (Mark 14:50). One must also remember there were guards at the door to protect against such an event. Surely no one would entertain the idea that the Jews came and took the body. It was exactly where they wanted it to be. They had gone to Pilate with a request that soldiers be posted. This had been done (Matt. 27:62-66). They could not have been better satisfied. They had what they wanted. Also, if they had the body they could well have produced such after the disciples began preaching that he had been raised from the dead. Yes, the tomb was empty and the reason is Jesus was raised from the dead.³⁷

What of the seal (additional precaution) covering the huge stone which was covering the tomb of Jesus (Matt. 27:66)? A. T. Robertson discusses the method of sealing the stone:

probably by a cord stretched across the stone and sealed at each end as in Dan. 6:17 ["And a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel"]. The sealing was done in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge to protect this stamp of Roman authority and power. They did their best to prevent theft and the resurrection (Bruce), but they overreached themselves and provided additional witness to the fact of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus (Plummer).³⁸

Henry Summer Maine (a member of the Supreme Council of India; Regius Professor of the Civil Law in the University of Cambridge) says that the seal was actually “considered as a mode of authentication.” He tells of the legal authority attached to a Roman seal. He further reports that the one on Jesus’ tomb obviously served to prevent anyone trying to remove the stone from tampering with the body, under threat of Roman law.³⁹

Of the Roman guard (Matt. 27:62-66), usually composed of four men, Roper comments:

Commanding the guard was a centurion designated by Pilate, presumably one in which he had full confidence...It is...reasonable to assume that these representatives of the Emperor could have been trusted to perform their duty to guard a tomb quite as strictly and as faithfully as they had executed a crucifixion. They had not the slightest interest in the task to which they were assigned. Their sole purpose and obligation was rigidly to perform their duty as soldiers of the empire of Rome to which they had dedicated their allegiance. The Roman seal affixed to the stone before Joseph’s tomb was far more sacred to them than all the philosophy of Israel or the sanctity of her ancient creed. Soldiers cold-blooded enough to gamble over a dying victim’s cloak are not the kind of men to be hoodwinked by timid Galileans or to jeopardize their Roman necks by sleeping on their post.⁴⁰

Was this a Roman guard or Temple officers? A. T. Robertson says the phrase [*echete koustodian* (Matt. 27:65)] is a present imperative and refers to a guard of Roman soldiers, not mere temple police.⁴¹ The fact that they needed the Roman governor’s sanction and the threat of punishment from him (Matt. 28:14) tells us that this guard was not the Temple police but soldiers from the Roman band in Jerusalem. If the Jews wanted to station Temple police at the stone, they did not need permission from Pilate.

Lewis and Short explain:

If Pilate had told them to use the “temple police” just to get rid of them, then the guard would be responsible to the chief priests only and not to Pilate. However, if Pilate gave them a “Roman guard” to protect the tomb, then the guard would be responsible to Pilate and not the chief priests. The key lies in verses 11 and 14 of chapter 28. In Matthew 28:11 it says that the guard came and reported to the Chief Priest. At first glance it seems that they are responsible to the Chief Priest. But, if some of the guards had reported to Pilate they would have been put to death immediately, as will be explained below. Matthew 28:14 confirms the view that they were a Roman guard and directly responsible to Pilate. “And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.” If they were the “temple police,” why worry about Pilate hearing about it? There is no indication that he would have jurisdiction over them. The writer feels this is what happened: They were a “Roman guard” to which Pilate had given instructions to secure the grave, in order to satisfy and keep peace with all the religious hierarchy. The chief priests cautiously had sought a “Roman guard” in Matthew 27:64...the Roman soldiers came to the chief priests for protection, because they knew that they would have influence over Pilate and would keep them from being executed.⁴²

How loyal to their posts were these Roman soldiers? “The punishment for quitting post was death, according to the laws (Dion. Hal, Atiq. Rom. VIII.79)...the fear of punishments produced faultless attention to duty, especially in the night watches.”⁴³ Currie lists eighteen offenses by soldiers punishable by death. Leaving the night watch was one of them.⁴⁴ J. Camus says of the tight security measures at Jesus’ tomb: “Never had a criminal given so much worry after his execution. Above all never had a crucified man had the honour of being guarded by a squad of soldiers.”⁴⁵

The Hallucination Theory

The argument says that Jesus never really arose from the dead in the first place. The disciples were only hallucinating (seeing a vision from their own mind), being so excited about His promise to be resurrected.

This theory assumes the disciples expected the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus did tell them He would rise, but their general attitude after crucifixion could be characterized by Peter's statement, "I go a-fishing" (John 21:3). It is clear they did not understand Jesus' statements (Mark 9:10; Luke 18:34). When Jesus was crucified, their hopes deflated completely (Luke 24:21). They did not expect His resurrection. Nicodemus and the women were bringing burial spices not expecting a resurrection: "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). McDowell records:

the general disposition of Christ's followers was not like what one would find in victims of an hallucinatory experience: "Mary came to the tomb...with spices...Why? to anoint the dead body of the Lord she loved. She was obviously not expecting to find Him risen from the dead. In fact, when she first saw Him she mistook Him for the gardener! When the Lord finally appeared to the disciples, they were frightened and thought they were seeing a ghost!"⁴⁶

When Jesus appeared to more than five hundred at one time (1 Cor. 15:6) were **they** hallucinating? If He did not rise from the dead, then bring forth His dead body! The fact remains, after three days the tomb was vacant. The disciples' testimony would not have stood for one minute if Jesus' body were still in the tomb. Did Thomas put his hand into an hallucination and touch the nail-prints of an hallucination (John 20:24-29)?

Where is the evidence for any of these theories? The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a true historical event. The

kind of evidence that stands up in a fair and just court is the kind of evidence existing in the New Testament for the resurrection of Christ. Wilbur Smith has stated:

The very kind of evidence which modern science, and even psychologists, are so insistent upon for determining the reality of any object under consideration is the kind of evidence that we have presented to us in the Gospels regarding the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, namely, the things that are seen with the human eye, touched with the human hand, and heard by the human ear. This is what we call empirical evidence.⁴⁷

Really, there are two primary evidences for the resurrection of Christ: The empty tomb and the witnesses.

The Empty Tomb

That Jesus died is sure. The centurion testified this truth to Pilate (Mark 15:42-45) after Joseph requested His body for burial. The soldiers acted as though He were dead. They came to break His legs to hasten death as they did the thieves but saw that He was already dead (John 19:33). Joseph and Nicodemus thought He was dead for they took His body and wrapped it in linen clothes with spices (John 19:40).

That Jesus was placed in a tomb is sure (John 19:41-42). A stone was rolled to the door of the tomb (Mark 15:46). The women knew there was a tomb where Jesus lay (Luke 23:55).

That tomb was found to be empty on the first day of the week, but the undisturbed grave clothes were present (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-25; John 20:1-8). Even the enemies of the Lord admitted that it was empty. Some concocted story to explain its emptiness will not do. How do we account for the empty tomb? The evidence does not support the myth that He fainted and then revived in

the tomb. How did a wounded man move a huge stone? The evidence shows that He was dead.

If the tomb was not empty, and this was known, then why did not some of the early followers make it an object of veneration? Why do we never hear of its becoming a place of pilgrimage in the days of the early church? Why would not someone want to spend a moment of quiet reflection there? His followers did not do so because the body was not there.⁴⁸ How do we explain the empty tomb? The only explanation is a miracle—the Resurrection!

The Witnesses

In the face of opposition credible witnesses exist. In 1 Corinthians 15, real witnesses are revealed. Four times it was said that Jesus was seen. Some of these witnesses were alive at the time Paul wrote and could be contacted.

Let us not forget the eyewitness accounts of the apostles (Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 5:32). One might hold that these witnesses were mistaken, but this needs to be proved. These were not insincere men trying to propagate a fraud. They were individuals with conviction, willing to die for their belief in the resurrection.

The empty tomb by itself did not produce faith. The apostle John reports to us that, when Thomas saw the risen Lord, he believed (John 20:27-29). Therefore, it was the post-resurrection appearances which caused faith. The empty tomb stood as a historical fact. Everyone knew it was empty. The only questions worth arguing are why it was empty and what does its emptiness prove.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ tells us four vital things:

1. Who Jesus is (proves His claims of being God's own Son, Deity).
2. Our King has conquered our enemy.
3. We will ultimately conquer our enemy.
4. Our enemy cannot use death to control us anymore.

Again, Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection of Christ. It is the crowning miracle of the New Testament; it is the very foundation of the Christian faith!

Conclusion

Skeptics scoff at our belief in Biblical miracles. We are labeled as fanatical, irrational, and believers in myth. Their naturalism rejects a supernatural explanation of any occurrence. However, their inconsistency immediately shows up in their own explanation of origins. To believe in the only other alternative to special creation, accidental organic evolution, they must accept an unnatural mechanism. Organic evolution says non-living matter somehow gave rise to simple living organisms which eventually reproduced and diversified, producing all life forms. This is nothing more than a belief in **spontaneous generation**--life arising from non-life, that which is living coming from non-living matter. Scientists such as Redi, Pasteur, and Spallanzani demonstrated this concept to be false. They proved that life comes only from pre-existing life. Just when such myths seem to have disappeared, along come some scientists saying that spontaneous generation is the mechanism for evolution. It is not that we refuse to accept that living matter can arise from non-living matter. We believe God created Adam from the dust of the ground. However, when one limits life's origin to a naturalistic explanation, there can be no jump from non-life to life. Where has life coming from non-life ever been observed or duplicated in the lab? Where has spontaneous generation ever passed through the crucible of the scientific method? The scientific method is based upon observation, experimentation, and verification. For spontaneous generation to be classified as scientific, it must be demonstrable, repeatable. We are still waiting!⁴⁹

From a purely empirical standpoint, to suggest that life arose from non-life is an insult to our intelligence. To remove God from the picture and expect us to believe in the unnatural spontaneous generation for the origin of life is to ask us to believe in irrational and fanatical myths. Both the theist and the atheist must believe in supernatural events for the origin of the universe. Do not allow the skeptic to scoff at our belief in the miraculous without reminding him of his own **miraculous** beliefs.

Endnotes

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3 Robert Taylor, "Meeting Objections to Christianity," **The Case For Christianity**, 15th Annual East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Lectureship, ed. Edwin Jones (Knoxville, TN: Primar of Tennessee, 1989), p. 149.

4 Harvey Everest, **The Divine Demonstration** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1972), p. 39.

5 George Salmon, **The Infallibility of the Church** (Baker Book House, 1959 reprint), p. 63.

6 McDowell, p. 5.

7 David Pharr, "The Case from the Canon," **The Case For Christianity**, p. 102.

8 Everest, p. 26.

9 John William McGarvey, **Commentary on Matthew and Mark** (Delight: Gospel Light), p. 232.

10 Rex Turner, **Systematic Theology** (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1989), p. 245.

11 Robert Carrell, "The Arrest and Trial of Jesus," **Studies in Luke**, ed. Edwin Jones (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1988), p. 289.

12 This is the conclusion of law school graduate Rex Turner, Sr., in examining the New Testament record and comparing it with the Jewish legal system. See Turner, p. 223ff.

13 Hugo McCord, "The Crucifixion of Christ," **Studies in Luke**, ed. Edwin Jones (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1988), p. 299.

14 Robert Dodson, "Jesus Tried by Gentiles, Crucified, Buried," **Studies in Matthew**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1995), p. 346.

15 Jim Laws, "The King's Trial, Suffering and Death," **The Book of Matthew**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas Warren (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1988), p. 685.

16 Ibid, p. 688.

17 McGarvey, pp. 247-248.

18 McDowell, p. 182.

19 Ibid, p. 200.

20 Ibid, p. 220.

21 Winfred Clark, "The Case from the Resurrection," **The Case For Christianity**, pp. 115-116.

22 Paul is asking why submit to baptism if the dead rise not at all.

23 John W. Haley, **Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974), p. 413.

24 Jerry Moffit, "The Empty Sepulchre. The Sanhedrin's Falsehood. The Final Interview and Commission," **The Book of Matthew**, p. 696.

25 Michael Hatcher, "The Lord is Raised and Commissions the Apostles," **Studies in Matthew**, p. 355.

26 McDowell, p. 220.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, p. 221.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid, p. 222.

32 We have already established the death of Jesus in this paper.

33 McDowell, p. 200.

34 Ibid, p. 243.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid, p. 244.

37 Clark, p. 122.

38 McDowell, p. 209.

39 Ibid, p. 209.

40 Ibid, pp. 210-211.

41 Ibid, p. 211.

42 Ibid, p. 212.

43 Ibid, p. 213.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid, p. 215.

46 Ibid, pp. 253-254.

47 Ibid, p. 250.

48 Ibid, p. 219.

49 The only other alternatives to spontaneous generation are that the universe is eternal or that it created itself. Trevor Major deals well with these options. See Trevor J. Major, "The Case from the Heavens," **The Case For Christianity**, p. 7.

CHAPTER 29

Miracles Surrounding The Ascension Of Jesus Christ

David Brown

Introduction

THE CRUCIFIXION, DEATH, BURIAL, and resurrection of Christ are the subjects of a myriad of articles, books, and sermons. However, in these studies it seems to me the ascension of Christ has not been given as much attention as the previously mentioned topics. In most instances where these subjects are investigated, due to the nature of the case, they are usually studied together. This is true of Christ's ascension as well. Of course I recognize that no one of these aspects of Christ is totally independent of the others. Therefore, when I speak of Christ's ascension not being treated apart from the previously mentioned topics, I have in mind studies focusing solely on His ascension and its implications. Whether such is the case or not, in this chapter I intend to concentrate on our Lord's ascension and its significance to man in God's great Scheme of Redemption.

Old Testament References To Christ's Ascension

David wrote, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psm. 110:1). To sit at the right hand of a monarch was to

sit in the place of authority. From this verse we learn that, if the second Lord of the Psalm was to sit at the “right hand” of the first Lord, he must first come to the right hand of the first Lord of the passage. Thus, we have Daniel writing:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Returning to the book of Psalms, we find the following marvelous comment. The Psalmist declares:

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them (Psm. 68:18).

The Psalmist foresaw the Christ accomplishing His task—the redemption of sinful man. The Lord would come from heaven to earth. In the “fullness of time” Christ would take His people from serving God under the Mosaic Law to serving Him under a new law (Gal. 3:7; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 9:15-17). From heaven He would rule mankind with a new law and give “gifts unto men.” Thus Paul wrote:

Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also

that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things (Eph. 4:8-10).

Unlike man's approach to God under the Law of Moses (through the Levitical Priesthood), God's people would be priests and boldly approach God through our High Priest, Jesus Christ—the only “mediator between God and men” (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; Rev. 5:10; Rev. 20:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14-16). Therefore, without the ascension of Christ to the place of His reign, man would have none of these blessings.

The psalms abound with the exaltation of the Christ. Many of them imply the ascension of our Lord to the right hand of His Father in heaven. In addition to Psalm 68:18, let us consider a few more of these psalms.

Psalm 2:1-6

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

Following the trouble that arose because of the healing of the lame man at the “beautiful gate of the temple,” the apostles reported these events to their own company (Acts 4:23). Luke tells us that the brethren then quoted at least a portion of this passage as they glorified God and called on Him to give them boldness to preach Christ under such trying circumstances (Acts 4:25-31). On Pentecost, Peter had declared Christ to be sitting and

reigning at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36). Thus, the early church recognized the necessity of the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God to receive the power and authority that He alone was able to bestow upon them.

Psalm 45:6-7

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

At the time of the writing of the book of Hebrews, certain Jewish Christians were actually considering giving up the Christian system and going back under the Law of Moses. In seeking to stem this apostasy the inspired writer to the Hebrews spends much time showing the superiority of the New Testament system over that of the Old Testament. He begins the book by exalting the Christ. Psalm 45:6-7 (Heb. 1:8) is quoted as partial proof of the following affirmation of the Christ:

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).

Please note that without the ascension of the Christ there would be no sitting “down on the right hand of the majesty on high.”

Again, the writer of Hebrews cited Psalm 8:6 to declare the superiority of Christ (Heb. 2:8)—“Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” This passage also implies the ascension of the Christ back to heaven so that he could be crowned “King of kings” (1 Tim. 6:15). Other

passages from the psalms that imply the ascension of Christ are Psalm 69:29; Psalm 72:8-11; Psalm 72: 17; Psalm :89:3-4, 19-37; and Psalm 132:11.

The New Testament And Christ's Ascension

In studying the four books of the one Gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the student immediately notices that Christ's ascension was fundamental to God's purpose in the salvation of mankind. Our Lord's ascension was no afterthought of God.

In Luke 9:51, the record states, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." "Be received up" translates the Greek word *analepsis*. In this passage it is used as a noun and means "a taking up." Only here in the New Testament is it so used. However, its verb form is employed in Mark 16:19 to specially reference Christ's ascension—"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God"; in Acts 1:2, "Until the day in which he was taken up"; in Acts 1:11, "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven"; in Acts 1:22, "unto that same day he was taken up from us"; and in 1 Tim. 3:16, "received up into glory."

I realize that Luke 9:51 could refer to Christ being "lifted" up on the cross (John 3:14-15; John 8:28; John 12:32). However, in these passages from the book of John the Greek word translated "lifted" is from *hupsoo*, meaning to elevate. It should be remembered that the usage of the verb form of *analepsis* in every passage refers to the ascension of Christ to heaven. We may, therefore, conclude from Luke 9:51 (without doing violence to it or any other passage) that Luke saw beyond the cross to the ascension of Christ back to heaven—the cross simply serving as an necessary stepping stone through which Jesus would reach His intended goal, glorification at the right hand of God in heaven.

Jesus asked, “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” (John 6:62). Assuredly, Christ is speaking of His return to heaven—from there He came to earth and to there He would return. Incidentally, by implication we find proof of the incarnation of our Lord from this verse—He was not conceived naturally (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4). Notice that He said He was going to “ascend up where he was before” (John 1:1-5; John 14:1-2; John 17:1-5). Indeed, as Paul wrote and Jesus stated, Christ was “in the form of God” and “equal with God” “before the world was” (Phil. 2:6; John 17:5). In becoming man He gave up the “form” of Deity, but not His Deity. He took upon Himself human form—the Son of Man (Phil. 2:7-8; Matt. 9:6; Matt. 11:19). Such He is today, though exalted and glorified (1 Tim. 2:5; Eph. 1:19-21). Indeed, Jesus Christ is as much man as He is God and vice versa—“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” (Col. 1:19).

Jesus was glorified through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (John 12:23-24), but in John 17:4-5 he specifically refers to being glorified in heaven—the glory He had with the Father before He came to earth. Thus again, the importance of the ascension is noted.

The Actual Event In The New Testament Scriptures

Matthew does not mention the specific event of our Lord’s ascension. However, since Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection are in fact involved with His ensuing ascension, all four events stand or fall together. In other words, you cannot have one without the others. Therefore, Christ’s ascension was necessary to the fulfillment of His statement that all power (authority) had been bestowed on Him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). In a simple

and straightforward manner Mark declared that Christ “was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

In the book of Luke, the physician states, “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51). Continuing in the book of Acts, Luke gives the details of Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:9-11). Let us notice the facts of Christ’s ascension as recorded by Luke.

1. Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The mount is located between Bethany and Jerusalem (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:12).
2. The ascension was accompanied by the appearance of two angels (Acts 1:10).
3. Christ’s ascension happened forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3).
4. While the disciples were looking at Jesus, He was taken up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.
5. The two angels stated that Christ had been taken up into heaven and He would return as they had seen Him go.

