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McClister, David; Robertson, Phil; Ward, Nathan; Peeler, Tommy; Schlabach, Calvin R.; Reaves, Brownie; Haynes, Jimmy; Falk, Jerry; Hopkins, Brad; Taylor, Rusty; Ogden, Robert; Jeffries, Shawn; Mauldin, Leon; Moody, Bryan; Forsyth, Brent; and Dilbeck, Will, "2019: The Works No One Else Did" (2019). *Florida College Annual Lecture Books*. 3.

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The Works No One Else Did

The Miracles of Jesus

The Works No One Else Did

The Miracles of Jesus

Edited by David McClister

**Florida College Annual Lectures
February 2019**



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Florida College Press
Temple Terrace, Florida

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-890119-60-7

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Foreword

The people of Jesus' day were amazing for the hardness of their hearts and their slowness to believe. They demanded signs, but did not believe when they saw them. They complained that Jesus' claims were blasphemous, but would not consider the evidence behind them. In a famous challenge, Jesus once said "the works which the Father has given me to accomplish—the very works that I do—they testify about me" (John 5.36). Jesus himself invited people to examine the miracles he performed, to see what conclusion they offered. Clearly, Jesus thought that his miracles were an important part of understanding who he is.

When the apostles preached the story of Jesus, they mentioned his miracles as a crucial part of the evidence for their claims about him. Peter described Jesus to the crowd at Pentecost as "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" (Acts 2.22). It was important to tell of his miracles, because they are a key to knowing his identity.

In this lectureship we aim to take up the challenge of Jesus anew for ourselves, to look at those wonderful deeds so that our hearts may be confirmed in the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God. We obviously cannot consider every miracle recorded in the gospels in the space and time we have available, but we hope that the studies chosen for this program will prick our hearts again and lead us to an even firmer assurance that our faith in Jesus is well-placed. Our trust lies in the one who made the lame walk, cleansed lepers, healed the sick, made the blind see, cast out demons, calmed a storm at sea, and raised the dead.

I am deeply grateful for the contributions of everyone who has worked to make this lecture program possible. Almost every person at Florida College is involved in this effort to some extent, as well as our speakers. The making of this week includes countless facets of planning, working, providing, scheduling, and helping. I hope that all of it comes together as a blessing to all who hear or read these studies.

H. E. "Buddy" Payne
President
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Temple Terrace, FL

Preface

Peter famously confessed of Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16.16). Later, Thomas called Jesus “My Lord and my God” (John 20.28). There is no doubt that the earliest followers of Jesus believed he was the Son of God, himself deity. How did they arrive at this conclusion? As it turns out, there is no simple answer to this question.

Jesus was not the first person to speak the word of God, to speak God’s word as God’s representative. There was a long line of prophets going all the way back to Moses who had spoken God’s word to God’s people. Some of them even used parables and predicted great events like the destruction of Jerusalem. But none of their followers thought any of these prophets were Sons of God based on their teaching.

Jesus was not the first person in history to fulfill a prophecy. Abraham saw in his own life the fulfillment of promises God had made to him. Isaac fulfilled the promise that Sarah would have a son. The nation of Israel fulfilled the prediction of a great exodus from slavery. Solomon fulfilled the promise made to David in 2 Sam 7, and Ahab died just like Micaiah said he would. But none of these people were believed to be divine because they fulfilled prophecies.

Jesus was not the first person in history who worked miracles. Moses had performed great acts, as well as Elijah and Elisha. But none of Moses’ friends came to the conclusion that Moses was the Son of God after he parted the Red Sea, and none of the disciples of the great prophetic pair believed their master was the Son of God either. Nor after Jesus was gone did any of the early Chris-

tians think that Peter or John or Paul were also the Sons of God, although they too worked miracles. Miracles did not necessarily mean that the miracle-worker was deity or even the Messiah.

Jesus was not the first person in history to be raised from the dead. The widow's son in Zarephath came back from the dead, but no one thought him to be God's Son because of it. The same is true of others who died and lived again in Old Testament times (2 Kng 4.32ff; 13.21). And Jesus himself raised people from the dead, but none of them were hailed as Sons of God as a result. Resurrection, by itself, did not prove a person to be divine or the Messiah of Israel.

