

Miracles

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Date: 13 August 2023

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[0 : 00] There are few more controversial issues in the Christian faith than that of miracles. Miracles. Atheists will point to miracles as being the weak link in Christian apologetics.

They say to us, how can you believe that the sun stood still in the sky or that Jesus raised a little girl from the dead?

Now, for we who are Christians who believe in a God of infinite power and might, the miracles of the Bible aren't so difficult for us to believe. But still we may have questions.

Do miracles still happen today? And what's the point of miracles anyway? Wouldn't it be easier to persuade others to become Christians if they didn't have to believe in miracles?

Some time ago, Nate preached an excellent sermon. Well, all his sermons are excellent. About Peter's healing of the lame beggar in Acts 3.

[1 : 17] And he really piqued my interest with some of the things he said. And at the time, he probably forgot this. I asked his permission. I asked his permission if I could talk more about miracles.

And he said, that's okay. So, I want this evening to talk about the purpose of miracles in the Bible and especially the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels.

So, a miracle is something that is different from the ordinary course of events. Something different. Something God does which is different from the way he normally does things.

I've got no intention of touching on whether these kind of miracles still happen today. Because personally, I believe that the greatest of all miracles happens when a person becomes a Christian. And God opens their heart to Jesus. But I do hope that as we look at this subject, our confidence in the value and the purpose of the miracles of Jesus will grow.

[2 : 29] So that his miracles, far from being something which make the Christian gospel unattractive, become an important centerpiece around which we can build a Christian worldview.

After all, our faith is based on the greatest of all miracles. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Well, it seems to me as we study the topic of Jesus' miracles in the Gospels, they have five purposes. Five purposes. Sign, compassion, revelation, victory, and kingdom.

As Christians, we believe in a supernatural gospel. A miraculous gospel without which we have no hope for the present nor for the future.

So, first of all, the first purpose of miracles in the Gospels is sign. Sign. The miracles of Jesus serve as signs pointing to who he is.

[3 : 44] Special people do special things. Special people row across the Atlantic. They create cures for cancer. They display extraordinary bravery.

But to perform a miracle takes a special kind of special. To lay aside the natural laws God has set in place requires supernatural ability.

When Jesus performed miracles, he was displaying supernatural ability. The kind of ability no one else has.

Now, albeit we understand that everything Jesus did, he did in the power of the Spirit. And therefore, there are no recorded miracles of Jesus before his baptism and his filling with the Holy Spirit.

And yet, for all that, his miracles are pointers to him being supernaturally special. So, in John chapter 10 and verse 37 and 38, Jesus says these things to his angry opponents.

[5 : 01] Far from his miracles being an obstacle to faith in him, Jesus points to his miracles as reasons to believe in him.

His message is not only in word, but also in work. The miracles of Jesus are signposts to the specialness of Jesus.

Who else can do these things? Whenever I take the ferry from Guruk to Danun, I think of Jesus' miracle of the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee by the power of his words.

The bodies of water are about the same size. Even the ferry with its powerful engines and its stabilizers feels the power of the waves of the Clyde.

But Jesus, with just a few words, stilled the wind and the waves. If ever you needed signs to how unique Jesus is, it is these supernatural miracles of power.

[6 : 35] But more than just being a sign of Jesus' supernatural power, there were signs that he is or was the Christ, the Jewish Messiah.

Notice how Jesus expresses himself. Believe the works, he says in John 10, 38. The miracles proclaim in works louder than words that Jesus has a special relationship with God.

The Old Testament predicted that when Jesus, when the Christ came, he would do miraculous things. He would open the eyes of the blind. He would make lame people walk.

So when Jesus came and did these amazing miracles, he was fulfilling the Old Testament conditions attached to his office as Messiah. Now, the Jewish leadership of the day should have taken notice of this, but they chose not to.

When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, they willingly blinded their eyes to him. They chose to discredit him even though he was displaying the signs of being their Messiah.

[8 : 06] And it made their willful blindness all the more serious, especially when they crucified him.

The miracles of Jesus serve as signs pointing to who Jesus is, both as supernaturally special and as Messiah.

The Savior predicted by the Old Testament and the climax of God's saving work on earth.

Whenever you read a miracle of Jesus in the Gospels, remember the chief lesson it's teaching is not moral or ethical, but Christological.

It is pointing to the uniqueness of Jesus. And therefore, our primary response is to be faith, worship, and praise.

Sign. That's the first purpose of Jesus' miracles. Second, compassion. Compassion or love. Jesus performed many of his miracles simply because of his great compassion.

This is the kind of Savior we have. The kind who doesn't use sick and suffering people to make a point about himself, but the kind who loves them and wants to relieve them of their suffering.

[9 : 38] These sick people aren't pawns in a power struggle between Jesus and the Pharisees.

They are human beings made in the image of God and dearly loved by Jesus.

So we read in Mark 1 verses 39 through 45 of Jesus' healing of a man with leprosy. We learn that a leper came to Jesus, a man with a diseased skin condition.

And he knelt before him. And he begged Jesus saying, If you are willing, you can make me clean. Now Jesus did not view this as an opportunity to get one up on the Pharisees.