Ten days after Christ’s ascension the Jewish feast Day of Pentecost came.¹ On that day the apostles received the baptismal measure of power from the Holy Spirit. With the eleven other apostles, Peter stood up and preached the first recorded Gospel sermon. In that sermon, Peter included the exaltation of Jesus Christ into heaven (Acts 2:29-36). The apostles proclaimed the ascension of Jesus as an historical event that they had witnessed (Acts 2:32). Though they may not have understood all the implications of the ascension, the apostles knew that it was a consequence of our Lord’s resurrection as well as the fact that it was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

What The Ascension Did For Christ

First of all, let us look at the meaning and significance of the phrase “the right hand of the Father” as it refers to Christ’s place in heaven and His relationship to the Father (Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; Acts 5:31; Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; Heb. 8:1; Heb. 10:12; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22).

During the Patriarchal age we are first introduced to the fact that the firstborn had special rights concerning his inheritance. When Jacob was about to bless Joseph’s children he laid his right hand on the younger of the two, Ephraim. Thinking that Jacob could not tell the difference in the boys, Joseph attempted to change his father’s hands over to his firstborn, Manasseh (Gen. 48:17). However, Jacob had prophetically understood that Ephraim was to be greater than his elder brother (Gen. 48:19). Even so, from the record we understand that, at least among the Jews, the firstborn had special rights regarding his inheritance. Thus, the right hand had special significance to them (Gen. 48:18). It indicates a place of superiority. As Jacob said of Ephraim, “he shall be greater” than Manasseh.

Preceding these events, we find the account of the naming of Benjamin. Jacob greatly loved Rachel (Gen. 29:18). Because of his great love for Rachel, Jacob loved her children more than Leah’s, his first wife’s children. Rachel died in giving birth to a child. As she was dying, she named the child Benoni—“son of my sorrow.” However, Jacob named him Benjamin—“son of the right hand.”

Following Joseph being sold into slavery, and at the time of the famine, Jacob sent all his sons but Benjamin into Egypt to buy food. Jacob would not let Benjamin go with his brothers into Egypt. This is because Jacob feared that Benjamin might be harmed (Gen. 42:4). After the events that caused Simeon to be left behind in Egypt, with

orders from Joseph to return with Benjamin, Jacob refused to allow Benjamin to go with his brothers into Egypt (Gen. 42:38). However, under protest, Jacob finally gave in to the demand that Benjamin go with his brothers back into Egypt to buy more food (Gen. 43:1-15). Indeed, in these events one can understand the significant honor in which Jacob held his son of “the right hand.” Benjamin was exalted above his brothers.

In the ancient world the oriental kings traditionally held the place at their right hand as the place of greatest honor. It was the place of authority and power in the exercising of government. Hence, Christ stated that He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). It is no wonder that Daniel prophesied that

one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14).

Frequently used in the Old Testament is the phrase “the right hand of the Lord” (Exod. 15:6, 12). It is figurative language used to denote immense power. When God used the phrase to describe His power in delivering Israel, the idea is that He used His full omnipotence. Hence, in the Bible we read of God’s stretching out His right hand to deliver Israel from her oppressors. This lets us know that, because of God’s great love for Israel, He used all of the power at His disposal to care for Israel. Thus, to use the right hand is to employ the fullness of one’s strength (Psm. 98:1; Isa. 41:10).

The psalmist speaks of the great blessings located at God’s right hand for all those that serve Him. It is with this in mind that David speaks of the Christ being seated at the right hand of the Lord (Psm. 110:1). Thus, David is

declaring that Christ is to be given a position of great authority. It is a place of unequalled honor and blessing.

The New Testament usage of “at the right hand of God” (and its equivalents) is meant to convey the high exaltation of the Christ by the Father. As regards Christ, the phrase means that He has the highest glory possible of things visible and invisible bestowed upon Him. There is no higher place of glory than the place occupied by Jesus Christ. Jesus, the man, has been raised to a position of supreme privilege, sovereignty, majesty, power, glory, and honor of which there is no greater.

The Ascension—A Direct Consequence Of The Crucifixion

To consider the death and resurrection of Christ and not consider His ascension is to consider an incomplete Scheme of Redemption. We learn from Hebrews 10:12 that, when Christ offered Himself a single sacrifice for sins, He “sat down on the right hand of God.” Earlier in the Hebrews epistle we have a similar statement—when Christ “had by himself purged our sins, [He] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). From Hebrews 12:2 we learn that He, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Please note in the preceding passage that not once is the resurrection mentioned. And, why is this the case? The following is the answer—Christ’s ascension presupposes the bodily resurrection of Christ. Thus, of Christ, Paul wrote:

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:20-21).

Therefore in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, we see one great act of God in four parts.

It is also important to note the significance of the fact that each of the previously mentioned passages from the epistle to the Hebrews has Christ seated at the right hand of God. This is the position of rest. Christ has finished the work of redeeming man—He has accomplished His task.² This also enlightens us as to why the Hebrews writer speaks of the priests under the Law of Moses standing daily, repeatedly offering the same sacrifices year after year that could never take away sin (Heb. 10:11). However, he speaks of our Lord's single, one-time-only sacrifice that did take away sin. Thus, Christ is pictured as taking His seat at the right hand of the Father because He had accomplished or finished His work of redemption for man (Heb. 10:12).

Because He took the lowliest of the low places, He now occupies the highest of the high places. Lowly and menial service is the path to the throne (Matt. 16:24; John 13:7-17). Jesus chose the cross that He might receive the crown. This is the reason that Satan's offer to Christ to give Him the kingdoms of the world if He would fall down and worship him was truly a temptation to the Lord—it bypassed the suffering of the cross for the dominion of the world (Matt. 4:9). Thus, having resisted temptation as Christ did (when our faith is put to the test), we too are strengthened (1 Pet. 5:8-10).

Christ Has Ascended Far Above All

We have noted that, upon the ascension of Christ into heaven, He was elevated to the place of supreme authority. What all does His authority encompass?

The Hebrews writer tells us that He is superior to the angels (Heb. 1:4). Peter informs us that, because of

Christ's ascension, His name is exalted above any authority or person of angelic beings (1 Pet. 3:21-22).

In turning to the Philippian epistle we find Paul emphasizing that Christ rules over all intelligent beings in existence under the earth, on the earth, and above the earth (Phil. 2:9-11). Thus, He is exalted above mankind. Furthermore, Peter comments that Christ has angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Paul writes that Christ is the head of all rule and authority (Col. 2:10). With this same thought in mind, Paul tells us that Jesus is positioned far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Eph. 1:21). Thus, without the ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father, there could not be such exaltation of our Lord. Therefore, we understand that authorities, powers, and rulers are subject to Him. Indeed, all things are made subject to Christ (Eph. 1:22). By explicit language, as well as by implication, the Scriptures teach us that nothing is left outside of His control (Heb. 2:8-9).

Having noted from the Bible these truths declaring Christ's authority over all things, one should not think that this means that all things are in obedience to the will of our Lord. The Word of God also informs us that we do not see all things in subjection to Him (Heb. 2:8). We learn that such will transpire when Jesus has put all things under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25). Thus, only at the end of the world, when death is destroyed, will Christ completely subdue all things (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

A Conclusion That Never Ends

What is the significance of Christ's ascension for mankind? Those persons who have obeyed the gospel of Christ and remained faithful to Him will enjoy all the benefits associated and resulting from His ascension (Rom. 1:16; Rom. 6:1-5; Col. 2:12-13; Col. 3:1-4; Rev. 2:10;

1 Cor. 15:58). Therefore, to be “raised with Christ” not only refers to the resurrection, but encompasses our own ascension into heaven at the end of the age. Thus, if we live in the reality of our resurrection, we should also anticipate our own ascension in resurrected and glorified bodies into heaven (1 John 3:2). Indeed, God’s great Scheme of Redemption transforms and finally raises for all eternity saved mankind, the church of Christ, into glory to be in the very presence of Deity Who loved lost mankind so much that the Second Person of the Godhead would become man. Through his sinless life and vicarious death, His resurrection and ascension, Christ secured a place in heaven for all eternity (Heb. 5:9).

It is with much praise and thanksgiving for and to God that I conclude this brief study of the ascension of Christ and its implications for all things—for mankind. Indeed, we have a man in heaven at the right hand of God (Heb. 9:24). He is able to emphasize and sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 2:18; Heb. 4:15-16). Thus, through the Gospel, He is able to equip Christians to meet every situation Satan throws against us. As Paul declared, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). How wonderful to know that, because Christ ascended to rule all things, the faithful of all the earth will be able to live in His presence, world without end! Indeed, because of Jesus Christ’s ascension we also may experience the same.

Endnotes

1 Jesus was raised from the dead on the day after the Sabbath that occurred during the Passover festival (John 20:1ff). This was the day on which the sheaf of the first ripe barley was waved before the Lord (Lev. 23:10-14), the festival being fixed by reference to the Sabbath that fell during Passover. Similarly, Pentecost (which means “fifty”) was also dated from this Sabbath

(Lev. 23:15-21), seven Sabbaths being counted, the following day (also the first day of the week) being the day on which the festival was to be celebrated. Therefore, it takes only simple mathematics to arrive at the figures previously stated.

From the day that Jesus rose from the grave to the seventh Sabbath was seven times seven days--equaling forty-nine days. The following day would have been Pentecost--the fiftieth day. For forty days following His resurrection Jesus had appeared to the disciples. Ten days are left, during which time the apostles did as Christ commanded them--they waited in Jerusalem for "the promise of the Father" (the coming baptismal power of the Holy Spirit) about which the Lord had told them (Acts 1:12-14).

2 In Acts 7:55-56, we have the account of Stephen's martyrdom. Stephen saw Christ standing at the right hand of God. "Standing" symbolized Christ's concern for the violent death of His servant as well as our Lord's readiness to receive the spirit of His faithful saint.

CHAPTER 30

The Future Miracles Of Jesus: The Second Coming Of Christ

Paul Sain

Introduction

CHRIST CAME TO EARTH miraculously--born of a virgin woman. Christ performed numerous miraculous deeds while on earth. Christ was miraculously raised from the dead. Christ ascended into heaven miraculously. Rejoice faithful Christian, for one day, Christ will miraculously come again, in the air, to receive His people, to present them to the Almighty Heavenly Father.

There are similarities and differences between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. First the similarities:

1. He personally came the first time (1 John 4:1-3). He will personally come again. He was not an illusion or mysterious phantom.
2. He came the first time according to the “**promise**” of Almighty God. He shall return according to the “**promise**” as frequently made in Holy Writ.
3. The first advent was “**expected**” and “**unexpected**” by the multitudes. So shall it be with the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 5:2).
4. He came to bless (save) ones who believed and obeyed Him (Luke 19:10). He will come again to bless those who have believed, and obeyed Him (2 Tim. 4:8).

The differences:

1. He first came as a babe in a manger (Luke 2:7). His return will be as a King on a throne (Matt. 25:31).
2. He first came in the likeness of man (Phil. 2:7). His return will be in the glory of God (Mark 8:38).
3. He first came in the flesh to save man (Heb. 2:14; Luke 19:10). He will come again in the spirit to judge (2 Tim. 4:1).
4. He first came as a servant (Matt. 20:28). He will return as Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:14-15).
5. He first came as a sin offering (Matt. 20:28). He is coming back without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

The Bible Plainly Declares: Our Lord Is Coming Again!

Jesus Christ, as quoted by the inspired writer John, said He would come again (John 14:1-3). James informs us the Lord would come again (James 5:7). John said Christ was coming (1 John 3:2). Paul often preached and wrote of the Lord's return (Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-57). Inspired writers throughout the New Testament speak of His coming again (1 Peter 1:13; Jude 7).

A day has been "**appointed**" for the end of time, the end of the world and the dissolving of all elements of the earth (2 Peter 3:9ff), a day in which the world shall be judged.

Robert Taylor has accurately written:

Like a gigantic finger the Old Testament points to His first coming. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John pen in unison that He has come and will come again. Acts through Revelation forms another mighty chorus in proclaiming the surety of His second coming. It is a golden thread running throughout the New Testament. Some 300 times the Old Testament spoke of His first coming. Some 300 times the New Testament speaks of His second coming.

Note what Paul taught from Mars Hill:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

At the ascension, the angels plainly declared that the Lord will return:

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

In the inspired Scriptures we also learn facts regarding what will happen at the time of the Lord's return (1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:9-10; Rev. 20:11-15; Col. 3:2-4). Our minds cannot appreciate nor comprehend the awesome events which will take place at the end of time. Paul said (1 Cor. 15:52-57) that "**we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.**" The trumpet will sound and be heard by every person everywhere. Those who have lived from all past generations ("**the dead**") shall be raised.

To the Thessalonians Paul stated:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them

in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The Lord's return will **not** be a secret, a supposed "**rapture**" of some folks, while leaving others behind. The second coming of Christ will be sudden, loud, visible, known by all, just prior to the destruction of the earth and all things of the earth (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

According to the Scriptures, it is absolutely certain that **all** will immediately know it is the day of the Lord, the end of time!

The Lord will not be alone when He comes again. We learn in the following passages who will be coming with Him from heaven:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and **all the holy angels with him**, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory (Matt. 25:31, emp. mine throughout, PS).

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven **with his mighty angels**, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Let us pause and add at this point that there is not a single human being who knows the time of the Lord's return. Anyone who attempts to predict the day or time is a false teacher. The Bible clearly and emphatically reveals that God the Father knows, and only He knows the time of the second coming!:

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only (Matt. 24:36).

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father (Mark 13:32).

Why Is The Lord Coming Again?

If we listened to many preachers/teachers on radio and televangelists, we would conclude that Jesus Christ is coming to establish, set up His kingdom, and reign on a literal throne on earth. There is **not** a single particle of truth to this teaching of man (Matt. 15:7-9)! It is a false doctrine from beginning to end.

The reason this can be stated with such bold forcefulness is that the kingdom is in effect, and has been since the first century (Col. 1:13-14). The Lord said that some to whom He was speaking in the first century would not die until the kingdom had come with power (Mark 9:1). The kingdom came (Acts 2). John declares that the kingdom is in effect, for he was in it (Rev. 1:9). There is not a single indication, according to the Holy Word of God, that the Lord will ever set foot on earth, much less reign for a 1,000 years!

The Lord is **not** coming again to die again for the sins of mankind. Christ did that once and for all (Heb. 9:28). He is **not** coming back to offer another opportunity for redemption, or to do so by another method (Heb. 9:27).

While these doctrines of men are false, it is true, according to the Bible, that Jesus Christ is coming again:

1. For the saints of God (1 Thess. 4:13-17).
2. To raise the dead (John 5:28-29).
3. To execute judgment upon all (Jude 15).
4. To judge the nations (Matt. 25:31).
5. To judge the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1).
6. To reward everyone according to their works (2 Cor. 5:10).
7. To reward **obedient** (Matt. 7:21).
8. To punish **disobedient** (Matt. 7:21; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).
9. To deliver the kingdom to God (1 Cor. 15:24).

Jehovah God has always been true to His Word and has done precisely what He said He would do. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). The Son of God did exactly what He said He would do. From the cross, when the Lord said “**It is finished**,” He was emphatically stating that the work that He came to do was completed. Thus, we can have confidence in the fact that Jesus Christ will come again one day, just as He said, and do what He promised.

What Will Occur When Christ Miraculously Comes Again?

Allowing the inspired Scriptures to state the facts, all will be gathered together (John 5:28-29). The dead will be raised (1 Cor. 15:52ff). Judgment will begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). The books will be opened, and all will be judged out of the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12). The faithful saints of God will be glorified (Col. 3:4). There will be an awesome change to a glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21). We will be like the Savior (1 John 3:2).

The miraculous coming of the Savior will bring **the end** and **the beginning** of things. It will be **the end** of this present world (2 Pet. 3:10-12). It will be the end of time (Rev. 10:6). Death will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Opportunities to obey God will be forever gone (2 Peter 3:9). The war with Satan (temptations, trials, and tribulations) will have ended (2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 9:27). It will be the end of rebellion and rejection by man to Jehovah God (Phil. 2:10), though belief in God and a desire to submit to Him will at that time be too late. The Lord’s second coming will bring to an end the longsuffering patience of Almighty God (Rom. 10).

The miraculous coming of Christ will simultaneously be **the beginning** of many things. To the faithful, it will be the beginning of a new life (Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The indescribable joyful life eternal will begin (Matt. 25:21; Rev. 21:4). To the sinner, it will be the beginning of eternal separation from the Creator (Rom. 6:23; Luke 16). The horrible, indescribable eternal punishment begins (2 Thess. 1:9; Matt. 8:12).

The Anticipation Of The Miraculous Second Coming Of Christ

Note briefly the vast quantity of Scripture references exhorting all to watch, prepare, anticipate, wait, long for, and endure until the coming of Christ.

To reach heaven at the end of this earthly sojourn, one must:

Become a disciple of Christ, a Christian. Ones in the first century who were acceptable to God obeyed the Gospel of Christ, submitting to the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21), and became Christians: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else! They were not hyphenated Christians (Baptist-Christian, Methodist-Christian, etc.). They did not “**join**” a denomination (part of the whole). They did not follow a cafeteria-style religion (pick and choose what suits one’s whim and fancy). They followed Christ and Him crucified. They obeyed Christ, fully, completely, totally, without reservation.

Daily walk toward the heavenly goal. Keep our eyes on Christ, our perfect example (1 Pet. 2:21). Become more like the Saviour daily, putting on the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Be a righteous light unto the world (Matt. 5:16):

- 1. Remain faithful to the end** (Matt. 10:22). Do not allow Satan to deter, distract, discourage. (1 Pet. 5:8). Work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Fear not things thou shalt suffer; be thou faithful (Rev. 2:10).
- 2. Keep your eyes on the goal** (Heb. 12:1-2).

3. **Press toward the mark** (Phil. 3:12-14).
4. **Look for the Lord's coming** (2 Tim. 4:6-8).
5. **Watch and wait for it** (Mark 13:34-35).
6. **Wait** for the coming of our Lord (1 Cor. 1:7).
7. **Wait for His Son** from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10).
8. **Look** for and **hasting** unto His coming (2 Pet. 3:12).
9. **Patiently wait** for coming of the Lord (Jas. 5:7).
10. **Be glad** (exceeding joy) when the time arrives (1 Pet. 4:13).
11. **Teach and preach** fervently (Matt. 16:26; Jude 23).
12. **Be ready--always** (Matt. 24:44).

Be assured of the promises of God. They are true, stedfast, and sure promises (2 Pet. 3:9). They are exceeding and precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4). Our God is able to carry out His precious promises (Rom. 4:19-22).

Judgment will one day be a reality! We will give an account of our words and actions, our acceptance or rejection of the Lord's will. We will hear the Son of God say either "**Enter in...**" or "**Depart from me...**"

Man desperately needed a Saviour. All mankind (who reach the stage of accountability) transgress the law of God (1 John 3:4) and sin (Rom. 3:23). Sin condemns (Rom. 6:23). Sin (that which defiles) will keep us out of the mansion (heaven) prepared for God's people (Rev. 22:17ff).

Hear the words of the physician, Luke, reflecting on the purpose of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, coming to earth the first time. He stated simply, "**For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). All mankind was lost in sin (Rom. 3:23). Sin separates one from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and thus there was a desperate need for a Savior.

Ones in the first century **heard** the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), **believed** it with all their heart (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:1,6), turned from their sins (**repented**) (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Acts 3:19; Acts 2:38), **confessed**

Jesus Christ as the true and living Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33), and then were **baptized** (immersed) in water, for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21; John 3:3-5) to be **saved** (Acts 2:47; Rom. 6:16). Having obeyed that **“form of doctrine”** they were **then** saved, freed from their sin (Rom. 6:17-18). They were added to the Lord’s church (Acts 2:47), not a denomination (religion of man). They were disciples of Christ (Acts 11:26), not followers of a fellow human being. To become a New Testament Christian, one must believe and obey the inspired, inerrant, infallible, irrefutable doctrine (teaching) of Christ, what we know as the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:13; Jas. 1:21ff).