None of these things, by themselves, were sufficient to compel the disciples to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But add them together, and the case is powerful and convincing. Furthermore, in almost every way Jesus' participation in these activities brought them to a level unseen before. His teaching was authoritative in a way that went far beyond the scribes or even the prophets. He spoke like God. And the things that the Hebrew Bible said would be true of the Messiah, and that the Messiah would do, Jesus did. And his "works" were often in a class by themselves. "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind" (John 9.32)—but Jesus did. In fact, when Jesus worked miracles, they were often things that were attributed to God in the Bible. Add all of those things together, and then add the resurrection. But not just simply resurrection. Jesus confessed to being God's Son at his trial, and that confession sealed the sentence of death upon him. His enemies carried it out, but God reversed the verdict and reserved the punishment. In that context, Jesus' resurrection said something great and wonderful. It said that Jesus was right and his enemies were wrong. When we add that to the teaching, the fulfilled prophecies, and the miracles, only one conclusion is rational: Jesus must indeed be the Son of God.

Our lecture program this year is dedicated to thinking about part of this picture, the miracles of Jesus. The authors of these essays have presented some rich material for you to consider. I hope it will

help reinforce in all of us our conviction that Jesus is the Son of God. That was, after all, the purpose of those miracles (John 20.30–31).

My thanks goes out to my colleagues in the Department of Biblical Studies at Florida College—Dr. Ray Madrigal, Dr. Tom Hamilton, Dr. Jason Longstreth, Dr. Dan Petty, Dr. Nathan Ward, Dr. Will Dilbeck, Mr. Tommy Peeler, and Mr. Jared Saltz—who have spent many hours planning and working to make this lecture program happen. I extend a special thanks to Dr. Nathan Ward and to the Marketing Department for the beautiful typesetting and book design, and to Joanie Dilbeck in the bookstore for seeing the printing through to the end. From planners to contributors to publishers, this work is always truly a team effort.

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Commonly-Used Abbreviations in This Volume

<i>c.</i> or <i>ca.</i>	<i>circa</i> (about)
ch	chapter
chs	chapters
<i>cf.</i>	<i>confer</i> (compare)
ed.	editor or edition
eds.	editors
<i>e.g.</i>	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
<i>et al</i>	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
etc.	et cetera (and so forth)
<i>i.e.</i>	<i>id est</i> (that is)
f	following verse
ff	following verses
Gr.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
<i>Ibid.</i>	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
UP	University Press
v	verse
vv	verses
LXX	Septuagint

Bible Book Abbreviations:

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus

Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
1 Kng	1 Kings
2 Kng	2 Kings
1 Chr	1 Chronicles
2 Chr	2 Chronicles
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Psa	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Eccl
Song	Song of Solomon
Isaiah	Isa
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Obad	Obadiah
Jon	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi
Matt	Matthew
Rom	Romans
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians

Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 Thes	1 Thessalonians
2 Thes	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Tit	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jam	James
1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Pet	2 Peter
Rev	Revelation

Bible Translation Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version or Authorized Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version of 1946 and 1951

Part One

The Evening Lectures

That You May Believe

Miracles as Signs

Phil Robertson

The apostle John wrote his gospel with a specific goal in mind: mold the heart of the readers with powerful stories and compelling lessons, so that belief in Jesus Christ would be the only conclusion (John 20.30–31 ESV). To accomplish this, he wrote not only about the life of Christ, but also about Christ being the only source of life for all men.

John saw more than anyone could ever imagine. For three years, he had a front row seat to the greatest show on earth. He walked with the Lord, listened to the Lord, watched the Lord, shared His feelings with the Lord, and was embraced by the Lord (1 John 1.1; John 13.25). Imagine that! He also witnessed Jesus' powerful touch on humanity through hundreds of miracles that defied the imagination. In an instant, water became delicious wine. The lame leaped for joy. The deaf heard the voices of loved ones. The mute shouted praise and appreciation. The demon-possessed were freed from chains of psychotic prisons. The dead awoke and walked out of their tombs. Jesus did so many great things that John concluded his gospel with, "Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21.25).

Every day John and his fellow disciples witnessed Jesus defy the natural forces that controlled the lives of men. But as grand and magnificent as each sight was to behold, the miracles were not the

focus of the Lord's ministry. These powerful acts were attention devices used to share powerful messages that transcended the miracles. As Professor Ben Witherington said, "They are not a means within themselves, they are pointing to something greater."¹

Although the miracles were mind-boggling, John does not want readers to lose their minds in the amazing events. Therefore, he avoided the common descriptions used by other Biblical writers and called the miracles "signs" in his gospel. To John, the miracles were signs with a purpose, to point their minds to the Lord's message.

What Exactly is a Sign?

Miracles are defined many ways in Scripture. Each designation has a specific meaning.