Rather we read, Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said, I will be clean. Why did Jesus heal this man with a skin disease?

We read, It was because he was moved with pity. Now the words Mark uses refer to the inner organs of Jesus, the organs controlled by our emotions.

[10 : 56] We know that certain of our inward organs are controlled by the sympathetic nervous system, called sympathetic, because it's dictated by our mood.

And for that moment when Jesus encountered that poor leper, he was deeply moved with pity and compassion. This healing wasn't motivated as much by Jesus' intellect, as much as it was an emotional gut reaction.

That's what moved him to stretch out his hand and touch the man, and then issue those immortal words, I will be clean.

This reveals to us, does it not, the heart of God. A heart which never uses us as pawns in a divine game of chess.

A heart which loves us in our suffering and reaches out in compassion to us. How can we be anything but emotionally moved when we see the suffering of others?

[12 : 09] Now this might not seem a very deep point to make, but in reality it might be the deepest point of all. Because it tells us all we need to know about the love and compassion of the Christian God.

That compassion which ultimately led to Jesus' suffering on the cross on our behalf. Whatever pain we are going through tonight, whether in body, in mind, or in heart, God has not changed.

And His compassion for us is just as deep and rich as it was that day He met that man with a skin condition in Mark 1.

The third purpose of miracles, revelation, revelation, or to tell us something, to tell us something.

Generally speaking, there were three periods in Bible history where God performed miracles.

The first was during the days of Moses. The second was during the days of the prophets like Elijah.

And the third were the days of Jesus and the early church.

[13:32] All three have this one thing in common. They represent times of progression in God telling us new things about Himself.

So, the days of Moses were days of miracle as God saved His people from their slavery in Egypt and revealed Himself to them through the law.

The days of the prophets were days of miracle as God saved His people from invading enemies and revealed Himself to the writings of the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The days of Jesus and the early church were days of miracle as God revealed Himself through the saving work of Jesus on the cross and revealed Himself through the writings of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

Miracles represent days of progression in God telling us new things about Himself. So, whenever we see a miracle in the Bible, generally speaking, we're to view it as an opportunity to ask, what is God saying about Himself here?

[14:58] What does God want me to know about Himself and His word of salvation? When the people of God saw a miracle, the correct question they should have asked should have been, what new thing is God saying and what new thing does God want me to learn about Him through this miracle?

This is why, generally speaking, we don't see many miracles in our own day because with the coming of Jesus and the completion of the biblical canon, God has told us everything He needs to say.

He has revealed Himself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and everything we need to be saved is contained in the pages of His word, the Bible.

So, the miraculous new works of Jesus point to God's miraculous new words.

When Jesus performs a miracle, it's almost like He's saying to us to use Nate's words, listen up, y'all, this is the word of God.

[16:17] Sorry, Nate. The fourth reason for miracles, victory, victory, triumph, conquest.

From the moment of Jesus' birth, He was in a spiritual battle. Even as a child, He was exposed to Herod's devil-inspired plot to kill all the boys of Bethlehem under the age of two years old.

His life was a constant battle against the devil. You know, Jesus still carries the scars of that battle today. For we read that there is a Lamb in heaven who looks like He has been slain.

But as we know, and in which we rejoice, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered. Never once in all His life did Jesus taste defeat at the hands of the devil.

He always conquered. The miracles of Jesus are exhibitions of His victory over the devil and all the forces of darkness.

[17:35] When you visit stately homes in Great Britain, you'll sometimes see a Union Jack, a British flag, a regimental British flag, bearing a list of battles into which it was carried and from which it emerged victorious.

So, it might have on it Waterloo or Ypres or Arnhem.

But this list of victories is sewn into the fabric of the Union Jack. The Gospels are like that flag.

The list of the victories Jesus has won against Satan woven into their fabric. For example, consider the miracle of Jesus casting forth demons from that demented man we call Legion.

This man had been driven insane by these demons who had taken possession of the poor man's mind and body and soul. Everyone who lived nearby was terrified of the man called Legion.

[18:54] And when Jesus asked him his name, he said, My name is Legion, for we are many. This was a powerful opponent for Jesus. But with the mere power of his word, Jesus cast all these demons of darkness into a herd of pigs.

He conquered them and overcame their merciless grip on their victim. The victory, the miracles of Jesus rather, every one of them, are declarations of the victory of Jesus over the devil and the

forces of darkness.

He breaks the prisoner's chains. He overpowers the strong man. He sets the captive free. Jesus conquers the grave and he tramples the serpent's head.

Whenever you encounter a miracle of Jesus in the gospel, view it as Jesus' victory over Satan and all that holds us captive to him.

The meekness of Jesus shines in the majesty of Jesus as by the Spirit he overcomes the darkness and destroys the work of the devil.

[20 : 17] the last reason for the miracles of Jesus kingdom, kingdom.

This final point is of first importance in understanding the place of miracles in the ministry of Jesus. over the last hundred years or so, New Testament professors led principally by a man from Westminster Seminary called Gerhardus Voss have suggested that the miracles of Jesus are connected with his teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God.