Results Of Preparing For The Miraculous Coming Of Christ

Let us be reminded and absolutely **know** this fact: **“if we will do today, what people did in the first century, we will become today, what they became then—New Testament Christians!”** Times may change; attitudes and desires of man will change with the direction of the wind; fads and fancies will reflect the culture and times—but man’s greatest need does not change. We must **prepare for the Lord’s miraculous return!** We must **build on the solid foundation** of Jesus Christ! We must **view our brief earthly sojourn** in light of eternity!

As the Ephesian brethren, so likewise Christians today can enjoy all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Note also these brethren received redemption (Eph. 1:7), reconciliation (Eph. 2:16), forgiveness (Eph. 1:7) an inheritance (Eph. 1:11); access to God (Eph. 2:18).

The faithful servants of the Creator will receive the **“crown of life”** (Rev. 2:10b). They shall hear the judge of all mankind say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant”**

(Matt. 25:21-23). The victory, receiving a mansion in heaven, can be ours (1 Cor. 15:57; John 14:1-3). The crown of righteousness has been laid up for the faithful (2 Tim. 4:6-8). It is an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25), a crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19), a crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Pet. 5:4), which truly is the ultimate victory (1 John 5:4).

Read, as if for the first time, the penetrating words of A. A. Westbrook in the beautiful hymn, “When He Comes In Glory By And By”:

O how sweet ‘twill be to meet the Lord,
 When He comes in glory by and by;
 What a song of praise will be outpoured,
 When He comes in glory by and by.
 We will have our robes all white as snow,
 When He comes in glory by and by
 O be ready, with the Lord to go,
 When He comes in glory by and by
 I am longing for that happy day,
 When He comes in glory by and by
 For with Him I hope to soar away,
 When He comes in glory by and by.

Consider further the “**glory**” that awaits the redeemed, when the Lord miraculously comes for His faithful children:

When all my labors and trials are o’er,
 And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
 Just to be near the dear Lord I adore,
 Will thro’ the ages be glory for me.
 When, by the gift of His infinite grace,
 I am accorded in heaven a place,
 Just to be there and to look on His face
 Will thro’ the ages be glory for me.
 Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
 Joy like a river around me will flow;
 Yet just a smile from my Savior I know
 Will thro’ the ages be glory for me.
 CHORUS:
 O that will be glory for me,
 Glory for me, glory for me;

When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.
(Chas. H. Gabriel)

How thrilling to know we are in the hands of the all-powerful, everywhere-present, all-knowing Creator of the universe. How comforting to realize He desires for us to live with Him forever and has made adequate and thorough provisions for this to be possible.

CHAPTER 31

The Miracles Of Jesus' Disciples

Gary Summers

Introduction

THE TWO MEN ENTERED the village in the late afternoon. They had never visited it before and were not sure what kind of reception they would receive. In a few moments they were passing a row of shops when they saw four men engaged in a rather animated discussion. As they approached them, however, their voices ceased, and they looked at the two strangers expectantly.

“We are from Bethsaida,” one said. “We are looking for the house of Jonathan the silversmith.”

“What business do you have with him?” one of the men asked.

“He is the kinsmen of a friend of ours.” The explanation satisfied the men, and they pointed out his dwelling place. As they were about to cross the street, a child that was carrying water from the well suddenly collapsed in the street. The lad’s father, one of the four men, rushed to his side, but he could not revive the youth. Another of the men had gone immediately to the woman in the town who had shown the most knowledge in matters like these.

When she had arrived, she examined the young man, raised her head slowly, and said, “I’m sorry.”

The father stared in disbelief. “Are you sure?” The woman bowed her head.

The two men said to the father, "Do not fear." One put his hand on the child's forehead and said, "His life is in him." He took his hand and said, "Arise." Immediately, the boy opened his eyes and stood upon his feet. The father hugged him. The woman looked at the two men and said, "Who are you? I know his life had departed from him. How were you able to restore it to him?"

The men responded, "Our names are not important. The name of Jesus of Nazareth is. It is by His power that this lad has been made whole. And just as He has healed this one physically, He can heal all men spiritually, saving them from their sins."

Power And Purpose

This account of a healing by two of the Lord's apostles is fictional, but something like it may have occurred when Jesus "began to send them out two by two" (Mark 6:7).¹ Jesus commissioned the twelve to anoint "with oil many who were sick" and to heal them (Mark 6:13). In fact, the Scriptures teach that Jesus **appointed** them for three specific purposes: 1) "that they might be with Him"; 2) "that He might send them out to preach"; and 3) "to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14-15).

These things are stated in a logical order. First, they needed to be **with** Jesus to learn from Him the Gospel. Jesus had begun to preach "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14); the apostles would learn by listening to and observing Him. Second, they would then be prepared to go out and likewise preach. The message of salvation is paramount. All else (the working of miracles) is subservient to man's redemption. But, just as their Lord did, so would the apostles also be able to perform miracles. Jesus did not limit or restrict what they could do: "He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases" (Matt. 10:1).

Matthew also connects the **power** exercised in the working of miracles with the **proclamation** of the Gospel. His specific instructions to the twelve were: “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely have you received, freely give’” (Matt. 10:7-8). Thus we see, at the very outset of the apostles’ working of miracles, God had a purpose for them in mind. They provided credibility so that people would listen to their message.

Imagine a pair of Jesus’ emissaries arriving in a town to preach salvation from sin in the name of Jesus. The reaction might well be, “Who?” or, “Why should we believe that remission of sins is available through this man we don’t know and have never met?” The purpose for the power which was displayed through the apostles was to establish the fact that these men were to be taken seriously, and their message was true, as evidenced by Divine endorsement.

That purpose (for miraculous manifestations) was true while they were still under the leadership of Jesus; it remained after He died on the cross for our sins, was buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven. Mark closes his Gospel narrative making this point: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs. Amen” (Mark 16:20). The writer of Hebrews also notes that God also bore witness to their preaching “both with signs and wonders, and with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 2:4).

Definition Of A Miracle

C. S. Lewis chose to define the word **miracle** as simply as possible: “an interference with Nature by supernatural power.”² Brother Guy N. Woods stated it with

a slightly different emphasis when he said that a miracle is “an event which the force of nature, including man’s own natural powers, cannot produce and which must, therefore, be attributed to supernatural sources.”³ Both of these definitions, however, recognize that a miracle is not a natural phenomenon, no matter how amazing or stupendous, but that the power of God has acted upon the natural order of things in such a way as to be clearly identified. Woods added that “a miracle, therefore, involves the exercise of powers above and beyond those common to man and which can only originate with God.”⁴

Every miracle recorded in the Bible (after the Creation week was completed) unites God’s power with the purpose of producing validation of either the message or the messenger—or both. Consider just a few of them.

1. Why did God work so many miracles in Egypt? The purpose was so that both Israel and Egypt would know that Moses was God’s spokesman and therefore needed to be heeded. Pharaoh kept rejecting the message, and, even though he temporarily relented by letting the Israelites go, he did not become fully convinced until the Red Sea closed in upon his soldiers.
2. The manna in the wilderness (along with God’s preserving the clothes and shoes of His people) showed not only God’s love and willingness to provide for them; it also demonstrated His presence among them and that He had chosen Moses to reveal His law and administer His government.
3. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, the purpose was to exalt God. None of Pharaoh’s magicians or wise men could discern the dream’s message; Joseph stated that “God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Gen. 41:16).
4. Likewise, in Daniel’s day, none of King Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men, astrologers, magicians, or soothsayers could

tell him his dream (much less interpret it). Daniel, however, told the king that these men lacked the power for such an undertaking, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets” (Dan. 2:28). The significance of Daniel’s closeness to Deity was not lost upon the Babylonian king any more than Joseph’s ability was lost upon Pharaoh. Both rulers knew through whom Truth could be obtained.

5. Even Elijah’s being taken to heaven was a confirmation that the things he had taught were of God. Elisha’s being witness to it was also confirmation that he would have a double portion of Elijah’s spirit (2 Kings 2:9-10). Both men performed many miracles, all of which enhanced their credibility as God’s spokesmen.

Adequate Proof

Many other miracles could be examined,⁵ but these are sufficient to establish the contention that miracles in one way or another established not only the power of God, but also the authenticity of the one speaking though His name. Even the negative experience of Jonah had this positive effect. The sailors learned of the power of God by seeing the way He dealt with His own prophet. Jonah certainly gained knowledge to the point of humility. And all who read this account marvel at the power and patience of the Almighty.

The miracles supply adequate proof for the open-minded to believe the message. An indifferent and blasé Israel, after the fire came down from heaven to consume the sacrifice Elijah had prepared, became enthusiastic in its faith: “The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!” (1 Kings 18:39). It was a demonstration of Divine power that dazzled even the wicked king Ahab, but his even more evil wife was not impressed.

Most of the Egyptians were convinced that Pharaoh should listen to Moses long before he did. Pharaoh’s

magicians told him, after the plague of lice, “This is the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19). When the plague of hail was announced, some of the Egyptians took heed to the words of Moses: “He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and livestock flee to the houses” (Exod. 9:20). The amazing thing is that anyone would not believe Moses, but some left their servants and livestock in the field to be destroyed (Exod. 9:21). One would think that, since Moses had a 100% accuracy record in the prophecy department, 100% of the Egyptians would have had enough sense to practice caution. It is not the inadequacy of the evidence that produced this mixed response; it is the inadequacy of the heart. There has always been a certain segment of any population who refuses either to glorify God or be thankful to Him; they prefer a lie to the Truth of God (Rom. 1:21, 25).

When Moses announced the plague of locusts, his servants asked Pharaoh, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” (Exod. 10:7). How could Pharaoh not be convinced? His staff is saying (in effect), “You know, chief, Moses is seven for seven. What do you want to bet that he’s called this one right, too?” It is only, however, after the death of the firstborn that Pharaoh allows the Israelites to leave, and he was not permanently convinced of the power of God even then.

The events in Egypt and at Mount Carmel verified the truthfulness of the proclamations of Moses and Elijah. This kind of evidence produces faith in people. When Moses and Aaron first arrived in Egypt, they went to their own people first: “And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed” (Exod. 4:30-31a). The Israelites believed in Jehovah after Elijah’s contest with

the false prophets of Baal. The widow of Zarephath confessed, after Elijah brought her dead son back to life, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kings 17:24). These miracles served their purpose of providing sufficient evidence.

When Naaman followed Elisha’s instructions to dip in the Jordan River seven times and found that his leprosy was gone, he concluded: “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15). King Darius, after Daniel’s safe deliverance from the lions, was moved to write: “I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the throne of God. For He is the living God” (Dan. 6:26a).

In the New Testament, Jesus does miracles so that the people will believe His bold claim of being the Son of God (John 10:34-36).⁶ The miracles He did caused people to trust in Him:

[M]any believed in His name when they saw the signs that He did (John 2:23b).

Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased (John 6:2).

Nicodemus correctly drew the conclusion he stated to the Lord: “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).

The blind man that Jesus healed used the same logic as Nicodemus when he found it necessary to defend himself against the Pharisees: “Now we know that God does not hear sinners...If this man were not of God, He could do nothing” (John 9:31a, 33). In connection with raising Lazarus from the dead, we read that many of the Jews who “had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him” (John

11:45). In fact, the chief priests wanted to kill Lazarus also because many Jews were believing in Jesus because the Lord had raised him from the dead (John 12:9-11).

John tells us the reason He recorded all of these great things that Jesus did: “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name” (John 20:31).

No one living today has seen the plagues of Egypt, the wonders performed by Elijah and Elisha, or the miracles of Jesus. But we find them recorded for us in the Bible. Modernists challenge just about every manifestation of supernaturalism that the Bible describes, but the fact that people became followers of Jesus in the first century defies rational explanation apart from the miracles. Why would anyone believe in a man who made such spectacular and seemingly ludicrous claims—especially when He was subsequently crucified? Why would they live righteously and give up their lives for Him—unless they had sufficient **evidence** to do so?

The Apostles: The Tradition Continues

As already noted, Jesus had commissioned the apostles to preach while He was still actively engaged in His own ministry. They needed and had received miraculous power for that work. After the Lord’s ascension into heaven, they had a great work to do: take the Gospel into all the world (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit and power from on high (Luke 24:49).

Israelites were gathered together in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind caused the multitude to center their attention on the apostles (Acts 2:6). Peter began with an explanation of their speaking in tongues, which was the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel (Acts 2:16-21). Not only had a

new Lawgiver (Jesus) come in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19, which is quoted in Acts 3:22-23, He brought the new covenant with Him (foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34). This covenant involves the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14), and that kingdom was prophesied by, among others, Isaiah (Isa. 2:2-4).

Also prophesied, however, was that accompanying this kingdom would be miraculous manifestations (Joel 2:28-32).⁷ The multitude had just observed some of these expressions when they heard the wind and then heard the apostles' speaking in all the various languages of those now gathered together. After Peter explains that what they had heard was the fulfillment of prophecy, he next **connects** the miracles of the Lord with those things they had observed. As he begins to preach Jesus, the very first thing he does is to remind them of the great things Jesus had done.

He begins with the words, **Jesus of Nazareth**. In fifty days the residents of Jerusalem had not forgotten Him—especially since following the Lord's death, "the veil of the temple had been torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split" (Matt. 27:51), not to mention the graves opening and the bodies of the saints making appearances to many (Matt. 27:52-53). Then there were the appearances that Jesus Himself had made. All visitors from various parts of the world were undoubtedly told of all these events, if they had not remained there since the Passover.

Peter next points out that Jesus was "a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did through Him in your midst" (Acts 2:22). This reminder to the people accomplishes several goals. First, it reminds them about Jesus, the One who had taught with authority. Second, it reminds them that the Lord's use of miracles was God's means of endorsing Him. Third, implicit is the

fact that, when the apostles do miracles, it will mean that God approves of them and their message, also.

The final words of Acts 2:22 are also significant: **as you yourselves also know**. Neither Jesus nor the apostles advertised that they would be conducting “healing services.” They did miracles in whatever place they were passing through. Thus, no one could deny the truthfulness of the apostles’ statement concerning Christ. They would have had to perjure themselves and become false witnesses to disagree with Peter’s declaration concerning Jesus and miracles.

The Source And The Extent Of The Power

If a **miracle** is not a natural phenomenon, then it involves the supernatural. Man does not have the ability to circumvent natural processes, since he is part of the natural world. Man can only find out ways of exploring, learning about, and harnessing this physical realm. The supernatural world is outside his sphere of knowledge, let alone expertise. Therefore, true miraculous powers could only be granted to man by Him who can violate the rules of nature He created. The power to do miracles, signs, and wonders must always come from God.

Just as Daniel told Darius that the genius to reveal dreams came from above, not from his own ability, so Peter says even of Jesus that **God** did the miracles, signs, and wonders through Him. The same would be true of the apostles, and this fact Peter would declare on the first recorded occasion of a specific miracle after the day of Pentecost. After Peter and John healed the lame man, they provided the following explanation: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (Acts 3:12). It was through faith in the name of Jesus that the miracle was accomplished (Acts 3:16).

Since God is the One Who supplies the power for miracles, there is not any appreciable difference in the quality of the work or the wide range of wonders done at any point throughout the Bible. Most of the destructive miracles, after God destroyed the world with a Flood (Gen. 7:11), occurred in Moses' day with the ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt. But other miracles were done which brought about an instant deterioration of a person's health. Miriam, for example was smitten with leprosy for one week (Num. 12:10-15). When Uzziah sought to usurp the duties of the priest by trying to burn incense, leprosy broke out on his forehead, and he remained a leper until the day of his death (2 Chron. 26:18-21). Jeroboam's hand withered when he called for the arrest of the man of God, but it was restored when he humbled himself (1 Kings 13:4, 6). God brought about these events without any participation from man, but it was more customary for Him to have men make the pronouncement of what would occur.

The men (angels) struck the Sodomites with blindness (Gen. 19:11), thus showing that God can exercise His power through spirit, as well as human, beings. Elisha prayed for the Syrians to be struck with blindness, and God obliged him (2 Kings 6:18). Paul pronounced blindness upon Elymas the sorcerer for a time (Acts 13:11). The apostles could do all that their Old Testament counterparts could do, as well as what Jesus did.

Although Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were rescued from the fiery furnace (Dan. 3), God used fire to destroy the disobedient Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2) and the two hundred and fifty rebellious men who were offering incense (Num. 16:35). Later, Elijah would call down fire from heaven to consume two captains and their companies of fifty soldiers (2 Kings 1:9-12). The apostles, James and John, were enamored with such destructive power and asked the Lord to use it against the Samaritans, but they were denied permission (Luke 9:54-55).

Most miracles, however, were of a constructive nature. Elisha told Naaman the leper how to be cleansed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5); Jesus healed ten lepers in Luke 17. He also healed the blind (John 9). Both Jesus and the apostles healed lame men. The Lord healed a man who had been infirm for thirty-eight years (John 5:5-9). Peter and John healed a man who had been lame all of his life (Acts 3:1-10). Peter restored a man who had been bedridden and paralyzed for eight years (Acts 9:32-35). Paul met a man in Lystra who had been crippled from his mother's womb; at the apostle's command, the one who had never stood upon his feet leaped and walked (Acts 14:8-10).

God's messengers were effectively able to counteract the effects of poison. Elisha was called upon to combat the deadly ingredients in the pot of stew that had been prepared (2 Kings 4:38-41); Jesus promised His apostles they would not be harmed by poison, whether it came in the form of a serpent or was placed into their drinking vessels (Mark 16:18). Paul was preserved from the harm that a viper would have ordinarily caused (Acts 28:1-5).

Nearly everyone is familiar with Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 on one occasion and the 4,000 on another. But the prophets of old also multiplied food. Elijah told the widow of Zarephath that her bin of flour would not be used up, nor would her jar of oil run dry until God sent rain (1 Kings 17:14). Elisha advised another widow to obtain as many jars as possible, and one vessel filled them all with oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). Even more similar to the miracle that Jesus did is the one Elisha performed when he set twenty loaves of barley bread before 100 men. They not only ate; they had some left over (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Both Jesus and the apostles were delivered from death upon occasion. Of the Lord we read: "Then they sought to take Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come" (John 7:30; see also John 8:20).

One time they even took up stones to throw at Him, but He “hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (John 8:59). The apostles were rescued from prison (Acts 5:19); Peter was delivered by an angel after the death of James (Acts 12:7). God used an earthquake to deliver Paul and Silas—although they returned after preaching the Gospel to the jailer and his family and baptizing them (Acts 16:26).

If any specific kind of miracle would be reserved for Jesus alone to do (that neither the prophets nor the apostles could duplicate), one would think it would be raising the dead, and the Lord did bring several back to life. He restored Jairus’ daughter to her anxious parents (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43). He raised the widow of Nain’s son in dramatic fashion. The crowd was carrying him out of the city to bury him. Jesus “touched the open coffin” and told him to arise—and he did (Luke 7:11-17)! Then there was Lazarus who had been in the tomb for four days. Those who had come to mourn were positively stupefied when he emerged from the tomb (John 11).

But others also raised the dead. In the Old Testament both Elijah and Elisha raised up a lad who had died. Through Elijah’s efforts the soul of the son of the widow of Zarephath came back to him (1 Kings 17:21-22), and through Elisha’s actions the son of the Shunammite woman had his life returned (2 Kings 4:35). Peter brought Tabitha back to life (Acts 9:40-41), and Paul restored Eutychus (Acts 20:9-10). God’s men have been able to do wondrous things through the power of God in every era.

Were the apostles actually able to heal the sick in the same way that Jesus did? There are three passages that indicate they could. The reader can judge for himself the validity of this claim after reading the three passages listed below:

And when they came out of the boat,
immediately the people recognized Him, ran

through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Where He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the border of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well (Mark 6:54-56).

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people...And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed (Acts 5:12a, 14-16).

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:11-12).