1. *Wonders*. The Greek word is *teras*. It suggests "something strange" has taken place and it caused the "beholder to marvel."² For example, in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, the crowds were in awe of the "wonders done through the apostles" (Acts 2.43). "*Teras* appeals to the imagination emphasizing the unusual or exceptional character of the deed."³

The Hebrew word is *pele'* and it is similar to its counterpart in the Greek. "The basic meaning of the verb is 'to be wonderful' and in the Hiphil (praise) 'to cause a wonderful thing to happen.'"⁴ Moses describes the miraculous works of God this way: "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exod.15.11). Even Jesus refers to His miracles as wonders (John 4.48). He knew these acts would drop the jaw of witnesses as they wondered at what they saw.

2. *Powers*. In Mark 6.14, the crowds marveled at Jesus due to the miraculous "powers" that were at work in Him. This "power" was seen in His ability to control forces perceived to be uncontrollable

1. B. Witherington, "The Seven Signs in the Gospel of John" (Seedbed 2015) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErefQks4eAM>.

2. W. Vine. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Revell 1966) 228.

3. D. Petty, "The Signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John" in D. Petty ed., *God So Loved: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Florida College Press 2002) 249.

4. R. Laird. *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Moody 1980) 2:723.

by men. The Greek word for power is *dunamis*. It implies a “power of inherent ability,” and is used of “works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means.”⁵ Jesus restrained winds and seas with stern verbal commands (Matt 8.26). With gentle words He healed those with deadly diseases (Luke 5.13). Others were healed without a word. The afflicted simply reached out and touched Him and “the power came out from Him and healed all” (Luke 6.19; 8.46). Even the enemies of God, like King Herod, marveled at these powers (Matt 14.1f).

3. *Works*. Jesus calls His miracles “works” as He defended His Deity to naysayers. He said, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone Me?” (John 10.32). The Greek word *ergon* implies “employment, task, a deed or act” that has been carried out, and it is undeniable to the beholder.⁶ Jesus wanted men to see that He was at work and the miracles proved He was working for God. He was not a vigilante seeking to enforce His own desires. His commission came from on high. “For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing. And greater works than these will He show Him, so that you may marvel” (John 5.20).

4. *Signs*. John chose to avoid all of the previous designations unless he was quoting other men. He wanted his readers to look beyond the wonder, power, and the work. He referred to the miracles as signs. It is a “word connoting a visible event intended to convey meaning beyond that which is normally perceived in the outward appearance of the event.”⁷ The Greek word for “sign” is *semeion*. It means a “sign, mark, indication or token.”⁸

Drive along any highway and your eyes will be distracted by numerous billboards promoting a place or a product. Roadways also have many traffic signs informing drivers of hazards or dangerous situations. Jesus used His miracles the same way.

5. J. Thayer. *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Zondervan 1970) 159.

6. Vine, *Expository Dictionary* 231.

7. “Sign,” in W. Elwell, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Baker 1988) 2.1961.

8. Vine, *Expository Dictionary* 29.

He wanted the audience to see the signs and heed the spiritual insights or warnings they shared.

W. E. Vine summed up the differences well. “A sign is intended to appeal to the understanding, a wonder appeals to the imagination, a power indicates its source is supernatural.”⁹ Peter used the many descriptions of miracles to prove the authority of Jesus’ in his first sermon. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know,” he said (Acts 2.22). John does not do that. Every miracle in his book is called a sign.

What is the Objective of a Sign?

Signs had a dual purpose: “They point beyond themselves to something which they accredit and attest, first of all to the person who works these signs and His significance.”¹⁰

In Moses’ call to action, the Lord gave him the power to perform miracles as a means of validating his authority. To prove it, he turned a stick into a venomous snake, deadly leprosy consumed his hand and then vanished, and river water became thick red blood (Exod 4.1–9). Each sign became a heavenly credential in Moses’ résumé before the people. As God said, “That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (Exod 4.5).

In the same way, John wanted his readers to see that the signs of Jesus pointed to His credibility as a messenger from God. “They establish the grand fact that Jesus had authority and power over all realms; He possessed power that belonged to God Himself.”¹¹ Due to the volume and magnitude of each sign in John, one would be hard-pressed not to reach that conclusion (John 20.30f). As one writer put it, “Unbelief and disobedience thus become the great crime against the signs.”¹²

9. *Ibid.* 228.

10. R. Lenski. *Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing House 1943) 199.

11. H. Hailey, *That You May Believe* (Nevada Publications 1973) 110.

12. Lenski, *John* 199.

Nicodemus, a religious leader who struggled with the possibility that a poor craftsman might be the Messiah, saw this truth in the signs. He told Jesus, “No one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3.2). He was not alone in reaching this conclusion. Many who saw the miracles recognized they were signs from God and believed in Jesus’ authority (John 2.23). Some were arguing in favor of Jesus simply because of what they saw. “When the Christ appears, will He do more signs than this man has done?” (John 7.31). When some called Jesus a transgressor of the law, once again, His signs were the alibi used to defend Him. “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” (John 9.16). “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9.33).