Jesus is the king and he brings in the reign of his kingdom which is present among us now by the proclamation of the gospel but has not yet been fully displayed in world history.

So, terms like eschatology and last days are involved in this discussion. the kingdom nature of the miracles of Jesus consists in two statements then and not now and now and not yet.

Then and not now. Let's begin with that one. Then and not now. As Christians we believe that at the very beginning God created human beings perfect.

[22 : 01] When he created Adam and Eve the first human pair he said over them behold it is very good. He created humanity to live and never die to eat and never hunger to see and never go blind to walk and never be lame.

The garden which he set them was a place of safety and security. This is the natural man's environment and state complete and whole and healthy.

We know that that first pair Adam and Eve sinned and became liable to all the miseries of sin.

Hunger, thirst, illness, both bodily and mentally and ultimately death. Human beings became afraid of their own shadows and toiled under the heat of the sun.

When Jesus encountered the broken and the lost and the hungry, the insane, the blind and the fearful, he was experiencing human beings not as we were created to be, not as we were in the paradise of God, but as we are now in the real life of sin and suffering.

[23 : 46] the point is, this is not who God created us to be. And that's one reason why at the graveside of his friend Lazarus, Jesus wept.

He cried. He cried not just because of his love for his friend Lazarus, but because of the curse of death that lies over the entire human race.

He wept because this is not the way it was supposed to be. Human beings were not created to die. Only Jesus fully understood how broken the world had become because of sin. This is the world in which we live, damaged and broken.

The world with which the kingdom, the world which the kingdom of Jesus Christ must save, must redeem. This is your world and my world, this world.

[24 : 55] It was not meant to be this way with wars and illness and death, but because of our sin, it is this way.

then and not now. But secondly, now, I'm not yet.

Now, I'm not yet. We may argue that the Second World War ended on the day Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy.

there used to be a man in our congregation who was present on the beaches in Normandy on D-Day. D-Day was the defining moment when although there was still almost a year of fighting left, the war was won.

At that stage in affairs, the defeat of the Nazis was a now and not yet thing. Victory had been won, and the end was but a matter of time.

[26 : 11] The liberated towns and villages of northern France were tasting a freedom which the whole continent of Europe would soon enjoy. This is the keynote in Jesus' miracles.

With the coming of Jesus, his perfect life, his death on the cross, his victorious resurrection, the victory over Satan and death was won once and for all.

It was now just a matter of time before the end when all of God's people would enjoy the freedom and liberty and fullness of the kingdom of God.

The miracles of Jesus, you see, are now and not yet. They proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness. There are pictures of what the kingdom of God will look like in the fullness of its completion when Jesus comes again.

So, let's consider the miracle of Jesus healing the paralyzed man in Luke chapter 5. Paralyzed man is someone whose legs don't work, can't walk.

[27 : 32] This man is in a terrible condition. He is fully dependent upon others to carry him here and carry him there. He cannot work, he cannot beg, he cannot walk, he is utterly helpless.

The first thing Jesus does is to forgive that man's sins. The second thing he does is to heal that man so much so that man picks up his bed and walks home.

It's an outstanding miracle of supernatural power. This miracle shows that the kingdom of, with the coming of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God is now and not yet.

It is now in the sense of Jesus working powerfully to put right that which was wrong to remove sin's curse upon that man's life.

It is not yet in the sense that it was merely a foretaste of what life in all its fullness shall be like in the complete kingdom of God when Jesus finally returns.

[28 : 48] On that day sin shall be a thing of the past. On that day the curse of sin shall be fully destroyed to the extent that not only shall this paralyzed man walk in the new heavens and the new earth, he shall do things which at present are impossible.

He shall be made special beyond even the mightiest of angels. They'll look at him and they'll gasp in astonishment and they'll say to one another, isn't that the man who was once cursed by sin and paralyzed?

Look at him now. Isn't he amazing? Now and not yet. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, but in this world Lazarus died again many years later.

But when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, Lazarus will live forever. The miracles of Jesus are the D-Day of the kingdom of God where victory is won, but complete freedom and the liberty of that victory is still to be experienced in all its fullness.

The miracles of Jesus are the now and not yet proclamation of the kingdom of God, the announcement of a new era, the so-called last days when all that is yet to take place is the second coming of our Lord.

[30 : 46] We have this now and not yet of the kingdom where the healing and wholeness that we experience now as Christians is just a wee foretaste of the fuller joy and peace we shall experience with Christ in His glory.

The miracles of Jesus do many things for us, but perhaps the greatest of them all is that they give us as Christians confidence in the power, in the love, and in the compassion of Jesus for us.

In a world which shows so little love and compassion and sympathy, they remind us we as Christians are on the winning side, and they point to a glorious future which at present we cannot begin to imagine.

Study the miracles of Jesus, love the miracles of Jesus, but more still, there's a question for us all, put your trust in the Jesus who performed miracles, the greatest of which was He died on the cross to take our sins away, and He rose on the third day to new and never dying life.

After all, isn't every comfort from heaven, every answered prayer, and every new vision of God's love, a miracle from the hands of Jesus?

[32 : 33] Jesus?MAN INZING