All three passages make broad, sweeping statements about the effectiveness to heal of Jesus, Peter, and Paul. No exceptions are listed: no evil spirit was too powerful, and no disease was too difficult for them to deal with. All were healed.⁸

Other New Testament Miracles

Not all of the miracles recorded in the book of Acts involved the apostles. God acted on His own in some instances. When a replacement was selected for Judas, for example, the disciples cast lots, confident that the Lord would determine the appropriate person for that work (Acts 1:21-26). The Lord decided what day and time the Holy Spirit would fall upon the disciples and that divided

tongues like as of fire would sit upon each of them (Acts 2:1-4). He also determined that the Holy Spirit would come upon Cornelius and his disciples. The fact that the Jewish Christians were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles demonstrates that no men had a hand in bringing about this event (Acts 10:44-45).

God caused an earthquake in Acts 16, and on another occasion the place where the disciples were praying together was shaken (Acts 4:31). Ananias and Sapphira died without a human hand being laid upon them (Acts 5), and an angel of the Lord struck Herod (Acts 12:23). An angel also delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-11).

God was greatly involved in evangelism. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and the prophets to speak the Word of God (Acts 2:16-38). An angel told Philip to go to a certain location (Acts 8:26), and the Spirit told him to join himself to the chariot of the queen's treasurer (Acts 8:29). After Philip baptized the eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away" (Acts 8:39). The Holy Spirit selected Barnabas and Saul for world evangelism (Acts 13:2, 4), but He forbade Paul and Silas to preach in Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7).

Of course, the Lord appeared to Saul while he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-4; Acts 22:6-11, 13; Acts 26:13-19). God also appeared to Ananias with respect to his forthcoming visit to Saul (Acts 9:10-16). Both Cornelius and Peter saw visions, which led to the conversion of the former (Acts 10:3-7, 22, 30-32; Acts 11:13-14; Acts 10:9-20, 28; Acts 11:5-10, 12). Paul also saw a vision of a man in Macedonia asking for help (Acts 16:9-10). Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

Although most of the miracles are mentioned in connection with the apostles, others also had spiritual gifts. Stephen "did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Philip had great success preaching in Samaria:

And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles that he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed (Acts 8:6-7).

These miracles and signs were a motivating force in Simon's conversion [as a magician, he could distinguish an illusion from legitimate power (Acts 8:13)].

Agabus prophesied of a famine to come (Acts 11:28) and of Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Paul discusses the various spiritual gifts that members of the church in Corinth possessed. Although these were bestowed by the apostles, all Christians could exercise one or more of these gifts, which included miraculous faith, gifts of healing, and working of miracles (1 Cor. 12:4-11). Timothy had received a gift through the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6). The New Testament is filled with references to the use of the miraculous, whether done by a member of the Godhead, the apostles, or those who were part of the New Testament church (Eph. 4).

Did Miracles Endure Beyond The First Century?

Since miracles and various spiritual gifts were such a part of the New Testament church, it would not be unreasonable for people to think that they would continue. In fact, there are a few purported miracles from the fourth and fifth centuries. Much later the Roman Catholic Church claimed the power to do miracles. Joseph Smith opened the door to them in **The Book of Mormon**. Most claiming to be Christians, however, have not had the emphasis upon them that occurred in the 1900's with Pentecostalism in the first half of the century and neo-Pentecostalism in the second half.

We will let our answers come from what we have observed previously in this study. It is obvious that God has no less power today than in the time of Moses, the era of the prophets, or the New Testament period of Jesus and the apostles. But different conditions do exist with respect to the need for miracles. One point previously established is that the miracles were to endorse a message and/or the messenger, which immediately presents a problem for any rational person today.

Catholic doctrine allows for miracles, but they teach, among other things, that Mary was herself conceived of a virgin and that she ascended to heaven. They assert that the pope is the head of the church on earth and that he is infallible when he speaks **ex cathedra** [from the chair]. None of these things is true. The Mormons claim new revelations, as do the Christian Scientists, but they are worlds apart on doctrine. Both Oneness Pentecostals and Trinitarian Pentecostals say that miracles characterize them, but they cannot even agree on the number of personalities in the Godhead. Then there are charismatics attending several religious denominations, which likewise have no unity. And we have not yet even taken into account Don Finto, [an apostate member of the church of Christ] who has presumed to declare himself an apostle!

If souls were not being lost by the existence of this ugly mess, it would be hilarious; in fact, Satan probably howls with delight on a daily basis. These numerous groups cannot all be working miracles because God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Jesus and the apostles did not teach conflicting doctrines; New Testament doctrine harmonizes so beautifully—because one and only one Holy Spirit inspired the writers. For that reason we should all speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

How absurd it would be for the Holy Spirit on Monday to tell everyone to pay heed to the pope but on Tuesday to

listen to Joseph Smith. On Wednesday everyone should abide by the teachings of Benny Hinn, and on Thursday the prophet of the day is Mary Baker Eddy. On Friday the teaching of Oral Roberts is on tap, and on Saturday we will want to keep company with Ellen G. White. We would be changing our beliefs daily. Instead of feasting on the Word of God, which remains the same, we would be treated to doctrine **du jour**.

If the purpose of miraculous signs was to endorse the teaching and the teacher, then God cannot possibly have anything to do with all of these different groups with their various and sundry doctrines, which means that all of the miracles being claimed today cannot possibly be occurring. At the most, only one religious group—the one that is correct—could be performing genuine miracles. All other groups are not doing miracles as defined by the Scriptures. Actually, there is not even one that is doing so, and that fact can be demonstrated by noting that not one religious group purporting to do miracles teaches what the inspired apostle Peter did about salvation on the day of Pentecost.

When asked what to do to be saved, not one “miracle worker” will say, “Repent , and let every of you be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Ask any religious leader about that verse, and he will not only disagree with it; he will fall all over himself trying to explain it away. None of those currently alleging inspiration will preach Jesus as Philip did and cause their hearers to want to be baptized in water afterward (Acts 8:35-39). All such fall into the foolish position of declaring Saul saved on the road to Damascus but still in his sins when he arrives there (Acts 22:16).

Reality, then, tells us that miracles are not occurring today. But what do the Scriptures teach on this subject? We noted earlier that a new law and a new lawgiver were

prophesied—and that miracles would accompany this new system, which it did. So does that new system likewise predict a future covenant and teach that miracles would continue as long as the earth stands? No. In fact, it teaches quite the opposite. They were designed to last only until “that which is perfect” (the complete revelation) would come (1 Cor. 13) or until we all come to the unity of the faith (Eph. 4), which the Word makes possible.

But why, if God had used miracles throughout all the ages, would they now be terminated? The answer is that God’s revelation had never been complete until the New Testament was written. The Law of Moses never inferred that nothing more would follow; instead, it predicted more (Deut. 18:18-19). But the New Testament assures readers that it is complete, that it contains “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3) and that it was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). These assessments fit perfectly with the promise Jesus made to the apostles—that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all things He had taught them (John 14:25-26; John 16:12-13).

The plan of salvation has been completed, the kingdom has been established, correct worship has been defined, and everything required for holy living has been revealed to us. Furthermore, the miracles confirmed all these things (Mark 16:20). What do we lack? To say that we need miracles is to insist upon confirmation of something which is no longer happening. Certainly, the teachings of uninspired men do not need confirmation. There is no new message requiring endorsement. To insist that such is needed today is to impugn the integrity of the Scriptures and the design of God from the beginning of the world.

Furthermore, those things being claimed as miracles today do not at all follow the Biblical pattern. Who has

raised the dead? When did a man lame from birth begin to walk and leap? What blind man can now see? Who goes into a city, town, or village and heals every sickness there without a single failure? Jesus did it. The apostles did it. Today, no one does it.

“But the apostles did fail on one occasion,” someone objects. Yes, they did. What was the reason? As Jesus, Peter, James, and John descended from the Mount of Transfiguration, a man approached Jesus, saying that His disciples had failed to cast out an evil spirit. The Lord commanded the evil spirit to come out of him, and he was healed. When His followers asked the reason for their failure, Jesus told them because of **their** unbelief (Matt. 17:14-21). Apparently, there were times in which their faith wavered. Even Peter, after he walked upon the water, became distracted and began to sink. Jesus saved him but asked, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matt. 14:31). The disciples thought they were in danger of losing their lives during the storm on the sea, and Jesus noted their little faith on that occasion, also (Matt. 8:24-26). He also connected “little faith” to their inability to grasp a spiritual point (Matt. 16:8). After His resurrection, however, the apostles had abundant faith and zero failures in working miracles. This incident serves as quite a contrast to those today who blame the lack of faith on the sick individual who made the mistake of seeking their help.

Conclusion

If the Bible would be studied for what it taught, so many people would not be deluded. No one today is doing the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). No one is performing “mighty signs and wonders, by the Spirit and power of God” in connection with preaching the Gospel (Rom. 15:19). Few, in fact, are preaching the **Gospel** at all; most are

preaching the man-originated doctrine of “faith only.” In this age of information, it is ironic to find that most people are Biblically illiterate.

The worst part is that most people in this postmodern world think that widespread ignorance is acceptable to God. They gleefully dance to the piper’s popular tune: “You Can Believe Whatever You Want And It’s All Right.” How unlike the Bereans have become even those who appear to be spiritually minded (Acts 17:11). Rather than searching the Scriptures, people are searching their own minds to see what they like.

God used miracles so that people would know who and what to believe. Pharaoh refused to pay attention to the prophecies of Moses though his kingdom was steadily being destroyed, Jezebel refused to grasp the obvious significance of the loss of her 450 prophets, the Pharisees quibbled that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and the leaders of the Jews threatened the apostles although they could not deny that a notable miracle had been done (Acts 4:16). Today, many invent miracles that are clearly bogus to rational people, and they refuse to listen to the Word which has been confirmed by real miracles. What Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 has never been more applicable: those who really want to go to heaven must have a love of the Truth. All should open their minds to what the Bible teaches, whether it relates to miracles, the Holy Spirit, salvation, acceptable worship, or any doctrine that God has seen fit to reveal to us. There, and only there, resides the truth which God both revealed and confirmed so that all who will may have life.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise specified.

2 C. S. Lewis, **Miracles** (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 10.

3 Guy N. Woods, "No Miracles Are Being Performed Today," **The Spiritual Sword** (April 1974), p. 13.

4 Ibid.

5 James D. Bales lists 47 categories of miracles in his book **Miracles or Mirages** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1956), pp. 8-10. Some of these numbers contain several miracles. The list, however, is not exhaustive.

6 Jesus also claimed to be the light of the world (John 8:12); the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); the judge of all mankind (John 5:22, 27); the giver of abundant life (John 10:10); and the giver of eternal life (John 10:27-28). He claimed to **always** please the Father (John 8:29), and that He and the Father were one (John 10:30). A person would be insane to believe all these things **without** evidence.

7 This point is made in David B. Jones, **Pentecostalism**, ed. David P. Brown (Spring, TX: Contending for the Faith, 1999), p. 279.

8 There was one exception, which will be addressed in a later section.

CHAPTER 32

**The Contrast Between The
Miracles Of Jesus And
Modern Day “Miracles”**

Keith Mosher, Sr.

Preface

SINCE IT IS QUITE well known that I completely forgot about last year’s dates for the **POWER** Lectureship and did not arrive for my scheduled time to speak (having a meeting in El Paso, Arkansas on that Sunday!), certainly I am more than grateful to be allowed to re-enter the Southaven building, let alone to be invited to speak again on the series.

It should be more than obvious that elders Pierce, Simpson, Everson, and Lambert are very forgiving of the weaknesses of others. I am so grateful, too, to B. J. Clarke, who read for the audience my manuscript last year and, evidently, forgave me for being so careless. It is certain that I must be in my dotage.

I also am grateful for the theme of this year’s series. Superstition, error, and even outright lying are seen in those who think “miracles” are occurring today. “Charismatic” movements inundate nearly every religious group including some churches (?) of Christ. I pray that reason will prevail and that the lectureship’s voice will be heard.

Introduction

A newspaper account read: "Mother Cleared In Child's Death In Faith Healing."¹ The article, found in a Mississippi newspaper, went on to report that the mother had "refused medical treatment for her young daughter ...because Jesus healed her body, not medical treatment."² Also charged in the death of the eleven-year-old daughter was the "pastor" of the "Living Witness of Apostolic Faith, Inc.," of Chicago. He was also cleared.

Many of the world's honest and sincere have been (and are being) deceived by a group of professional religious racketeers who claim that they, by God's power, are able to perform miracles. Literally, millions of dollars have been bilked from honest people who sought a true cure from their diseases, but the false healers sought only more publicity for themselves. Certainly sickness, infirmity, and psychological ailment are not to be wished on anyone and surely one would desire a cure for all. But, such miracles do **not** occur today (1 Cor. 13:8ff), and this study of the miraculous contrast between so-called modern miracles and Jesus' actual supernatural feats should add a vital chapter to this year's lecture series and should show the honest seeker that the Lord put a time limit on the miraculous age (Zech. 13:2).

However, people are not always honest. Note the following report:

After worshipping with the Coleman Avenue congregation Sunday evening, my wife and I attended a special service at the First Assembly of God Church. The service was conducted by Kathryn Kuhlman, a widely known evangelist and "healer." Miss Kuhlman had been invited to Memphis by the First Assembly for a special day of services.

My purpose for attending the service was educational. I had never had opportunity to attend a gathering where the power of the Holy

Spirit was to be manifested in the healing of diseases. If such were possible, I wanted to witness it.

After delivering a very entertaining and emotionally charged sermon, Miss Kuhlman asked all to bow their heads and then called upon Christ and the Holy Spirit to fill the assembly and heal those who were in need of such. She called those who had been suffering from emphysema and arthritis to come forward and show how they had been healed. Invariably they came, breathing deeply as evidence that their emphysema had subsided and touching toes to show that an arthritic spine had suddenly been cured. Many others came forward to tell of conditions they felt had been remedied.

When people came to Miss Kuhlman, she would place her hands on their faces and they would fall backward onto the floor. This falling Miss Kuhlman attributed to the power of Christ filling their bodies. These actions usually produced laughter from the capacity crowd of 3,500 people, a laughter Miss Kuhlman called “holy laughter.”

But the hilarity soon ceased for me. A young man in his late teens, crippled to the extent that he walked with crutches, made his way to the front to be healed. Seeing the young man, Miss Kuhlman touched him; he fell; then he tried to walk. And how hard he tried! My heart broke with his every vain effort. And when he collapsed in his seat after being helped from the crowded platform, I knew I was not witnessing the healing power of God. He sat there, exhausted from his obviously sincere attempt to “touch the garment” of Jesus.³

As the above writer, more hearts should “ache” for those deceived by the scurrilous “healers” who prey on the ignorant. Jesus would **never** fail at any miracle He performed and this latter fact is **the** difference between His true miracles and the sham performances today.

This study will include a look, Biblically, at Jesus’ miracles; a look, historically, at “miracles” since New

Testament times; and a look, theologically, at the contrasts between the two.

Jesus’ Miracles, Biblically

Warfield penned:

When our Lord came down to earth He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven which is His home. The number of the miracles which He wrought may easily be underrated. It is said that in effect He banished disease and death from Palestine during His ministry. If this is exaggeration, it is pardonable exaggeration. Wherever He went He brought a blessing.⁴

The inspired Luke seems to confirm Warfield’s assessment of Jesus’ miracles for the physician wrote:

That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him (Acts 10:37-38).⁵

First of all, it must be understood that if the historical Jesus did no miracles then He is not the Christ (John 5:36). Elimination of the miracles from the Gospel accounts eliminates any need to believe that a Palestinian peasant is Deity in the flesh (John 10:30-31). Christ is the heart of the faith and the only One Who can offer eternal life to man (John 6:63; 10:10; 14:6). If Jesus could not perform miracles, He is, then, not approved by God as the Savior of man (Acts 2:22).

A miracle may be defined as an event occurring in the natural world which is observable by human senses but is an occurrence produced by divine power without

any adequate human or natural cause.⁶ A miracle supercedes nature and may be even be contrary to the natural (e.g., the sun “stood still,” Joshua 10:12). It is an indubitable fact that Jesus of Nazareth is reputed to have had super-human abilities and that that power, demonstrated in just three and one-half years, has given Him prominence throughout history. His miracles, then, are **not** isolated facts but must be viewed as needful acts designed to prove His Deity (John 3:2). Jesus’ miracles can be classified as power over nature, power to heal, power to exorcise demons, power to feed, and power to raise the dead.

At a wedding feast Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). On another occasion when Jesus saw His disciples stressed while rowing on a stormy lake called Galilee, Jesus walked across the water to them, defying gravity (John 6:19). One early morning He cursed a fig tree and it withered (Matt. 21:18-20). On one special occasion Jesus, by supernatural knowledge and control, informed Peter that, in the mouth of the very first fish Peter would catch, there would be tribute money for the temple (Matt. 17:27). Jesus controlled inertia (John 6:21), weather (Matt. 8:23-27), and even fishing results (Luke 5:1-11).

The ability to heal, Jesus said, was proof that He also could forgive sins (Luke 5:18-26). So, Jesus “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matt. 4:23). Jesus healed a paralytic (Matt. 9:2), a centurion’s servant from a distance (Matt. 8:13), a mother-in-law sick with fever (Matt. 8:15), a nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54), a leper (Matt. 8:1-4), a man born blind (John 9:1ff), a woman with an issue of blood (Matt. 9:22), and the deaf and the lame (Matt. 11:5). He also restored speech to the

dumb (Matt. 12:22) and eyes to a man who never had any (Mark 8:22-26).

Jesus, in the third place, never met a demon He could not control even when the demon fled to a synagogue (Mark 1:23-28). On one occasion Jesus drove the demons from **two** individuals and ordered the evil spirits into a herd of swine (Matt. 8:28-34). Of course the demons immediately destroyed the pigs (Matt. 8:32).⁷ The demons, who evidently had escaped torment for a season, always knew (and confessed that they knew) that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. Matt. 8:29).

Perhaps Jesus' ability to multiply food for large crowds could be considered power of nature, but His feeding of five thousand men, plus women and children, with just five loaves and two fishes was so extraordinary that the miracle is recorded in all four Gospel accounts (Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). The number of witnesses to this singular event is impressive, and the miracle is not one that can be disproved. Jesus also fed at least four thousand men, plus women and children, and on that occasion He multiplied seven loaves and several fishes (Matt. 15:32-39).

The final “category” of the miracles performed by Christ is raising of the dead. The son of a widow from Nain was raised right from his funeral bier (Luke 7:11-16). A temple ruler begged for the life of his daughter, which life was returned by Christ (Matt. 9:18-19, 23-26). According to Luke, the ruler's name was Jairus, and the daughter had died at age twelve while Jesus tarried to heal another (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56). The most famous case of resurrection concerns Lazarus, a friend of the Christ's (John 11). On that occasion Jesus even waited until Lazarus died from some sickness before He went to the tomb to raise the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11:6, 11). But, Jesus' own resurrection and His

power to accomplish such a feat remain as the greatest of all miracles (John 10:17-18).

The establishing of Jesus as the world's Savior and Christianity as a coherent system demands historical certitude about the factuality of Jesus' miracles. Some (such as David Hume) have argued that there is not "observable testimony" from nature that a miracle could occur.⁸ But, the question to such a naturalist as Hume is, "whose testimony?" If God established natural law (and He did, Genesis 1:1), then God could (and did) override His own natural creation. Regarding this latter fact, Jesus claimed the power to work miracles (John 5:36-38; John 14:11). One cannot have faith in Christ and reject His own testimony that He worked miracles. Note the following probability factors concerning Christ's miracles:

1. Many (most) of Jesus' miracles were performed before the public. Jesus healed in the cities, at busy markets, in synagogues, and at the temple.

2. Jesus performed His miracles over an extended period of time and He performed a **large** variety of miracles. (Imposters always have a limited repertoire and sporadic "results.") Jesus began His ministry with a miracle and concluded His work with one (John 2:11; Acts 1:10-11).

3. Some of Jesus' miracles were performed before **unbelievers** (e.g., Matt. 12:24). The presence of opposition or criticism never influenced Jesus' ability to perform a miracle.