Over and over again, the signs were used as evidence to give credibility to Jesus the messenger. Jesus came from God (John 3.2; 9.32f) to fulfill the commission of God (John 5.36), to do God’s work (Acts 2.22), and to reveal His deity in that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father (John 10.37f; 14.11). Yet, Jesus wanted Nicodemus and the others to see more in the signs than just His supernatural authority. He wanted everyone to know that He came with a plan to save the world (John 3.16) and that the signs point to greater messages regarding His personality, power, and purpose.

Signs Pointed to a Specific Message

When God gave Moses miraculous powers, the signs became individual sermons. The staff turning to a snake and back into a piece of wood shared the lesson that God will guide or judge with the shepherd’s rod. Moses’ hand turning to leprosy and then being healed taught that God could inflict suffering and provide healing. The plagues were also signs. Each epidemic was a holy tirade aimed at a specific god of the Egyptians. The Lord told Pharaoh through Moses, “For this time I will send all My plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth” (Exod 9.14).

“In John’s gospel the signs are not only a demonstration of divine power but also a revelation of Jesus’ divine character. In addition to confirming His divine message, they also proclaim His personhood

and mission.”¹³ “Like (Jesus) Himself, every work is also a word. It speaks to him who hath ears to hear. It is a ‘sign’ to him who can spiritually interpret.”¹⁴ The challenge for the witness was to see the revelation as well as the miracle. To do this, the witness must have been willing to open his heart as well as his eyes to the wonder. The miracles were similar to the Lord’s parables in this regard. Jesus often left His stories open without making application to His audience. Some of His parables were so well-crafted the lesson was impossible to miss. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan the audience could only conclude that the hated Samaritan was a good neighbor. Yet, when Jesus shared the Parable of the Sower, no one understood the meaning, including the disciples. Later they had to ask the Lord for understanding (Matt 13.18–23). In similar fashion, some of Jesus’ signs were easy to interpret; others needed an explanation.

Consider the sign when Jesus gave the disciples bizarre fishing advice. It is a sermon the Lord preached twice. The first time, it was a visual hook that forced the professional fishermen to see that they were in need of a heavenly education. When they obeyed the Lord’s command and cast their nets again, the catch was so heavy the nets started to rip apart and the boats began to sink (Luke 5.6). Peter immediately understood what it meant. He fell on his face and bowed in reverence to Jesus, proclaiming his unworthiness. With the stunned disciples now eager to listen, the Lord explained the purpose of the sign. “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5.10f).

The second time, the disciples had returned to Galilee and their boats. The Lord’s death and resurrection had left them in a bewildered fog. Jesus used this setting as an opportunity to preach a rerun and remind them of their calling. This time, the nets did not break and the boat did not begin to sink although the load was enormous. Once again, Peter got the message first. He immediately jumps out of the boat and eagerly splashes his way to the shore (John 21.1–8). He and the others would never again fish from boats

13. “Sign,” *Baker Encyclopedia* 1962.

14. J. Ellicott, *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (Cassell and Company 1897) 394.

for a living. They would forever trust in the Lord to care for them, as they fished for the souls of men and cast the gracious net of the gospel all over the world. The message in the sign was simple: trust the Lord, follow His commands, and He will fill your lives with a great purpose.

Why Did Some Refuse to Believe in Jesus After Witnessing His Signs?

“Seeing does not necessarily lead to believing. It’s believing that leads to seeing and understanding about Jesus.”¹⁵ Just as Pharaoh refused to believe the signs from Moses, Jesus’ critics refused to believe the lessons from His signs. John did not shy away from recording the negative reactions of many to Jesus’ miracles.

“Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others explained, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them” (John 9.16). Even when the miracle was undeniable, the animosity toward our Lord continued. Following the resurrection of Lazarus, John wrote, “So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation’” (John 11.47f). “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him” (John 12.37).

Jesus knew well that the message in His miracles would be a challenge for many, especially the religious elite. He constantly chastised them for their ignorance. “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matt 16.3). Jesus chided them for their ability to discern climatic changes, while being impervious to seeing His mission and how it would change the world. “Their failure to interpret (*diakrinein*) the signs of the times is sufficient evidence that they were ‘blind guides,’ totally lacking in spiritual discernment.”¹⁶

15. B. Witherington: “The Seven Signs in the Gospel of John.”

16. L. Chouinard, *Matthew*. College Press Commentary NIV Commentary (College Press 1997) 290.

In modern day, a stop sign has no power to make a driver stop. It merely states a message. Yet, when a motorist recognizes the value of that sign, he can enjoy the protection and value that message brings to his life. Think of Jesus' signs in the same way a vacationing family approaches driving to Orlando. Even the children in the car can see that the sign saying "Disney World next left" has great merit. But it is useless if dad refuses to follow the direction and turn left. In addition, this may lead to a mutiny from the back seat. Signs have no value if they are ignored. The signs of Jesus were similar: when one recognized the value of the message, his life changed due to the sermon inherent in the sign. As Jesus said of His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matt 13.16). Signs are blessings to those who will look and listen. Unfortunately, many of the Lord's miraculous sights fell on deaf ears.