4. The cured gave testimony to the **fact** of their healing. And sometimes unbelieving family members and critical religious leaders had no course but to believe that the person was healed (e.g., John 9).

5. Biblical miracles are part of the means by which the true Christian religion was established. (Pagan religionists believed "miracles" because they **already**

“believed” their religion.) The foregoing distinction is of **utmost** importance, for Christianity is authenticated by the “earnest” or miraculous age (Eph. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:3-4).

Therefore, the only historically true Christ is the One who walked on the sea, raised the dead, healed the diseased, chased away the demons, defeated the tomb, and ascended into heaven. Only Jesus is the “pillar and ground of the truth” for He is the “mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

“Modern” Miracles, Historically

Miracles were intended to confirm revelation. As Kuyper expressed it:

it has not been God’s way to communicate to each and every man a separate and divine store of divine knowledge of his own, to meet his separate needs; but He rather has spread a common board for all, and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He has given to the world one organically complete revelation, adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all, and from the one completed revelation He requires each to draw his whole spiritual sustenance. Therefore, it is, that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God’s revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed.⁹

Calvin further remarked that “It is unreasonable to ask miracles, or to find them, where there is no new gospel.”¹⁰ According to Scripture, special, miraculous revelation ceased when the Bible was completed (1 Cor. 13:8-10). In the first century the Scriptures were being produced, but now they must be applied. If one looks for true miracles, then, beyond the apostolic age, one will find none. Protestant theory, generally, is that miracles continued for

the first three centuries after Christ, but Roman officials argue for miracles in “every age.”¹¹ However, Protestant “reasoning” for miracles in the second and third centuries could apply to all centuries. Either miracles ceased or they did not. The Bible notes that without apostolic power no one could do a miracle (Acts 8:12-18; Acts 19:1-6; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Tim. 1:5-6; Rom. 1:11; et al.). The apostles are **not** living today. Miracles have ceased.¹²

In “patristic” times (centuries two through four) men affirmed miracles (unattested), but taught false doctrine at the same time. Few writers of the period claimed to be eyewitnesses of a miracle and after the third century miracles were always written of as occurring “somewhere.”¹³ Augustine is a good example of that era, for he wrote of miracles “wrought by the relics of Stephen.”¹⁴ But a little later, Augustine decided miracles just did not occur, at least as well attested ones as Jesus did.¹⁵

Roman Catholic “miracles” are invented, especially one--stigmatization. The first stigmatic (supposed bleeding from the sights on one’s body equivalent to the places on His body where Christ was wounded) was Francis of Assisi.¹⁶ Francis did **not** bleed, however, and the “marks” were blackish in color.¹⁷ Catholics even claim that “nails as hard as iron” grew out of Francis’ hands.¹⁸ A “saint” Catherine of Siena (1370) was the next notorious stigmatic, but hers was only “inwardly.”¹⁹ 321 persons have claimed the stigmatic, but only sixty-two have been granted “sainthood” by Catholicism.²⁰ Note that the “stigmata” is a supposed sign that the person is one of God’s favorites, yet the Bible response is that God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). The following, historical point bears emphasis here:

Pretensions by any class of men to the possession and use of the miraculous power as a permanent endorsement are, within the limits of the

Christian (usage of “Christian” here is non-Biblical, KM) Church, a specialty of Roman Catholicism. Denial of these pretensions is part of the protest by which we bear the name Protestants. The history of Protestantism is a uniform disclaimer of any promise of the Scriptures that miraculous powers should be continued in the church.²¹

Yet, John Wesley, Edward Irving, and others who claimed to be Protestants tended to spiritual (miraculous) enthusiasm with a capital “E.” Everyone of these charismatic leaders taught doctrines contrary to Scripture and everyone of the latter has been critically judged by history as a false prophet. In fact Irving’s followers all confessed to having lied about their gifts!²²

Modern faith-healers and so-called miracle workers are legion today. It is impossible to know why men would claim miraculous ability today, but the following reports (although somewhat dated) might give someone an insight into the fact that “working miracles” today is big business:

The Houston Chronicle, Monday, March 1, 1982, reported Oral Robert’s announcement of a \$120,000,000.00 fund-raising drive “because of financial troubles facing Oral Robert’s ministries.” It seems that Oral’s “City of Faith Hospital” has had a decline in contributions, but “is not broke but at the rate we’re going it might not be that far away.”²³

Time magazine reported in their religious section, February 4, 1980 (page 65) on the receipts of the “T.V. Tube Evangelists” for the year 1979. Hold onto your hats; yes, it is in the millions: Jim Bakker, \$51,000,000.00; Pat Robertson, \$47,000,000.00; and Robert Schuller, \$16,000,000.00.²⁴

Oral Roberts built a hospital. Christian Science Founder Mary Baker Eddy went to a dentist (!) although she taught

that sickness was not real. Francis of Assisi and **all** charismatics have espoused doctrines contrary to Scripture. Protestants claim that miracles ceased, but their own members seek them. (Such Protestants are just like pagans who only “kept” their gods because those pagans wanted some divine miracle or favor.)²⁵ What is there about the modern miracle that is so different from a miracle worked by Jesus?

Jesus’ Miracles And Modern “Miracles”: The Theological Contrasts

A friend, and brother in Christ, wrote:

Being disabled with cerebral palsy, I have come in contact with many people who believe in miraculous healings, or “**miracles**” today. Some of these people I have just made casual contact with, but others have become very good and dear friends of mine. If anyone has a desire to be healed, **I do**.²⁶

When the brother above finished writing a leaflet on “Miracles Today,” which tract begins with the quoted paragraph above, he penned:

As I stated before, if anyone has the desire to be healed, it would be me. But by studying this subject in depth, I know we no longer have “**miracles**” today. The real issue is, is the Bible the final authority?...May I encourage you to take God at His Word about this matter.²⁷

Why is not this faithful, good Christian brother healed by some modern miracle worker? Simply because such people are fakes. Note the following contrasts between Jesus and modernists.

1. Jesus’ miracles were in public and performed on folks who were in the midst of huge and, for the most part, unbelieving crowds. Modernists will not “perform” before such audiences.

2. Jesus performed a variety of miracles. Modern miracle workers "heal" **hidden** diseases, which healings are **never** verified medically. Jesus' miracles were even verified before the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin (John 9:30-31).

3. Modern miracle workers "charge" for their services. Jesus never asked for a donation for any miracle.

4. No deaf hear today. None born blind see today. Cerebral palsy victims (sadly) remain such today. And no modern "miracle" workers would tackle such diseases probably for two reasons. Such a fake could not heal the deaf, palsied, and blind, and such a trickster would not dare "knock down" the palsied, blind, and deaf as is the silly practice today among such folks. Jesus healed all such diseases without ever causing one person to fall backward.

5. Not one dead person has ever been raised since apostolic times. Jesus could, and did, raise the dead (John 11). (One Gospel preacher did attend a meeting where a woman was supposed to be raised. When the Gospel preacher viewed her in the casket, he took a pin and stuck her thigh. She immediately came out of the coffin!)

6. Jesus' miracles were signs to confirm a message and a messenger (Acts 2:22). Modern "miracle" workers confirm no new revelation and contradict God's perfect revelation (1 Cor. 13:8-10). As a side note here, Paul wrote that he left Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Why did not Paul heal Trophimus? Because no new revelation was being given when Trophimus was sick.

7. Jesus healed unbelievers, the dead, and the demon-possessed, all of whom had **no** faith. Modern "miracle" workers will aver that someone received no healing because that one did not have enough faith.

8. Jesus could control nature. No "miracle" worker today has ever claimed such. Who will walk on water or stop a tornado?

9. Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. But where is the “bread-making” church today which will feed the world’s hungry? And where is the fisherman who knows where the fish are the way Jesus did?

10. And where is the person today who can step in a boat and **immediately** that boat will be at the opposite shore (John 6:21)?

Modernists build hospitals and go to dentists. Jesus did neither.

Conclusion

Charismatics today teach that the same power of God available to heal the soul is available to heal the body. Their theology is taken from Isaiah 53:4 where the record is, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” and their conclusion is that soul **and** body can be healed because both are offered at the Cross. However, Matthew, by inspiration, wrote that Jesus’ physical healing **during** His earthly ministry fulfilled the Isaiah prophecy (Matt. 8:16-17). The miracles Jesus performed confirmed that Deity had come in the flesh. He came “in the flesh” in order to die for mankind (Heb. 2:9; Heb. 10:5). No more such offerings of Deity are needed (Heb. 10:10). Therefore, no more miracles, such as truly were done by Christ, are needed.

Modern “miracle” workers need to be challenged. They are legion and are undermining the very basis of true Christianity. If miracles are just done “willy-nilly” (as modernists say such occur) and have **no** relation to the foundation of Christianity, then what of John 20:30-31?

Endnotes

1 UPI (Natchez, MS: April 19, 1980).

2 Ibid.

3 Tommy Alexander, "On Hearing Kathryn Kuhlman," **The Getwell Reminder** (Memphis: Getwell church of Christ).

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5 **The Holy Bible**, King James Version (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers). All Scripture references are to this version unless otherwise specified.

6 From Clarence E. McCartney, **Twelve Great Questions About Christ** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), p. 87.

7 A distinction is **always** made in Scripture between psychologically damaged people, epileptics, and the demon possessed. See Matthew 4:24, especially.

8 David Hume, **Philosophical Naturalism** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), p. 22.

9 Abraham Kuyper, "Miracles," **Encyclopedia of Sacred Knowledge**, ed. John Allen (New York: Schaff-Herzog, 1898), p. 368.

10 John Calvin, **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, Volume 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1909), p. 26.

11 Warfield, p. 35.

12 Modern charismatic movements insist that tongue-speaking and healing "revived" around 1900. See Frederick Bruner, **Theology of the Holy Spirit** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).

13 Warfield, p. 40.

14 Ibid, pp. 38-39.

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16 Ibid, p. 262.

17 Ibid.

18 Joseph von Guores, "The Christian Mystique," **Encyclopedia of Christian Knowledge**, Volume 2, ed. John Allen (New York: Schaff-Herzog, 1898), p. 422.

19 Warfield, p. 84.

20 Ibid, p. 85.

21 Ibid, p. 127.

22 Ibid, pp. 146-148.

23 Bulletin, South Currey Street Church of Christ, ed. Gary Colley, Volume 14, No. 14 (West Plains, MO: April 11, 1982), p. 1.

24 Ibid. Two of the evangelists mentioned, Bakker and Swaggert, were proven to be immoral.

25 Warfield, p. 230.

26 Cleon Green, "Miracles Today?" (A tract published by the author out of Nashville, Arkansas, Route 1, Box 307). Brother Green sells them for \$4.00 per hundred.

27 Ibid.

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CHAPTER 33

Mary, The Virgin Mother Of Jesus

Tish Clarke

Commendation

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the elders of this wonderful congregation for all that they mean to me, my family, and the entire local church family at Southaven. My husband and I feel that we have truly been blessed to raise our children in the atmosphere of the Southaven church of Christ.

I would also like to express my appreciation for my sweet husband, who has literally lived and breathed this lectureship for several months. It is exciting to watch it come to fruition, and I believe this book will serve the church for many years to come, long after we are gone.

Introduction

When we hear the name Mary, mother of Christ, many wonderful images are brought forth in our minds. Her name means “Exalted” and is a derivative of the Old Testament name Miriam. One sees a righteous, humble daughter of God who obediently conforms to His will throughout the many events of her life depicted in the Bible. We see a picture of youthful innocence with the faith of a woman many years beyond her age. What a joy it must have been for God to look down through the corridor of

time and see the woman He would choose to be the mother for His Son on Earth. At the same time, we see a woman who is very much a human, one who can and does sin; a woman who makes mistakes, a woman who is not perfect; and yet, a woman who has so much to teach us through the life that she led.

It is my desire (through this character study) to see Mary as the woman that she truly was in contrast with the woman the world has taught her to have been. Throughout history she has been drastically misunderstood and gradually over time has come to even be worshiped. Her humble character would weep at the numerous false doctrines that have been propagated by mankind to put forth their false religions. There are many wonderful lessons to be learned from this sweet life.

Precious Attributes

Our first glimpse of Mary reveals a young tender virgin who is espoused to a carpenter of Nazareth, Joseph. Through the genealogies of Matthew and Luke we learn that they both descended from David through two different branches in the family. This was important to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10. The lowly station that he held would indicate that Mary's family also came from humble beginnings. In the Jewish tradition an espousal was a legal binding contract that took place before the wedding. According to Genesis 24:53 and Exodus 22:16-17 the groom was to pay a dowry to her family.¹ An espoused woman was as bound to her fiancé as a married woman to her husband:

The Jewish law held espousal or engagement to be as binding as marriage. An engagement was completed after negotiations had been carried on by the groom's representative and the dowry money had been paid to the girl's father. After

the betrothal, the groom could claim the bride at any time. The legal aspect of marriage was included in the betrothal; the wedding was merely a recognition of the agreement that had already been established.²

What a beautiful time in a woman's life! Mary must have experienced the joy and anticipation of dreaming of the life she would have with her intended in the future. What woman doesn't dream of creating a home for the man that she loves and, when the time is right, bringing forth children to nurture together? In Jewish culture this period of engagement usually lasted a year. In Luke we find the angel Gabriel being sent from God to Mary. Mary had no idea how her life was about to change.

It is in this very first Biblical account of Mary that we first learn of her godly qualities. Luke 1:26-38 records the meeting that took place between Mary and Gabriel. It is interesting to note her response to Gabriel's greeting, for it is here that we see her **humble** character:

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God (Luke 1:28-30).

To the unpretentious Mary, this greeting was an honor she did not deserve. In **Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary** the word for troubled is *diatarasso*, meaning alarmed or greatly disturbed.³ She was a woman that did not know her true value and as such was even more precious:

Had she been a proud ambitious young woman, that aimed high, and flattered herself with the expectation of great things in the world, she would have been pleased at his saying, would have been puffed up with it, and (as we have

reason to think she was a young woman of very good sense) would have had an answer ready, signifying so much: but, instead of that, she is confounded at it, as not conscious to herself of any thing that either merited or promised such great things; and she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.⁴

While she is contemplating Gabriel's greeting he is quick to respond, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God" (Luke 1:30). She has been chosen in preference to all the other women upon earth to be the mother of the Messiah. Let us continue to look at the qualities the Father saw in Mary to single her out among all the women past and present to bear His only begotten Son.

At the next juncture in Scripture she learns the plan that God would have for her. She is to be the virgin that has been prophesied of old. Her simple response is a question asking how it could be so--not a laugh of disbelief as Sarah's had been or a question based in disbelief as Zacharias' had been. Here we see her tremendous **faith**. She has complete faith that it **will** be so; she is wondering **how** it is to be so. To be found with child could elicit any of the following responses in her life: a tremendous blow to her espoused, a shame to bear for her family, and possible death. An espoused woman who was found to be with child before the wedding ceremony took place was considered an adulterer. As an adulterer, she would be subject to the law of God in Deuteronomy 22:20-21:

But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.

She did not dwell on what could befall her; she had trust in God that His plan would be executed as He intended it

to be. Her faith leads her to act in her next godly attribute: **obedience.**

After being informed that her cousin Elisabeth, in her old age, was to bear a son, Mary responded with “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38):

This was an expression of resignation to the will of God, and of faith in the promise. To be the “handmaid of the Lord” is to be submissive and obedient, and is the same as saying, “I fully credit all that is said, and am perfectly ready to obey all the commands of the Lord.”⁵

She was a remarkable woman. She understood that she was going to bear the Son of God and that it would create great upheaval in her life. Yet, she obediently steps forward to the challenge set before her. How many of us have ever been given a seemingly impossible task and have responded in a manner not suitable for a child of God? We do not see Mary asking God to change His mind or to let her conceive in a more conventional manner. Nor do we see Mary asking why this was to happen to her, why should she bear the humiliation of being found with child and having to face condemning accusations of her supposed “sin.” On the contrary, we see a humble, meek disposition which readily responds with complete obedience to God’s will. She does not even ask for it to be made easier for her. She is in complete acceptance to the will of God. What possible joys have we never witnessed because our faith was not up to the task? Had Mary not possessed the depth of faith and obedience, she would not have been chosen to nurture and cherish the Son of God! What a tremendous blessing--to be given the opportunity to be a part of the life that would bring redemption to the entire world!

Mary has just been given the most amazing news in the world. The most unbelievable event was going to

transpire in her life and it was being set in motion at rapid speed. Her next response was truly one of **wisdom**. She made haste to go to Elisabeth. The text tells us that Elisabeth and Zacharias were both righteous. They walked in all the commandments of the Lord and were found blameless (Luke 1:6). Her journey from Nazareth to the region of Judea would be an arduous one. It is commonly thought that the city she hurriedly set out for was probably Hebron. It was the city of the priests and was approximately seventy miles from Nazareth.⁶ This was no small task for a woman in a delicate condition. Again, from **Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary**, the word haste comes from the Greek word *spoude*, meaning "to dispatch with eagerness and speed, an earnestness."⁷ It was imperative for her to get to Elisabeth. They both had been chosen by God to carry a special baby into existence: Elisabeth the forerunner to Christ and Mary the Son of God. Mary immediately understood the significance of her elderly cousin bearing a child and desired to be present with her to share in her joy and her concerns. When you are facing a tremendous concern in your life, follow Mary's example and go to those who are found to be righteous in God's eyes. Make haste to be found numbered with those on the Lord's side.

We also learn from Mary of her **selfless** nature in this journey. Due to her desire to share the joy of the miraculous pregnancies with her cousin, she chooses to make the journey. As she is carrying the Son of God, she could have reasoned that she was more valuable and as such requested Elisabeth to make the journey. Yet we do not see her assume a haughty attitude. She makes preparation and quickly leaves for her cousin's home. We are not told of her being concerned with the length of the journey or the hardship that it may cause; she simply goes. We need to learn to be selfless in our nature no matter

what may be going on in our lives. We are blessed when we stand with other Christian women and share in the daily joys and pains of our lives.

Upon Mary's arrival in the home of her cousin she is greeted by a joyful Elisabeth. Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and the babe leaps in her womb. She states:

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord (Luke 1:42-45).

Mary knew that Elisabeth was with child, but it does not appear that Elisabeth had been told any thing of her cousin Mary's being designed for the mother of the Messiah; and therefore what knowledge she appears to have had of it must have come by a revelation, which would be a great encouragement to Mary... She said, Blessed art thou among women, the same word that the angels had said (Luke 1:28); for thus this will of God, concerning honouring the Son, should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. But Elisabeth adds a reason, Therefore blessed art thou because blessed is the fruit of thy womb; thence it was that she derived this excelling dignity.⁸

Since Elisabeth was about six months along in her pregnancy she had been feeling her baby move around for some time. However, this passage would indicate that this was an unusual movement on the part of the baby this time. Elisabeth is Spirit filled and makes the proclamation that Mary is carrying the Redeemer of the world. It appears that Luke 1:15 began to be fulfilled. Gabriel had informed Zacharias that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Through the actions of her

son and the actions of the Holy Spirit, Elisabeth is used as a vessel to offer encouragement and words of blessing to Mary. This must have been a tremendous source of joy to Mary. Both women were facing highly unusual circumstances and each reacted in a fully trusting and completely obedient manner to the Lord. It is at this time that one should examine the friends that she maintains in her life. Are they of the nature to bring you down through your hard times or do they exalt you to achieve all the Lord would have for you to do through this trial?

Praiseworthy Psalm

Mary's song of praise, Luke 1:46-55, has often been compared to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and rightfully so. They are both very similar in sentiment and phraseology. Both songs come from hearts that are overflowing with joy and praise at the state that they have found themselves in. Both women were miraculously blessed with their firstborn sons. Both sons were raised to serve God for very specific purposes. Samuel was to be the prophet to appoint the first king to the Israelite nation, and Jesus was to be the King of kings to save all nations. Christ came from the line of David and Scripture was fulfilled. In contrast to David as king, Christ was sinless and through His death and resurrection became the Savior of all mankind. All one has to do is believe and act in accordance to obedience with His will and he will be added to His church after baptism.

Hannah and Mary were both exalted women and would be counted blessed above all women. Mary was the most blessed, as she was to be favored over all other women. Hannah desired a child above all else; she prayed fervently for the gift of a child. Mary, upon finding out that she was to carry the Son of God, shows us a life of righteousness and prayer. How alike these two women were, both with

their lives blessed so richly from the Father above and both by their obedience to His will and promises made. Hannah promised that she would nurture her son and raise him to serve God in the Temple. Mary, by being chosen to be the mother of Jesus, was given the responsibility to nurture Him in good health and raise Him spiritually to fulfill the will of God. Finally, both women knew from the onset of their pregnancies that there was to be loss. Hannah was to give her son to Eli to serve in the temple from an early age. Mary would be raising Jesus to serve God and be about His Father's business. She was forewarned by Simeon of a tragedy that would center around her Son...a tragedy so severe that it would be like a sword piercing her own soul. Read the heartrending statement of Simeon to Mary as he blesses her and her child: "And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Luke 2:34-35.

At the time of their songs, did these women fully understand the impact of the life that they would lead? I think not. Hannah did not yet know the pain of leaving her son year after year in the temple when she brought him his new coat. As a mother I can only imagine the anguish Mary must have felt if she heard the angry mob yell "Crucify him, Crucify him." Luke 23:21. Mary did not know of the intense grief and soul rending pain she would experience upon seeing her son on the cruel cross of Calvary. Through their songs we see what righteous women these two beautiful daughters of God were:

Instead of worry, joy filled Mary's heart. And her praise song, known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), was filled with praise for God and with a vivid awareness of His greatness and love. What was Mary's vision of God?

[He] has done great things (Luke 1:49).
Holy is His name (Luke 1:49).
His mercy extends to those who fear Him (Luke 1:50).
He has performed mighty deeds (Luke 1:51).
[He] has lifted up the humble (Luke 1:52).
He has filled the hungry (Luke 1:53).

Mary knew God as a God of power and a God of concern, the One who cares enough for the humble and the hungry to reach down and to meet human need. Perhaps this helps to explain Mary's response to the Lord. She had a clear vision of who God is. She knew Him as a God who cares...who cares enough to act. May we each know God so well!⁹

Mary praises God with her entire being in the song that she gives to Elisabeth. In her song she shines forth with years of examining the Scriptures. For her song to follow Hannah's song as closely as it does gives us an insight into her study habits. Apparently, she was very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and had studied them so well that she could see the resemblance of her life to the faithful and prayerful Hannah of old. In that knowledge she was able to bring from the depths of her being a most beautiful song of praise to the Father. Our lives will also be enriched if our study habits bring us closer to the recorded lives of these pillars of the Bible.

How much strength did Mary receive through her knowledge of the God of the Old Testament? Enough it would seem to carry her through one of the most difficult times any woman could face: the eminent pregnancy of an unwed mother with an incredulous story that she carried the Son of God. There are untold blessings awaiting us if we will follow Mary's example and make the Scriptures a living and breathing part of our being. When we are faced with the tremendous challenges of our lives, we can be encouraged by the knowledge that God is there for us just

as He was there for His people these past several thousand years of recorded history. We can learn a lesson on how to praise our God from Mary:

This song properly consists of three parts:

1. In the first part Mary praises God for what he had done for herself, Luke 1:46-50.
2. In the second, she praises him for what he had done, and would do, against the oppressors of his people, Luke 1:51-53.
3. In the third, she praises him for what he had done, and would do, for his church, Luke 1:53-56.¹⁰

Pattern to Follow

After staying with Elisabeth for about three months she returned to Nazareth. It was there she would face her fiancé, and the reality of her life would begin. Joseph was a remarkable man. Due to his deep love for Mary he was planning to put her away privately rather than humiliate her publicly. This must have been a very trying time for Joseph. He learns that his espoused is with child and she claims that it is the very Son of God. Thousands of years had passed since the prophecy and now that it was being fulfilled, Joseph did not believe Mary. Yet, his love prevented him from doing anything to harm her.

At this point an angel is again dispatched to carry a message from God. Joseph is informed of the very same thing that Mary was told and he immediately believed and roused himself from sleep and took Mary to be his wife. What an immense relief it must have been to Mary to be summoned to Joseph's side! Here was the love of her life standing by her, believing her incredulous tale, and taking her to dwell with him as her protectorate. What peace Mary must have felt at this moment in her life! We are not told very much of Joseph; one can infer that he was a godly man from the few facts that we are told. He

listened to God's messenger, believed the message, and fulfilled his part. He married Mary, he knew her not till after the baby was born, and then he named Him Jesus so that Scripture might be fulfilled. Once again, we see that Mary has surrounded herself with a virtuous believer in God. It is evident that she was a firm believer in Ecclesiastes 4:12: "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." With God, Mary and Joseph had a threefold cord.

Due to the decree of Caesar Augustus, Joseph and Mary were required to make a trip to Bethlehem in order to be taxed. Once again, Mary is on a journey, this time when she is almost due with her child. When they reach Bethlehem they find housing in the stable at an inn. Here the mother of the Son of God, true to her nature, humbly gives birth to the Christ. After months of waiting and pondering over the events that were to take place, she is still the lowly Mary. She is not one to be affected by her new role. She was not too good to give birth in a stable and place her child in the manger. Some time later the young couple would receive visitors in the form of the wise men and the shepherds. Once again outside sources affirmed that the child was the blessed King born to a virgin.

The child was not long in this world, when Joseph received a vision telling him they were not safe and to flee to Egypt. Immediately he arose and took Jesus and Mary into Egypt for safety. When Herod was dead they left again and returned to Nazareth where they settled down and raised their family: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). This verse implies that Mary and Joseph did their job of raising Jesus well.

The next time we see Jesus He is twelve years old and His parents have brought Him to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. After beginning the return trip home,

Mary and Joseph could not find Jesus. Concerned when they still could not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem and finally located Him after three days in the temple. One can imagine the stress and fear that they faced as Jesus was missing. How astonished they were to find Him teaching in the temple. When asked why He had put them through this pain, they did not understand Jesus' response: "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) While Mary did not understand, she kept these sayings in her heart (Luke 2:51):

It is remarkable that this is all that is recorded of the infancy of Jesus; and this, with the short account that follows of his going to Jerusalem, is all that we know of him for thirty years of his life. The design of the evangelists was to give an account of His "public ministry," and not His private life. Hence, they say little of Him in regard to His first years. What they **do** say, however, corresponds entirely with what we might expect. He was wise, pure, pleasing God, and deeply skilled in the knowledge of the divine law. He set a lovely example for all children; was subject to his parents, and increased in favor with God and man.¹¹

We are not told much about the early motherhood of Mary. However, from Luke 2:52 we know that she was concerned that Jesus grew in wisdom. As mothers, our chief responsibility is to teach our children the Word of God (Deut. 6:6-9). It is clear that Mary fulfilled her part of responsibility. As we witness Jesus' tender regard for His mother on the cross at the close of His life, we can infer that she was a loving mother. A mother Who is God fearing, loves her children and her husband, is all a child needs for a healthy and spiritual home. Jesus certainly had this home.

The next time that we see Mary is at a wedding feast, and Jesus is approximately thirty years old:

Mary came to Jesus with the tidings that the wine supply had been exhausted. In his reply, the use of Woman does not involve disrespect (cf. John 19:26)...Jesus wanted his mother to understand that the former relationship between the two of them (Luke 2:51) was at an end. She was not to interfere in his mission. Mary wisely did not dispute the matter. If she could not command him, she could instruct the servants to obey his directions. Thus she showed her confidence in him.¹²

Thus begins His earthly ministry. From there He, His mother, and His disciples went down to Capernaum, and many more miracles were wrought at the hand of Jesus. It is clear that she wants to stay near her son. This is seen in the account of her concern over His health in Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50; and Mark 3:31-35. Mary, ever the loving mother, is concerned that her son is neglecting Himself. She does not understand at this time that His time was precious and it was needful for Him to teach the people. He uses this concern from His physical family to teach the simple lesson that those who are of His spiritual family are they which hear the Word of God and do it.

The most painful moment for Mary, the loving mother, would come at the scenes leading up to the cross and the horrible death on the cross. For Mary, any fear and pain that she felt in her young life at being a virgin giving birth to a child, was unlike anything she would soon face. All Jerusalem was in an uproar crying for the death of her innocent son--not just any death, but the death of the cross. Initially all the disciples forsook Jesus and fled, Mark 14:50. Later John returns with Mary to the sight of the cross. It is her courage that we see at the foot of the cross. Her beloved son, the Savior of the world, hung dying upon the cruel rugged cross of Calvary and she stood steadfastly by as she listened to the taunts and ridicules of those misguided souls around her. Mary shows us the degree of

love that she possessed for Jesus when she stayed at the foot of the cross. How difficult it must have been for her to witness the torture and ravaged body of her son:

Now was fulfilled Simeon's word, A sword shall pierce through thy own soul, Luke 2:35. His torments were her tortures; she was upon the rack, while he was upon the cross; and her heart bled with his wounds; and the reproaches wherewith they reproached him fell on those that attended him.¹³

Her love kept her at the foot of the cross. Their lives had come full circle. She had not left Him when the danger was great when He was a baby and she would not leave Him in His greatest hour of need. Jesus shows us the degree of love and concern He had for this woman who had nurtured Him and given Him a godly home on earth when He gave her over to the care of John, the beloved apostle. Looking down in extreme pain He was concerned for the care of his mother. Thinking not of Himself (the same selfless spirit that she possessed) He looked to her needs:

Behold, my beloved disciple shall be to you a son, and provide for you, and discharge toward you the duties of an affectionate child. Mary was poor. It would even seem that now she had no home. Jesus, in his dying moments, filled with tender regard for his mother, secured for her an adopted son, obtained for her a home, and consoled her grief by the prospect of attention from him who was the most beloved of all the apostles. What an example of filial attention! What a model to all children! And how lovely appears the dying Saviour, thus remembering his afflicted mother, and making her welfare one of his last cares on the cross, and even when making atonement for the sins of the world!¹⁴

It is interesting to note that John was the longest-living apostle; he died from natural causes.¹⁵ The chapter closes

on Mary's extraordinary life with the simple verse in Acts 1:14: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." Mary is counted as one of the believers. She is found again amidst those who can keep her strong and lift her up. She is found in prayer and supplication to God. Many who have experienced pain and loss in their lives choose to blame God rather than allowing it to build their faith. Mary was not one such person. She was rather, a strong, faithful, God fearing woman, and we would do well to follow her example:

Meek (John 2:5), and humble, making her model the holy women of old (Luke 1:46), yielding herself in implicit faith up to the divine will though ignorant how it was to be accomplished (Luke 1:38), energetic (Luke 1:39), thankful (Luke 1:48), and piously reflective (Luke 2:19, 51), though not faultless, she was the most tender and lovable of women, yet a woman still.¹⁶

Perilous Doctrine

It is truly sad that this wonderful woman who was so selfless and had so completely centered her life on God's will has become the object of such tremendous false doctrine at the hands of those who wish to propagate their own "religion." Many false doctrines have been associated with this righteous character of the Bible. Mariolatry, or the act of worshiping Mary, has been around for many centuries. Truly she has become an idol to Catholicism:

History first mentions the teaching in the second century. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries it had become widespread. Over a period of time many feasts were instituted in honor of Mary: the feast of Nativity, the feast of the Annunciation, the feast of the Purification, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and others. The Bible speaks of none.¹⁷

There is not space in this manuscript to write in full detail of all the false doctrines concerning Mary. I wish to discuss the main areas of false teaching and equip the reader with a brief answer to these issues.

“Mother of God” was a term that first began to be used around the second century and began as a reference to the Divinity of Christ. However, it soon took on the idea of worshiping Mary as the mother of the **Divine** part of Christ as well as the **fleshly** part. For this to be true, Mary would have to have been in existence before Christ in order to give birth to Him. Yet, John 1:2 teaches that Christ was “In the beginning with God,” and John 1:14 goes on to state that He was made flesh. He was in existence before Mary.

The doctrine of the immaculate conception concerns the birth of Mary and states that, in order for Christ to have been born free of sin, it was necessary for Mary to have been born free of “original” sin. The Bible teaches that we are all born free of the sins of our fathers (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:4, 20). We suffer the consequences of sin, but we do not inherit the guilt of the sin. Carrying this doctrine to its logical extreme, if Mary were to be born free of sin in a miraculous way, it would be necessary for her mother to be born free, and so on, and so on.

In the seventh century, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary was in full swing. This was necessary to lift Mary into the realm of the supernatural. There are two theories propagated by the Roman Catholic church as to how Mary remained a virgin. First, Joseph was married before, and “the brethren of the Lord” were from this union with his first wife. Second, they were the cousins of Christ, born to Mary’s sister.¹⁸ It was certainly not following God’s plan for her to have been a wife to Joseph in name only. Does this not violate the principle found in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5?

By the middle ages Mary was considered a mediatrix between God and man. How can she hear and answer

prayers unless she is Divine? She would need to possess omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence to hear and answer prayers between man and Christ. It was at this point in history in which saying the rosary came into practice.

This doctrine in part came about from a false concept of the relationship between Christ and man:

The image of Christ as sternly wrathful became prominent in Catholic thought, a notion which seemed to be re-enforced by the advent of the Black Plague in Europe in the 14th century that slaughtered a large portion of the populace. The idea arose to appeal to Mary, who was viewed as possessing a softer and kinder nature, to intercede with the angry Son of God for mercy and protection.¹⁹

1 Timothy 2:5 and Hebrews 4:14-16 both teach that this doctrine is wholly and utterly false. Christ is the mediator between man and God. This doctrine leads to the false notion that salvation can be found through Mary. What more loving nature has been seen on this earth than that of the Christ hanging on the cross? To teach that Mary had to become the mediator between God and man because Christ was too angry and vengeful and would not intercede on mankind's behalf is utterly blasphemous. No greater love can be seen than that of Jesus as He utters from the tortuous cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The following is a truly sad example of this false teaching:

A typical prayer is seen in Pope Leo XIII's *Adiutricem Populi*. He prayed, "O Virgin most holy, none abounds in the knowledge of God except through thee; none, O Mother of God, obtains salvation except through thee, none, receives a gift from the throne of mercy except through thee." Thus, Catholic doctrine holds that no one can be saved without appealing to Mary as the conduit of salvation!²⁰

Mary would be appalled at these false teachings and the many others that surround her. Not one of these doctrines is remotely founded in Scripture. Quite the opposite is true. Mary never exalted herself to the idolatrous position that Mariolatry holds. When Christ was given the opportunity to exalt her in Luke 11:27-28 to a position of higher value, He rebukes the notion, and teaches instead: "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." As in all things Christ is our final answer. Indeed Mary was special; she was chosen by God for a very unique position, the mother of the Son of God.

Endnotes

1 Keil and Delitzsch, **Commentary on the Old Testament**, New Updated Edition, Electronic Database (Hendrickson, 1996).

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18 Herbert Lockyer, "Mary, the Woman Honored Above All Women," **All the Women of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 92.

19 Daniel Denham, "Mariolatry," **Roman Catholicism**, ed. David P. Brown (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 2000), p. 97.

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CHAPTER 34

The Woman With The Issue Of Blood

Sherrie Clarke

Introduction

WHAT A GREAT HONOR it is to speak on this great lectureship and doubly so to be one of the first women to do so! I pray that this practice will continue. Thank you to the elders and my son, B. J., for the great work they do each year in presenting this lectureship. I'm not ashamed to say that I'm so very proud of my son and the path he has taken in life. No mother could want more for her son than to be a preacher of the Gospel.

Definition And Purpose Of Miracles

A miracle is a sign, token or indication of the presence and working of God; an extraordinary act of God which is observable. The Bible refers to miracles as signs (Mark 16:20), wonders (Acts 2:22; Acts 14:8-18), and mighty works (Matt. 11:20-23; Acts 14; Heb. 2:4). Whenever the Jews wanted Jesus to justify or prove something, they asked, "What sign do you show to us?" (John 2:18). We would like to think that, if Christ were living in our time, we would be different. If someone were to come to us claiming to be the Son of God, would we accept this assertion without some sort of proof? I doubt it. We too may ask, "What sign do you show to us?" (John 2:18).

John summarizes the purpose of the miracles of Christ in John 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

In the book of Acts many miracles were designed to prepare hearts for receiving the Word of God. They were designed to produce faith in the observer. The one asking for the miracle was already in possession of this faith. However, the onlooker was not convinced and that is the main purpose for which miracles were intended: to cause people to believe Jesus was Who He claimed to be. He was the very Son of God.

Mark's Account Of The Miracle

The miracle assigned to me is the woman with the issue of blood. It is not as familiar as some of the other miracles, but obviously God thought it worthy of being included, as it was given space in parallel accounts in Matthew 9:18-22; Mark 5:25-34; and Luke 8:43-48. Let's look at Mark's account:

Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment; for she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" But His disciples said to

Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."¹

The Woman's Condition

Let's look at this miracle in sections, beginning with the question, what was this issue of blood mentioned that this woman had suffered from for 12 years? The **International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia** says:

When used as a description of a bodily affliction the word signifies: (1) A discharge, the consequence of uncleanness and sin (Lev. 15:2 ff; Num. 5:2). As such it was one of the judgments which were to afflict the family of Joab (2 Sam. 3:29); (2) a hemorrhage, either natural (Lev. 12:7, where the word used is *maqor*, literally, a "fountain"), or the consequence of disease (Matt. 9:20; Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43).²

We can assume from this reading that the issue of blood plaguing this woman was a female problem and that she had endured this problem for twelve years. This is a condition that would make her continuously unclean and that would be the source of continual embarrassment. Leviticus 15:25-30 describes the impurity of this situation and the penalties involved:

If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her customary impurity, or if it runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and whatever she

sits on shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches those things shall be unclean; he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. But if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the priest shall offer the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her before the Lord for the discharge of her uncleanness.

This woman has been shut out from fellowship with others and to touch her would make one unclean. Can you imagine the loneliness and shame this woman must have felt?

Physicians Unable to Help

Mark's account then tells us that "she suffered many things from many physicians" and "she had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:26)." Luke also states in Luke 8:43, "which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any." The doctors did not cure her and the following excerpt from **Adam Clarke's Commentary**, quoting Rabbi Jochanan, may give us a clue as to why:

Rabbi Jochanan says: "Take of gum Alexandria, of alum, and of crocus hortensis, the weight of a zuzee each; let them be bruised together, and given in wine to the woman that hath an issue of blood. But if this fail,

"Take of Persian onions nine logs, boil them in wine, and give it to her to drink: and say, Arise from thy flux. But should this fail,

"Set her in a place where two ways meet, and let her hold a cup of wine in her hand; and let somebody come behind and affright her, and say, Arise from thy flux. But should this do no good,

“Take a handful of cummin and a handful of crocus, and a handful of faenu-greek; let these be boiled, and given her to drink, and say, Arise from thy flux. But should this also fail,

“Dig seven trenches, and burn in them some cuttings of vines not yet circumcised (vines not four years old;) and let her take in her hand a cup of wine, and let her be led from this trench and set down over that; and let her be removed from that, and set down over another: and in each removal say unto her, Arise from thy flux? Dr. Lightfoot gives these as a sample, out of many others, extracted from Bab. Shabb. fol. 110.³

We sometimes question our doctor’s techniques today but those listed above are more than humorous. It is quite obvious that the physicians of that day did not have the knowledge to treat or cure the problem that this woman had.