The question some might ask is, "If some signs were good and received by the people, why not do more?" Why not become the "miracle man" everybody wanted? When they asked for food, give it to them. When they asked for more supernatural shows, just oblige to the request and give them more evidence. Why not pull out all the stops? Jesus repeatedly rebuffed that pressure because the miracles were not meant to be a whimsical response to a world in doubt (John 6.26; Luke 23.8). They were sermons of salvation and not a circus act. The stumbling blocks for the naysayers were not the signs but what the signs meant.

Remember when Jesus went home to Nazareth? His own kin and neighbors struggled with His claim to be the Messiah. Although He shared a few undeniable signs, they refused to accept the message. They were like older children rebuffing a younger sibling who is telling them what to do. "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And are not His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all His sisters with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" And they took offense at Him" (Matt 13.54–57). The following verse is one of the saddest in all of Scripture. "And He did not do many mighty works

there, because of their unbelief” (Matt 13.58). Jesus was forced out of His hometown because they would not accept the purpose of the miraculous messages.

Miracles never saved anyone. Yes, Jesus may have used them to extend a life, enrich a life, or give some another chance at life. But in the end, all of those who ate His scrumptious food, drank His sweet wine, and felt His healing hand died. Even those who walked away from their tombs eventually were carried back to their graves. Just because someone received the immediate physical benefit of a miracle did not mean he was “saved” by it. Salvation was only given to those who cherished the message, even if the sign did not specifically benefit them in an earthly way. It was the powerful sermon in the sign that nourished, healed, and gave men new life. As Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6.63).

Do We See the Signs the Lord Has Revealed to Us?

All miracles are signs but not all signs are miracles. Consider the rainbow: it is a sign God put in the sky following the flood. Sure, man can give it a scientific explanation and reason, but this does not diminish its power or its message. God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations... I will remember My covenant... And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen 9.12–15). A rainbow is more than a brilliant meteorological event of light reflecting off the backdrop of raindrops and dispersing into a beautiful spectrum of color. It is a sign from heaven pointing to an incredible reminder of God’s wrath and His covenant of peace with all men.

Many signs in the Bible were not miracles. The blood from the Passover lamb was a sign pointing to a confirmation of faith in deliverance from death (Exod 12.13). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a sign pointing to the Law of the Lord being in the people’s mouth as God’s strong hand led them out of Egypt (Exod 13.9). The Sabbath was a sign reminding the people that they were to be holy and set apart to the Lord (Exod 31.13, 17). The stone memo-

rial built by Joshua at the front door of Canaan was a sign to future generations of God's providential care (Josh 4.6f). The Christian lifestyle was a sign to unbelievers and to believers that salvation and courage come from the gospel of Christ (Phil 1.27–30). Therefore, even though Jesus does not continue to walk the earth performing signs, He through the Spirit has left many signs to challenge our spiritual eyes and ears today.

Conclusion

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20.30f).

John makes four profound points regarding the signs in his thesis for the gospel:

1. These *signs* encompass all that is needed for the readers to know the total message. John records seven prominent miracles in the first eleven chapters of the book. These signs are sufficient to point the world to the messages Jesus wanted all men to see and hear. Although the disciples, like John, saw many more wonders, these signs encompass all that is required to know the deity of Jesus Christ. Also, Jesus affirmed these signs are sufficient for all men. When the Pharisees kept asking for more signs, He rebuked them and referred to them as being an “evil generation.” He promised them one more sign and it would be the most powerful of all, His resurrection from the dead (Matt 12.38–40). The message from that sign became the foundation of faith for all believers as they shared it with the world (Acts 2.24; 3.15; 10.40; 13.30).

2. These signs are *written*. The reader does not need visual evidence. YouTube, Netflix, or any other visual medium is not necessary to tell the story. There has always been power in the written word. Even Jesus' critics proved this point. The Pharisees held Moses in high regard and considered him a man of God. “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man (Jesus), we do not know where he comes from” (John 9.29). Ironically, they put

more faith in the written word than in being “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet 1.16). Jesus told them, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings how will you believe My words?” (John 5.47f). The Samaritans did not need miracles to believe; the word was good enough for them (John 4.41). Again, miracles never saved anyone, but the Word of our Lord does save and always will (Acts 11.14; Jam 1.21; John 5.24).

3. These signs lead men to *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. All the signs in John’s gospel point to messages about Jesus’ character, personality, authority, and mission. More importantly, the messages produce faith in Christ as the Word of God (John 1.1). In Luke 16, a condemned rich man pled to have the dead man Lazarus return to earth and warn his brothers of the danger of unbelief. Abraham told him they have “Moses and the prophets” and not even the resurrection of the poor man can outweigh the prophetic word. Belief comes from accepting the message, not from seeing a miracle (John 17.20). As Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen yet believed” (John 20.29). John has recorded all the signs needed to produce the faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Chosen One of God. Therefore, a reader of the gospel can shout confidently like Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”

4. These signs point to *life in his name*. Ultimately, John wants his readers to enjoy the everlasting life Jesus came to give abundantly to the world through Him (John 10.10; John 3.16). When men understand and believe the truths found in these powerful miracles, they will see His personality, His power, and His purpose. They will also know how to respond to His eternal invitation and receive His perpetual gift (John 6.47–51). They will trust in His assurance that He is the “resurrection and the life” and even those that die will live again (John 11.25). This was Jesus’ prayer for His disciples and all men. “And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17.3).

This Man Performs Many Signs

The Miracles as History

Nathan Ward

A song from my childhood I occasionally think of is *Sesame Street's* "One of These Things." While the song plays, the viewer finds one object that is different from the rest. Writing this particular manuscript in connection with the rest of the lectureship brings that old song to mind once again. The rest of the lectureship focuses on Jesus' miracles as signs pointing to various aspects of himself, his nature, and his work. By contrast, this manuscript focuses on the apologetic question of miracles: are the miracles actual historical events in the life of Jesus or later mythological embellishments added as the story of Jesus grew? Are miracles even possible? How can we know?¹

At the outset, let me clarify a few things. First, the topic of miracles in the context of apologetics has been touched on in the Florida College Lectureship before. While there will inevitably be some overlap, I do not intend to duplicate the material covered nearly 20 years ago.² Second, this manuscript cannot exhaustively discuss

1. Although I would fully agree with F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Eerdmans 1965) 63 that our first concern related to miracles "should be not to 'defend' them but to understand them," there is clearly a need in our culture to be able to defend them as well. To give one-fifteenth of a lectureship that is about understanding them to the task of defense surely is not out of proportion.

2. See M. Roberts, "The Role of Miracles," in F. Jenkins, ed., *A Place to Stand: Apologetics in an Uncertain Age*. Florida College Annual Lectures 1999 (Florida College 1999) 86–98.

the question of miracles, even from just the apologetic perspective. Entire books have been written on the topic,³ and I cannot hope to explore every angle of it. Finally, in an effort to preserve readability, I have placed most lengthy quotes and technical discussion in the footnotes.

Introductory Matters

The sheer amount of literature produced on the topic of miracles may well raise the question of what is so important about them. The answer is evident: without the miraculous Christianity is false. As Paul argued, Christianity is all a lie without the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15.13–19). And if there is no miraculous, then there is no resurrection.⁴

Second, correctly defining “miracle” is a vital step in the discussion. This lecture is not about God’s *providential* working in his creation, where he acts through normal, natural means to accomplish his purposes (such as the raising up of Cyrus to set the Judean captives free). Nor is this manuscript intended to discuss modern miracles.

Although there is debate over the best definition of miracles, Richard Purtill provides a helpful starting place: “An event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting.”⁵ He adds that natural laws can be suspended, “temporarily and for a particular purpose, by the creator

3. For further study, see C. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Eerdmans 1984); N. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought* (Zondervan 1982); R. Geivett and G. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Intervarsity Press 1997); C. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. 2 vols (Baker Academic 2011); C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (MacMillan 1947); L. Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (Zondervan 2018); R. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*. New Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (MacMillan 1970). See also the Bibliography for books with helpful segments on the topic, especially the lengthy chapter on miracles in P. Eddy and G. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Baker Academic 2007).

4. B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection* (DeWard 2012) 21 says, “Something may be left—a system of morals or the like—but that is not Christianity.”