Faith Concealed

You will notice in Mark 5:27 that “when she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment.” In Matthew 9:21 she said, “If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.” After being at the mercy of physicians who not only took all of her money but left her worse off than before, she decided to go to the Great Physician and this she did. Her problem was so personal and shameful that she tried to do what she had planned as inconspicuously as possible. For one thing, the touch of such a person was considered unclean by the Law and in her humility, she was probably sure that Jesus would not want to touch her. This may be why she chose to touch the fringes of His garment from behind. In Numbers 15:38 these fringes are described as tassels the Jews were instructed to sew onto the corners of their garments to remind them to do the commandments of the Lord. She

felt, if she could but touch one tassel on the corner of Christ's garment, that she would be healed. Naturally this woman would try to be as discreet as possible considering her condition.

What great faith she must have had to believe that just touching a tassel on His garment without His knowledge would be enough to heal her.

Faith Rewarded

Mark 5:29 says, "And straightway the fountain of her blood dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague."

Her faith was rewarded immediately and was unique in that it took place without an apparent conscious participation by Christ. We cannot assume that His garment was magical but that Jesus was all knowing and realized the woman's touch of faith and granted her this miracle.

Jesus' Question

In Mark 5:30, Jesus realizes that virtue or power has gone out of His body and He asks the question, "Who touched my clothes?" In **Barnes' Notes**, the following explanation is given of this verse:

Verse 30. [Virtue had gone out of him] Power to heal. The word in the original means power.

[Who touched my clothes?] This he said, not to obtain information, for he had healed her, and must have known on whom the blessing was conferred; but he did it that the woman might herself make a confession of the whole matter, so that the power of her faith and the greatness of the miracle might be manifested to the praise of God.⁴

Jesus tries to reveal who it was that touched Him, but, according to Luke's account, all denied it. Jesus was not

asking this question because He was upset but rather because He was concerned. But the disciples almost ridiculed his question almost as if it had been improper: “You see the multitudes thronging You, and You say, Who touched me?” Because of the size of the crowd, Peter was amazed that Jesus would ask such a question, as if they could know the answer since the crowd was pressing Him so. Jesus persisted and explained that somebody had touched Him because He felt the power go out of Him.

Faith Revealed

Christ looked around to see her that had done this thing, not to blame her for what she had done, but that He might commend and encourage her faith and also to make known to the crowd the miracle that had taken place. When Jesus persisted by asking the question of who touched Him, the woman realized that her actions were no longer hidden and Mark 5:33 says that the “woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth.”

Why was she afraid? The text does not reveal the reason, but some have suggested that perhaps she was afraid of what Jesus would do, or would He be angry that He had been made unclean? Or perhaps it was because she would be revealed and have to tell everything in front of the crowd. Whatever the reason, she did bow before Jesus in a humble way and explain to Him and before the crowd why she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. Her faith was revealed to all who were there. Her confession had made known the miracle that Jesus performed and thus fulfilled again the reason for miracles: to prove to the observer that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God.

Jesus' Commendation

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your affliction (Mark 5:34)." Matthew Henry's **Commentary on the Whole Bible** states:

The great physician confirms her cure, and sends her away with the comfort of it: Be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole, Luke 8:48. Jacob got the blessing from Isaac clandestinely, and by a wile; but, when the fraud was discovered, Isaac ratified it designedly. It was obtained surreptitiously and under-hand, but it was secured and seconded above-board. So was the cure here. He is blessed, and he shall be blessed; so here, She is healed, and she shall be healed.⁵

Affectionately Jesus calls her "daughter," and tells her to "take courage." Remember she was trembling and fearful and it is not unusual that the Lord, Who is full of compassion, would tell her not to worry. Then He tells her that her faith has made her whole. Christ's mention of this in front of the crowd would also insure that they knew she was now clean and could be accepted back into their fellowship. The healing had occurred because she had faith and Christ reminds her of this. There was no magic here, only belief in the spiritual action and power of Almighty God.

Christ's compassion and love toward women is found in many other examples in the Bible. Consider Jesus' dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:7-26. Most Jews would have nothing to do with a Samaritan. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:31. In John 11:32-33, Jesus again shows His compassion when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is weeping because her brother is dead. In John 11:33 it says, "Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her

weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” Then in Luke 7:12-15, Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain:

And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had **compassion** on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “young man, I say to you, arise.” And he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And he presented him to his mother (emp. mine, SC).

One final passage to mention is John 19:25-28, when Jesus shows compassion for His mother. When He saw her standing at the cross, He told his mother to “behold your son” and told John to “behold your mother!” And John 19:28 says, “knowing that all things were now accomplished.” He included making sure of His mother’s care as one of the things that he had to accomplish.

Jesus had compassion on this woman and many others and healed her of her infirmity even though she did not verbally ask. Her faith drew Christ’s healing power and, when she chose the Great Physician, He alone was able to send her away whole.

Practical Applications

We can apply several things mentioned in this parable to ourselves and learn from them.

First, we all have or will have to suffer. Christians are not immune to disease. Disease and suffering have been in this world since Adam and Eve sinned and were put out of the Garden of Eden. Sometimes people want to blame God for sickness and suffering when, in reality, the blame lays at the feet of Adam and Eve. After their sin, man began to die physically and mankind, from then on until time ends, has and will suffer sickness and death.

Knowing this, how can we accept suffering and keep the right attitude and faith during our struggles?

1. Suffering makes us look forward to heaven and helps us realize this world is not our home. When you're young you think you want to live forever, but by the time you reach 60 years old, you begin to realize that one lifetime is all you could handle and you're ready for something better. This world is full of sin, pain, and grief and doesn't remain as attractive as we get older. Suffering may be God's way to prepare us to long for a home in heaven with Him. Paul admonished in Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

2. Suffering turns us to God. We are told in Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Being poor in spirit means that we realize that God is in charge and we depend on Him and not ourselves. When we look to physicians to heal us like this woman did and find no relief, we realize how much we depend on God. And this realizing our dependence upon God makes us humble, which is another quality that God expects from us.

3. Suffering makes us more compassionate toward others. I used to think when I was in my 20's and early 30's that this "going through the change" business was all a bunch of nonsense but it's amazing how much more understanding I became when I began having hot flashes and mood swings myself. Paul says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

A beautiful poem by Helen Steiner Rice says this so beautifully:

Let me not live a life that's free
From the things that draw me close to thee
For how can I ever hope to heal
The wounds of others I do not feel
If my eyes are dry and I never weep,
How do I know when the hurt is deep
If my heart is cold and it never bleeds,
How can I tell what my brother needs
For without "crosses to carry" and "burdens to
bear,"
We dance through a life that is frothy and fair,
And "chasing the rainbow" we have no desire
For "roads that are rough" and "realms that are
higher"
So spare me no heartache or sorrow, dear Lord,
For the heart that is hurt reaps the richest
reward,
And God enters the heart that is broken with
sorrow
As He opens the door to a brighter tomorrow,
For only through tears can we recognize
The suffering that lies in another's eyes.
Helen Steiner Rice

Suffering definitely will make us more compassionate of others' hardships.

No one can extend a sympathetic hand as well as one who has experienced the same troubles.

Even though we may not be able to touch the hem of Christ's garment to receive healing, there are things we can do to receive strength and healing.

1. ***Have faith in God through prayer.*** The woman with the issue of blood was healed because of her faith. She believed that Christ would miraculously heal her. We cannot have that same assurance but we can have faith in His promises. God speaks those promises through His Word, and we talk to Him through prayer. Jesus said, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them" (Mark 11:24). And James says, "But let him ask in

faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by wind” (Jas. 1:6).

Jesus Christ Himself was suffering in Matthew 26 when the hour was growing closer for Him to die. The Bible says, “He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed” (Matt. 26:37). Later He fell on His face and prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39).

Many times we feel God has not answered our prayers when, in reality, He did answer but according to His will. We need to pray, as Christ did, that God’s will be done and not ours because He knows what is best for us.

Christians sometimes use prayer only as a fire escape: when they are in serious trouble and need a way out. We need to be praying constantly (1 Thess. 5:17), and we need to be living a moral life and obeying God’s commandments so that God’s ears are open to us. 1 Peter 3:10-12 tells us:

He who would love life
And see good days, Let
him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking guile.
Let him turn away from evil
and do good; Let him seek peace
and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord
are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Do we really believe in the power of prayer? In James 5:13-16 it says:

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.
Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

As a minister of the Gospel, my husband needs to be aware of those who are in need of prayer. And as members of the Lord's church, we need to covet the prayers of one another. But it never ceases to amaze me that, many times, those who are sick or have a need will keep it a secret. They will go into the hospital and not want anyone to know. If we truly believe that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much," then we should want all the prayers we can get.

2. ***Go to God's Word for strength.*** The Scriptures abound with promises that God will be with us during our struggles:

The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:9).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psm. 46:1).

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5).

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee (Psm. 55:22).

If God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31).

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee (Isa. 41:13).

Strength from God's Word is available, but we have to plant it in our minds before the troubles come. Many times we believe the above passages intellectually but do not emotionally accept them and use them in our time of need. We are all weak whether we want to admit it or not. Only by

admitting our weaknesses and relying on the Lord do we take the first step toward true strength and power. If we hope and trust in the Lord through His Word, great strength is available to us. Isaiah 40:31 promises, “Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles.”

Unlike an unbeliever, we as Christians are children of God and we should know from His Word that we never have to face anything alone: “But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me” (Psm. 3:3).

3. ***Take one day at a time.*** When we are suffering with illness or have problems, sometimes we tend to feel **overwhelmed** by what we’ve been through in the past, what we are dealing with now, and what events may lie ahead. Burdens will either destroy or strengthen our faith, depending on our attitude toward our suffering.

When we look at our problems we need to decide, “Is there anything I can do to help this situation?” If we can, we need to do our part and solve what we can. Even though we pray for our daily bread, we do not sit down at the table and expect God to deliver the bread directly to us. We realize we need to do what we can to bring this to pass. The same goes with solving our problems.

Fear and worry are not the answer! Jesus addressed this subject in Matthew 6:25-34 when He said:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" It is estimated that at least 90% of the things we worry about never happen. There is a story of the grandfather clock, which stopped one day because it realized that, during the next 90 years, it would have to tick 2,838,240,000 times. When someone reminded the clock that it would only have to tick one tick at a time, it had the courage to start again. We need to take one day at a time, as that is how God gives life to us. We must do what we can to make the problem better and leave the rest to God. One of my favorite poems is "Let Go And Let God":

As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God,
Because He is my friend.
But then instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help,
With ways that were my own.
At last, I snatched them back again
And cried, "How can you be so slow?"
"My child" He said, "What could I do?
You never did let go."

Author Unknown

4. ***Look outward.*** You've heard the saying that a person completely wrapped up in himself makes a small

package. This is so easy to do when we are suffering. Our troubles are the most prominent ones in the world. But if we will lift our poor-pitiful-me heads up and look around, we can always find others with whom we wouldn't trade places.

Usually when we are sick we are making visits to the doctor or hospital for tests and in these places we are constantly made aware of the sufferings of others. Sometimes it takes being put flat on our backs to realize just how important a call, visit, or card can mean, and our thoughts are turned toward others as a result, and we think of ways to repay those kindnesses shown to us.

The faithful child of God has been promised that one day there will be no more sickness, sorrow and tears. I'd like to close this writing with another poem by Helen Steiner Rice:

**“The End Of The Road
Is But A Bend In The Road”**

When we feel we have nothing left to give
And we are sure that the “song had ended”--
When our day seems over and the shadows fall
And the darkness of night has descended,
Where can we go to find the strength
To valiantly keep on trying,
Where can we find the hand that will dry
The tears that the heart is crying--
There's but one place to go and that is to God
And, dropping all pretense and pride,
We can pour out our problems without restraint
And gain strength with Him at our side.
And together we stand at life's crossroads
And view what we think is the end,
But God has a much bigger vision
And He tells us it's **only a bend.**
For the road goes on and is smoother,
And the “pause in the song” is a “rest,”
And the part that's unsung and unfinished
Is the sweetest and richest and best
So rest and relax and grow stronger,

Let go and let God share your load,
Your work is not finished or ended,
You've just come to "**a bend in the road.**"

Conclusion

The woman with the issue of blood was given the blessing of coming in contact with Christ. She received more than she expected and was restored completely. The Lord gave her a blessing. Let us touch the hem of Christ's garment by going to Him in faith through study and prayer and we too can be confident we can "go in peace."

Endnotes

1 All quotes are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

2 **International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1996).

3 Adam Clarke, **Commentary**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1996).

4 **Barnes' Notes**, Electronic Database (Biblesoft, 1997).

5 Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, New Modern edition, Electronic Database (Hendrickson, 1991).

CHAPTER 35

The Syrophoenician Woman

Anita Hochdorf

The Miracle

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour (Matt. 15:21-28).

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS *JESUS* is revealed in Scripture as looking on the multitudes with compassion (Matt. 9:36; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 15:32; Matt. 20:34; Mark 6:34; Mark 8:2) However, one cannot read very far in God's Word before reading of Christ's compassion for the individual as well as the multitudes He taught on a daily basis. There are many accounts recorded that tell of Jesus' leaving the

multitudes to teach or heal just one (Luke 19:5-9; John 4:6-42). There were also occasions when Jesus simply turned from the crowd in order to focus in on the needs of an individual (Matt. 19:16; Matt. 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13).

The Syro-Phoenician woman, as with all who seek Jesus, had nothing to lose and everything to gain. She was aware that she was unworthy of such a favor, but her faith outweighed her fear. She did not seek Him with fingers crossed as if to say, "I hope He knows what He is doing." She was convicted that Jesus was Who He said He was and was capable of performing the miracle needed to rid her daughter of the demon with which she was vexed. No doubt, with the great stories of His miracles, came the stories of His kindness and His message. Perhaps this gave her the courage she demonstrated through her persistence when His disciples wished to send her away.

Background

Jesus had departed from Capernaum and gone up to the coast of Tyre and Sidon. The Holy Spirit does not reveal to the reader the details as to why Jesus took this unusual journey to the Gentile district of Northern Galilee. Perhaps He meant to rest and spend time with His apostles. Capernaum had ceased to be a peaceful dwelling place for Jesus so it is a possibility He was simply seeking solitude.¹ In any case, Jesus could not be hid. His reputation had preceded Him and He was met with great enthusiasm by a heathen woman.

This Syro-Phoenician woman of great faith is referred to as a Canaanite in the account of Matthew, but in Mark's account as a Greek. However, this is not a contradiction. The term Greek was commonly used to distinguish Gentiles from Jews, such as is shown in this segment of Paul's letter to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation

to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

She was a woman of heathen descent, a descendant of the Canaanite worshipers of Baal, and yet, her faith surpassed that of many of the Jews whose faith should have been greater. She did not ask questions when Jesus told her “be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matt. 15:28). She accepted the results without questioning the method. All too often, the individual seeking God’s assistance already has some preconceived notion as to how it ought to come about. In recalling the account of Naaman, we see a perfect example of one who wanted the “Burger King” miracle. That is, he wanted it “his way” (2 Kings 5:11). This attitude has permeated the religious world and some of the congregations within the Lord’s church. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if men would obey the Gospel without questioning God’s method and commands? The Syro-Phoenician woman is a good example of accepting God’s blessings on His terms, not man’s.

Purpose

In order to determine the purpose of the miracle one must depend upon the context, and what is revealed throughout Scripture concerning miracles in general, to supply the answer. We understand from John 20:30-31 that one reason miracles were performed was to produce belief.

One cannot help but focus on Jesus’ immediate refusal to respond to this woman and her request. No doubt, this was a test of her faith and her resolve. Had she given up at His hesitance and gone home, the story would have ended differently. Perhaps Jesus wanted her to demonstrate her faith that He was the Son of God and worthy of worship. Several times throughout Scripture we read of Jesus asking His apostles Who they believe He is, (Matt. 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). The fact that a woman from a heathen nation

had such a faith, when many of the Jews did not, was a good lesson in itself. Perhaps this miracle had a twofold purpose. It may have been to reward this woman's faith as well as an effort to prepare the apostles for the time when they would be sent out to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Application

Jesus Loves All Men

Jesus is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). This is an attitude which had to be demonstrated to the Jews, and to His apostles as well, time and time again. Jesus' disciples, without compassion, were ready to turn the heathen woman away. She was little more than an annoyance to them: "And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us" (Matt. 15:23).

It is easy to love the loveable, approach the agreeable, and convert those with whom we are comfortable, but there are many disagreeable degenerates in the world also in desperate need of the Gospel. It is important to remember that the same Gospel that converted Cornelius converted Zacchaeus. Likewise, it is good to keep in memory, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

The Jews misunderstood their purpose in God's plan. They were the chosen nation through whom the Messiah would come, but God's love was not limited to the borders of Israel. If that were the case He would not have sent Jonah to Nineveh to urge them to repent from their wickedness. He would have simply destroyed them.

The Christian should never take on this characteristic of the Jews. The Christian cannot know the hearts of men--that is to say, who will be a good candidate for conversion and who will not. I dare say Jonah was not alone in his attitude toward the Ninevites. It is not likely

that any of God's prophets would have considered the Ninevites as good candidates for conversion, but the Ninevites needed and heeded the Word of God.

The man Zacchaeus, small in stature, great in restitution, was not an obvious choice for conversion either. As with the Ninevites, his reputation was such that people did not care that he was lost. But Jesus cared, just as He cares for the Ninevites and Zacchaeuses of today:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9, emp. mine, AH).

All Must Seek Jesus

The faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman was the driving force behind her persistence in seeking and acquiring Jesus' aid. Her faith that Jesus was the only one who could help her prodded her to seek Him with great urgency. She did not want this opportunity for an audience with the Lord to pass her by. She took advantage of her opportunity to petition Him. It is hard to imagine one not taking full advantage of the opportunity to speak to Jesus. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to be reminded of the blessing of prayer. After all, is this not the Christian's opportunity to seek and speak to Jesus? Is it not the Christian's opportunity to praise, petition, and thank Him? The Christian should long for the moments of prayer and meditation. Prayer should not be treated as an obligation or simply a rehearsed request, but a chance to have an audience with the Father through Jesus.

The Syro-Phoenician woman heard about Jesus, she believed He was Who He said He was, and she acted on her faith. It sounds fundamental, but there are many

who proclaim their faith, but do not act on it: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas. 2:17).

Those who earnestly seek Jesus and obey Him will be rewarded. We have many examples in Scripture of those who sought Jesus and were rewarded. It was said of Zacchaeus that “he sought to see Jesus who he was” (Luke 19:3), and he was rewarded: “And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house” (Luke 19:9). We have the same opportunity to receive spiritual blessings when we seek Him today: “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt. 7:8).

Jesus has done His part: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to Earth, He spent much time in preaching and teaching God’s Word, and He died a cruel death so that we might be saved. To not seek Jesus is to reject His love and the greatest act of mercy ever shown to man.

All Must Confess Him As Lord

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matt 10:32-33).

It sounds simple on the surface to stand and proclaim Jesus as one’s Savior, but all too often, it is treated as a one-time statement to be made. It is one thing to stand only at baptism and confess Christ as one’s Savior in front of those of like precious faith. It is quite another to confess Christ in front of those who look down their noses at Christianity as if it is foolishness. Confessing Christ has to be more than a one-time, or occasional statement; it is to be a way of life for the Christian. The life of the Christian should confess Christ

in such a way that the individual does not always have to open his mouth to confess Christ. Therefore, one who wishes to live with one foot in the world and one in Christ will never be effective in converting others to Christ. He is not worthy of Christ's name and cannot expect a Christian's reward.