5. R. Purtill, “Defining Miracles,” in R. Geivett and G. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Intervarsity Press 1997) 62–63.

of nature; on this view an exception to the laws of nature can be permitted only by the creator of nature, just as an exception to a legal ordinance can be permitted only by the authority that passed the law (or some higher authority).⁶

Some have objected to definitions like this on the grounds that they suggest God is not constantly acting in his creation (in contrast to texts like Col 1.17 and Heb 1.3). We should be cautious that we do not define it as an intervention “in which God comes in and acts in a world from which he is normally absent.”⁷ Everything in the natural world depends on God for its continued existence and he is continually present in the natural order and is active within it, which is the reason the laws of nature run.⁸ Even so, it seems clear that none of the miracles would have happened had natural laws run according to the status quo. While not an intervention from a deistic God, miracles are indeed interventions into the natural law.

Others object on the grounds that the miracles sometimes use the natural order of things, such as the wind at the parting of the Red Sea. While the use of nature is certainly present in some miracles, it is never nature in a normal state. At the Exodus, it is surely an exception to the natural course of the wind.

There are still others who object on theological grounds. Tim Keller, for example says, “We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem the world where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken.”⁹ While his point is appreciated and helpful, it is limited and thus insufficient as a definition, as it leaves entire categories of miracles untouched.¹⁰ So, as eloquent as

6. *Ibid.* 68.

7. C.S. Evans, *Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense: A Response to Contemporary Challenges* (Baker Academic 2015) 96.

8. *Ibid.*

9. T. Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books 2008) 99.

10. For example, God did not intend the natural order to include defying gravity, weather control, and mass production of food. Similar questions can be raised regard-

it may be, it cannot replace a general definition of miracles involving some sort of exception to natural laws.¹¹

Finally, by way of definitions, it should be said that “natural laws” are descriptive, not prescriptive. That is to say, they only describe what the scientist has found in nature rather than legislating what must happen. For example, there is no highly-guarded vault that holds the original, engraved-in-stone law of gravity. The law is merely a description of how things in the natural realm interact with one another.¹²

Objections to Miracles

Objections to miracles have been raised from a variety of perspectives. Although an exhaustive discussion is beyond the scope of this manuscript, this section will consider four key objections and offer responses.

Historical Objections. Since the focus of this manuscript is on the miracles as history, this objection must be considered first and given the most space.

Probability and Extraordinary Claims. One historical objection to miracles is rooted in probability: the probability for the regular is greater than the probability for the rare.¹³ Further, even if there is witness testimony for the rare, given the odds of a miracle actually happening, it is more likely the witnesses were mistaken than the miracle took place.¹⁴ In short, we should trust what usually hap-

ing N. T. Wright’s view of miracles as reflecting the inbreaking of the kingdom rather than exceptions to the natural order (to paraphrase him). There is some truth to this in some of Jesus’ miracles, but it is not even a sufficient comprehensive definition of *only* Jesus’ miracles, much less the entire concept of the miraculous in the Bible.

11. Perhaps the best definition not to use the language of “exception” or “suspension” is provided by C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* 81, who instead calls it “feeding new events into the pattern.” Yet since these “new events” are temporary (*e.g.*, water does not still turn into wine), the miracles of Jesus remain exceptional, as Lewis himself also notes (63). See also W. Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity* (Broadman and Holman 1997) 152 for a similar effort to remove this language from the definition.

12. See Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Intervarsity Press 2003) 566–67 for a discussion of various theories of the laws of nature.

13. N. Geisler and F. Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Crossway 2004) 205.

14. This is the perspective of Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776). He

pens to continue to happen. This thinking is often expressed as, “Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence.”¹⁵

This approach has several problems. First, if its logic is followed, it rules out all rare events from ever happening—or, at least, from us believing that they ever happened. If probability is a deciding factor, the lottery has never been won, for the odds are far too small. Yet we know that it has. If singular events are a deciding factor, the universe never came into existence, life never came to be, and the skeptic you are arguing with was never born—for all of these things only happened once. Yet we know that they did. The deciding factor, therefore, cannot be the probability or uniqueness of the event, but a much broader amount of information. We never estimate whether an event is probable purely by looking at the frequency with which events of that type occur. Rather, we take into account all we know about the situation.¹⁶

Second, in the adage, what exactly is meant by “extraordinary evidence”? A believer who parrots this line may only mean that the evidence has to be examined more closely, but that is hardly what a skeptic would mean. In fact, the very ambiguity of the statement betrays the skeptic’s position: for many, there is no level of evidence that would be sufficient to prove the miraculous.¹⁷ Besides, most people regularly believe extraordinary claims (like someone correctly choosing a set of numbers against astronomical odds) without “extraordinary evidence.” The issue is not the quantity of

makes this point and goes on to say, “We ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations.” Hume’s essay “Of Miracles” is reprinted in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles* 29–44. For a thorough philosophical critique of Hume (by an atheist), see J. Earman, *Hume’s Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford UP 2000).