Only In Christ Is One Justified

The Syro-Phoenician woman had no misgivings about her place in society. The Jews simply had no use for the Syrians and commonly referred to them as dogs. However, it was not Jesus' aim to insult this good lady. He was simply using it in the colloquial sense of the day. The Lord even softens the term by using the word *kunarion*, which means young puppy, suggesting a small house dog, a pet: "NT:2952 *kunarion* (koo-nar'-ee-on); neuter of a presumed derivative of NT:2965; a young puppy; KJV-dog."² This was apparently picked up on by the woman as she took no offense at Christ's statement. She realized she had no right to expect a blessing from the God her people had rejected. It was not her desire to receive the Jews' portion of blessings. She simply desired the crumbs from the masters' table. The Jews had been the recipients of the Lord's favor for so long that many of them had taken His favor for granted. The Jews often thought of themselves as having merited such blessings through their works and tradition. We read time and time again in God's Word of those Jews who did not appreciate all that God had done for them. Just as they murmured about the manna sent from heaven, they failed to appreciate "the bread" He had handed them on a silver platter. And yet, for the Syro-Phoenician woman, "crumbs" would have been more than sufficient.

Sometimes it is easy for one who has been raised in the church and has been a Christian for many years to take the blessings of Christianity for granted. The Christian may

moan and groan about having to spend time with brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps there are some who become annoyed that their absence at services is always noticed and become angry or defensive when someone calls to find out why. The Christian should never take these blessings, and they are blessings, for granted. There are so many people in this world without hope. They do not have the peace of mind the Christian has in salvation. There are many who long for relationships with those who would genuinely care about their soul.

Humility is an important lesson to be learned. It is when we realize our own unworthiness that we realize our need for the Savior. The world would have the individual believe man is his own God, but the Bible teaches the foolishness of this thinking: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"(Jer. 10:23). To believe man is better able to direct his steps than God, the Creator of man, shows the utmost arrogance and ignorance:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy
fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast
ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of
him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
(Psm. 8:3-4).

Man is only justified through Christ, never by his own merit, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph 2:8-9). The Christian must stay on guard all times to avoid having a haughty spirit. A wise man once said, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"(Prov. 16:18). We often sing a song that does a good job of putting all the things we do for Christ into proper perspective, and it reminds us of all that Christ has done for us:

“Follow Me”

“I work so hard for Jesus,” I often boast and say,
“I’ve sacrificed a lot of things to walk the narrow
way.

I gave up fame and fortune, I’m worth a lot to
Thee.”

And then I hear Him gently say to me.

“I left My home in Glory, and counted it but loss.
My hands were nailed in anger, upon the cruel
cross.

But now we’ll make the journey, with your hand
safe in mine,
so lift your cross and follow close to me.”³

A Stiff Resolve Is Required

The determination with which the Syro-Phoenician woman sought the Savior is most admirable. She did not let any action or reaction deter her from her mission. She did not allow herself to become discouraged to the point of giving up. Nothing is more disheartening than knowing that a child of God has allowed himself to become so discouraged in the Lord’s work that he decides to quit.

Of course, this is just what Satan would have the Christian do. The Devil does his best to discourage the faithful child of God to give up. He tempts the Christian to partake in some wicked, worldly activity leaving them feeling defeated and deflated. He fools many into believing the Christian life is too hard, the way too narrow and heaven is unattainable.

It is true that man cannot earn his own salvation; however, there can be complete confidence in Christ as Lord and Savior. The Christian has absolute assurance that the Lord will save all who are obedient to His Word (Matt. 7:21).

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). There has never been, nor will there ever be a perfect man, other than Jesus: “Though he were a

Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Because all have sinned, God has devised a plan for the redemption of man. It is a plan that has been in the mind of God from the beginning (Eph. 3:9). It is a perfect and foolproof plan. However, as with every plan, it must be followed. When one follows God’s plan and continues faithfully, Satan is powerless to pluck him from the Father’s hand (John 10:28-29). However, because man has been given the power to choose whom he will serve (Josh. 24:15; Matt. 6:24), it is possible for one to remove himself from God’s hand.

Because it is possible to fall from God’s grace, the Christian must have a stiff resolve. The Lord has promised the Christian that the Christian life will not be easy. The Christian will suffer trials, temptations, and persecution:

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (Jas. 1:2-4).

At times the Christian will fall. Having a stiff resolve, such as that of the Syro-Phoenician woman, prods the fallen to pick himself up from the pit of sin, dust the cares of the world from his heart and his mind, and return to the battlefield on the Lord’s side. The Lord’s army requires hard-fighting soldiers; the fainthearted need not apply.

The Faithful Will Be Rewarded

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Had the Syro-Phoenician woman not been truly convicted of Jesus' love and compassion, or that He would grant her petition, she would have walked away at the first sign of a refusal. Because she believed with a great faith those things she had heard concerning His abundant mercy, she was persistent in her pursuit on her daughter's behalf.

The Word of God is that which affirms the faith of the child of God today. We are fortunate to have been given "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," (2 Pet. 1:2-3). One no longer has to rely on word of mouth alone to learn of God's expectations for man. Today the good and honest heart can learn firsthand what is required for salvation directly from the mind of God through the Word.

It stands to reason, then, that the reader with an honest heart should possess a faith that is at least equal to that of a woman of heathen descent. The Christian must obtain a faith Satan cannot sabotage and a resolve he cannot reave.

In Conclusion

Although this miracle is recorded in relatively few words, its encouragement to those outside of Christ is immeasurable. The Holy Spirit so masterfully shows the nature of God, His willingness to receive, forgive, and save those who earnestly seek Him.

To the Christian who may be weary and discouraged, teetering on the brink of apostasy, it is perhaps a wake up call--a reminder of the resolve that is sometimes going to be required of the child of God, and of how such dedication to the cause of Christ will ultimately result in salvation.

Endnotes

1 Herbert Lockyer, "The SyroPhoenician Woman," **All the Women of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), p. 224.

2 **New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary** (Biblesoft/International Bible Translators, 1994).

3 Ira Stamphill, "Follow Me," **Songs of the church**, comp. and ed. Alton J. Howard(Howard, 1972) No. 107.

CHAPTER 36

The Healing of The Woman With An Infirmary

April Meacham

Introduction

THE SOUTHAVEN CHURCH OF Christ is very special to my family. When we lived in the Southaven area, her elders gave each of us so many opportunities to serve and challenged us to grow. Her members encouraged us at every step. Now that we have moved on to do the Lord's work in other places, this congregation continues to support us financially, prayerfully, and lovingly. The opportunity to be part of this lectureship, to be one of the first ladies' class speakers, will always be a treasured memory. I express my deep gratitude to B. J. and the elders for this invitation.

The Bible records for our benefit 35 miracles Jesus performed while He was on this earth. These miracles all served His **ultimate** purpose "that ye might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31).¹ Each miracle had a more specific purpose as well. Some miracles showed Christ's command over natural law, like the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee recorded in Luke 8:22-25. The casting out of the demon in Luke 11:14 confirmed Christ's authority over Satan, and the raising of Lazarus in John 11 demonstrated His power over death. Sometimes, Jesus

fulfilled a physical need as in the story of the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14:15-21). Other times, He focused attention on spiritual needs such as unforgiven sin while healing a physical infirmity (Matt. 9:1-8).

The miracle to be discussed in this manuscript falls into this last category. However, in this instance, Jesus did not direct attention to spiritual needs by forgiving the sins of the one who needed the physical healing. Instead, He used this miracle to point out the spiritual infirmity of some of those who witnessed the miracle. Jesus straightened the woman's crooked body and exposed the hypocrites' crooked hearts!

The Healing Of The Woman With An Infirmity (Luke 13:10-17)

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

The Background Of The Miracle

This lesser-known miracle is part of a continuing story of conflict between the Son of God and the hypocritical Jewish rulers. Through His teaching and miracles, Jesus was gaining the respect and devotion of the people. He was obviously not like the rulers the people had become accustomed to seeing, “for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). His teaching was from heaven and made manifest the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. As darkness hates the light (John 3:20), so these leaders hated the Light of the World.

Jesus demonstrated the shortcomings of the religious leaders many times. In the Sermon on the Mount, He warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter heaven (Matt. 5:20), and taught that we should not pray as the hypocrites do (Matt. 6:5). He pronounced many woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites repeatedly (Matt. 23; Luke 11:37-12:1). He spoke parables designed to expose their rejection of the Son of God (Mark 12:1-12; Matt. 21:42-46).

Jesus angered the religious leaders not only by publicizing their hypocrisy, but also by not following their interpretation of the Law. They had made many changes to the Law as Moses had written it, especially with regard to the Sabbath law with its burdensome minutiae.² Jesus did not restrain Himself to the actions the Jewish leaders considered righteous. He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. This angered the Jews so greatly that they sought to kill the Christ (John 5:1-16). His disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath and were taken to task by the Pharisees. Jesus defended His disciples, telling the Pharisees that if they understood, they “would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matt. 12:7). On another occasion, Jesus was in a synagogue and found a man whose right hand was withered. The leaders watched Him to see if He

would heal the man on the Sabbath. When He did, they were “filled with madness” (Luke 6:11). Again, Christ healed a blind man on the Sabbath, and some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day” (John 9:16).

This, then, is the relationship of Jesus with the Jewish rulers when this miracle occurs. The leaders, desiring to take the Christ, feared the people because they followed Him. The leaders feared and hated Jesus, because He brought their evil deeds into the light. Luke 11:54 tells us they were “Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.” But in Luke 13, as another Sabbath finds Him in the synagogue teaching, Jesus does not hide from their indignant observations. Instead, He takes aim at another hypocritical leader. He begins by performing another miracle of healing.

The Miracle Performed

As was His custom (Luke 13:10), Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He was teaching and saw in the assembly a woman with a spirit of infirmity who was bent over and could not stand upright. **Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament** tells us that the words “bowed together” were “a medical term for curvature of the spine.”³ This woman could move about, but she could not straighten her spine.

What was the source of this infirmity? If the record ended with the information given in Luke 13:11, we could be left with the impression that the condition resulted from purely natural means. However, this is not the case, for in Luke 13:16, Jesus answers the question, “And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, **whom Satan hath bound**, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (emp. mine throughout, ALM).

Satan was the source. He sent this woman a demon, a spirit that brought this infirmity upon her and had kept her bound with it for eighteen long years.

Jesus saw this woman and called her to Him. She did not have to seek out His attention. He told her that she was loosed from her infirmity and laid His hands on her. The term “loosed” comes from the Greek word *apolelusiai* and means “to free fully.”⁴ The healing was immediate and complete; there were no lingering pains, neither did the woman have to undergo therapy to strengthen her muscles. She stood fully upright now to see her Compassionate Healer and became a walking fulfillment of this prophetic psalm of praise: “The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous” (Psm. 146:8).

Unlike the nine ungrateful lepers of Luke 17, the woman reacted properly. She glorified God for the miraculous healing that the Christ performed on this Sabbath day!!

The Hypocritical Ruler Versus Jesus

Nevertheless, there was one who spoke up indignantly. True to Pharisaical form, this man had an exaggerated sense of his own importance. He had a position of leadership in this synagogue; it was his job to control the order of public worship.⁵ He was not in control of the Christ, however. Jesus came to this place on this day to teach and chose to heal the afflicted woman. Whether sincerely concerned that Jesus was not following the Law, or merely succumbing to petty jealousy, the ruler strongly objected to the miracle. He became angry at the “attention-getter” and sought a way to regain what he perceived as his rightful control.

So he now took his turn to attack the Lord for not following the Pharisees’ traditions concerning the Sabbath.

As is often the case with those who are not pure in heart, he did not speak directly to the one with whom he was taking issue. He was angry with Jesus, but addressed his rebuke to the people. He “reminded” the people that there were six days in which to come to be healed; they did not need to come on the Sabbath for that. He spoke to the people, but how clearly his words berated the Lord!

Jesus noted the hypocrisy of this ruler and answered him. Luke 13:15-16 records:

Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

His selfishness and pride showed in his hypocritical interpretation of the law and in his lack of concern for someone in need.⁶ Jesus’ rhetorical question shined a bright light on this heart darkened by sin. Yes, each would go home to untie his animals and let them drink to relieve their suffering. They would show mercy on the beasts and concurrently disallow Christ the right to show mercy unto one of God’s own children. How boldly they declared their hypocrisy in denying this woman freedom from her suffering!

As a ruler of the synagogue, this man should have considered a daughter of Abraham to be one of God’s specially favored people.⁷ Should he not have rejoiced that one who belonged to the God of heaven had finally been freed from the power of Satan? Should he not have desired that the woman who had been afflicted for so long be relieved of her affliction without a moment’s delay? This man indeed needed to go and “learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13).

The End Of The Story?

Jesus swiftly and firmly exposed the hypocrites. The ruler **knew** the Law and the traditions, but Christ properly **reasoned** from the Law. The Lord of the Sabbath understood that “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). The sabbath was never intended to be a weight for man to bear; it was intended to meet man’s need for rest (Exod. 20:8-11). Jesus’ rebuke brought “all his adversaries” to the point of being ashamed (Luke 13:17).

“And all the people rejoiced for the glorious things that were done by him” (Luke 13:17). No doubt they were pleased to see the ungodly rulers who tried to bind them to unreasonable traditions put in their place. But the miraculous power of the Christ, the tender compassion of the Savior, and the skillful handling of the Scriptures were all reasons for the people to rejoice: “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Prov. 29:2).

The Main Application

Jesus used this miracle as an opportunity to teach those present about the sin of hypocrisy. What can we learn from their lesson? What do we need to know about hypocrisy today?

Hypocrisy comes from the Greek word *hupokrites* and means “an actor under an assumed character (stage-player)”⁸: “In the Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask and played a part on the stage, imitating the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character portrayed.”⁹ In spiritual terms, a hypocrite is one who tries to make others believe he is righteous and tries to hide what he really is. He is like a stage actor, putting on a garment of righteousness and mask of purity for the performance. With this definition in mind, it is easy to see how many of us today fall prey to the same sin that beset so many of New Testament times.

To many, the most easily seen and measured aspect of a Christian's faithfulness is that of attendance in worship. When you teach your family that we are to worship with the saints, and then forsake the assembly, you are a hypocrite. What makes us think that a child who is encouraged to be a loyal member of a school sports team to the point of missing worship services for the games will ever be a faithful child of God? Vacation Bible School does not mean it is time to take a vacation! What about Gospel meetings and lectureships? Do you miss these opportunities so you can attend the weekly sessions of your civic club? Do you allow secular homework to keep you away from mid-week Bible study? Every reasonable person understands that there are times where one legitimately misses worship, but we have far too many hypocrites in the church in this area. They are ready to show support to any civic or school cause with their attendance and effort, but can't be bothered to attend the worship of the Lord's church as they should. Yet the Bible still commands "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

One may say, "I am a member of the _____ church of Christ." The word member indicates a constituent part, one of the whole who contributes to making it complete. Does the body of Christ where I worship see me in that light? Or am I merely a pew-warmer? A local congregation has programs of work in which I can be involved. If I claim to be a member and do not **work** for the Lord in my local congregation, I am a hypocrite:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, **according to the effectual working in the measure of every part**, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

Singing “I Want to Be a Worker for the Lord” all the while knowing that you have no intention of doing anything more than showing up for some of the worship services is just a melodic lie!

Those who complain that things at the local church aren’t done right while never lifting a finger to help are hypocrites! In Matthew 23:3-4, we read these words about the scribes and Pharisees:

[B]ut do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Notice that 1 Corinthians 3:14 says that if any man’s **work** abide which he hath built upon, he shall receive a reward. The Bible never promised a reward to those who just sit around and talk!!

If you are so concerned about performing the acts of worship (which we must do) that you neglect having a proper heart and attitude, you are a hypocrite.¹⁰ This is hardly a new problem. Isaiah the prophet wrote these words: “Therefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me” (Isa. 29:13). On the other hand, Paul tells us that the reason the Macedonians had been able to give of their means so liberally was that they had **first** given themselves (2 Cor. 8:5). That is what God is looking for—first a pure heart, then pure worship.

When we profess to be a Christian, but use improper speech, watch impure movies, listen to vulgar music, attend dances, drink alcoholic beverages, use tobacco, or associate with the “wrong crowd,” we are hypocrites. We should stand in the world as light on a candlestick, reproving the works of darkness (Eph. 5:8, 11). We have a much higher

standard of behavior than the world does, because our standard is God's Standard (Isa. 55:8-9). When the world has to give warnings about various activities (labels on video games, the famous "Surgeon General's" warnings on tobacco, the "Don't Drink and Drive" campaign, ratings on movies and music, etc.), Christians should already know that they have no business partaking in those activities and products. Let us instead follow the apostle Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Additional Lessons We Can Learn

The story of the woman with an infirmity teaches us powerfully about the eternal dangers of hypocrisy. We can learn other lessons from this passage of scripture as well.

The woman was present at the synagogue to worship. It was obviously very difficult for her to attend, for she could not stand or walk upright. Her deep desire to assemble to worship shows the shallowness of our thinking. We often fuss if the air conditioner on our vehicle is out when we drive to the church building! Next time you are tempted to let that "light affliction," such as a minor headache or aches and pains, keep you from joining the saints in worship, remember the wonderful example this truly afflicted woman is to us.

Jesus called the woman to Him by speaking directly to her. Although we are not physically in His presence today, He still calls us to Him. Sometimes we are afraid to use the terminology "being called" because of the denominational mindset of the direct operation of the Spirit. However, the Bible uses those words often. We are

called “by our gospel” (2 Thess. 2:14), to “eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12), “unto his glory” (1 Pet. 5:10), and “out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9). Peter exhorts us to “make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). Yes, we are indeed called today. We should not be afraid of using Bible words just because others misuse them!

The woman in the story was under the bondage of Satan. His power over her was manifested in a physical way. We are under the spiritual bondage of Satan today unless we choose to follow the Christ. He will free us, just as he freed the woman in the story.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). Jesus healed the woman completely, nothing lacking; we are set free from sin, nothing lacking: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

In this lesson, we learn the importance of correctly reasoning from the scriptures. So often, we pride ourselves on having read the Bible all the way through or having read the Bible every day of the year. These are good things. However, what good does it do if we mishandle the Word? We are exhorted to “give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).¹¹

We must learn to properly interpret Scripture. If we are careless in this, we wrest the scriptures to our own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). To avoid this, we should practice proper hermeneutics, the science of interpreting the Scripture. The following is a list of generally accepted hermeneutical principles:

1. Answer these questions.
 - Who is speaking?
 - To whom are they speaking?
 - When are they speaking?

- What was said just before and after the statement in question?
 - What would the words have meant to the original audience?
2. Every passage should be interpreted as literally as the context allows.
 3. No difficult passage may be interpreted in a way that contradicts another clearer passage of scripture.

By learning and following these simple rules of hermeneutics, we will go far toward “handling aright the word of truth.”

Jesus’ adversaries were ashamed when He pointed out their hypocrisy. We have a way to avoid such shame: “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psm. 119:6). Do the things God has commanded, refrain from the things God has forbidden, and you will never have to be ashamed of yourself.

Conclusion

The conflict between Jesus and the hypocrites culminated in the most dramatic and pivotal event in history. The Jewish leaders captured Him, tortured Him, taunted Him, and finally crucified the Messiah. Before we sit in judgment too harshly, let us remember that our hypocrisy has the same result. When we exchange our robes of purity for the costumes of hypocrisy, we crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6). Let us rather clothe ourselves with “the wisdom from above” that is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (Jas. 3:17).

Endnotes

1 **The Holy Bible**, King James Version, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998). All Scripture references are pasted from this electronic version unless otherwise noted.

2 James Orr, et al., **The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia**, Vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2363.

3 **Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament**, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

4 **Vine's Expository Dictionary**, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

5 Orr, p. 2878.

6 Kevin Beard, "The Parables of Counting the Cost," **The Parables of Jesus, POWER Lectureship** (Lebanon, TN: Sain Publications, 2000), p. 432.

7 **Barnes' Notes**, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

8 **Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary**, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

9 **Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

10 Jerry Joseph, "Dangerous 'Isms in the New Testament," **Dangerous 'Isms, POWER Lectureship** (Lebanon, TN: Sain Publications, 1997), p. 655.

11 **The Holy Bible**, American Standard Version, CD-ROM (Biblesoft: Seattle, 1998).

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