15. Even some believers have expressed this regarding miracles. For example, D. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Intervarsity Press 2011) 535 says, “We need a higher level of evidence to substantiate a miracle claim than we do for a nonmiraculous event.” He is hardly alone among apologists in repeating this perspective.

16. C.S. Evans, *Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense* 98. See also C. Collins, *The God of Miracles: An Evangelical Examination of God’s Actions in the World* (Crossway 2000) 147–50. Even if there remains a low probability of the event in question, that alone is no reason to reject it, especially if there is no better explanation. See Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend* 90.

17. See fn 46.

evidence, but the quality of it, which is true for any claim that is being tested, miraculous or otherwise.

It is true that part of the issue of evidence's quality is its quantity. Probability studies show that independent testimony of multiple witnesses to an event significantly raises the likelihood of it having happened. And the presence of the testimony to the event must be explained, which raises the question of the counter-probability of the event being reported incorrectly by multiple, independent witnesses. To the point, the probability of the convergence of just six reliable, *independent* witnesses being mistaken about an event is one in one trillion.¹⁸

The quality of testimony can also be enhanced by the circumstances of the witness. For example, a witness who receives benefit from testifying is more likely to create a lie; a witness who has endured personal harm due to the testimony is more likely to have told the truth. As Paley says,

If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumor of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess to the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account;—still, if [this] rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say that there exists not a skeptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity.¹⁹

Beyond even that, the practical absurdity of this position can be readily seen if it were used in a courtroom: “Ladies and gen-

18. J. and W. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations* 570. Moreland and Craig point out that this number is five times greater than the improbability Hume assigns to the resurrection.

19. W. Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (Baker Book House 1952) 16–17.

tlemen of the jury, your job as rational agents is to weigh the testimonies of 500 people who have testified that they never saw my client murder someone against the three people who said that they did. Clearly, based on what is normal, my client must be found not guilty.”²⁰ Finally, as we will see later, the question of the probability of a miracle is drastically affected by the existence of a personal God.

Analogy to the Present. A similar argument is that there must be uniformity between the present and past.²¹ That is to say, since miracles do not happen now, they could never have happened. There are three key problems with this argument. First, it begs the question by presuming what it should be arguing, namely that miracles do not happen.²² Although I realize that most of my audience are cessationists, countless people around the world believe in present-day miracles. The purpose here is not to debate that issue, but to acknowledge that thousands of people would disagree that miracles are not analogous to the modern world.

Second, it presumes the ongoing presence of the miraculous in the Bible. As has often been noted, the vast majority of Biblical miracles center around the Exodus, the anti-establishment prophetic work of Elijah and Elisha, and the ministry of Jesus. Beyond that, the Bible is largely silent. That is to say, hundreds or even thousands of years pass without any miracles happening at all. Even if we are right about the age of miracles having passed and miracles not happening in some 1,900 years, it still is well within the principle of analogy that miracles happened then and not since.

Finally, as noted above in the discussion about probability, the argument against miracles from analogy does not allow for singularities. While the principle of analogy is a valuable *method* for studying history (*i.e.*, we assume consistency and continuity when studying the past), it cannot become the rule for what must and

20. Illustration condensed and modified from Beckwith, “History and Miracles,” 93.

21. This view’s most well-known proponent was German theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923).

22. Throughout, I use “begs the question” in the technical sense of a logical fallacy where someone assumes as true what should be under examination.

must not have happened.²³ Singularities do occur, and this principle applied as a hard and fast rule will not allow for what we know to be a reality.

History's Inability to Examine the Miraculous. It is sometimes alleged that miracles cannot be examined historically, since the source of the miracle is a non-empirical, supernatural being and historians cannot possibly detect such an agent.²⁴ But *events* surrounding a miracle associated with other historical phenomena *can* be investigated. Besides, the skeptic would not want to give up the ability to examine miracles, lest they be unable to disprove them—for if they cannot be investigated, they can neither be verified nor falsified. If, for example, historians found conclusive proof that Jesus' body is still in a tomb, opponents of Christianity would rightly conclude that the resurrection never happened. But this hypothetical only works if historians can, in fact, investigate miraculous claims.²⁵

Objectivity, Subjectivity, and History. A common argument in our postmodern culture is that everything is subjective, so history cannot be trusted. It surely is true that no one can be completely objective and that all history is written from a certain point of view, but to argue that there can be no objective history is self-defeating. Either the view that it is unknowable is only a subjective opinion (which does not disprove objectivity) or the view is objective (which disproves subjectivity).²⁶ Further, if there is no objective history, then there cannot be bad history. Yet this is absurd. If one historian argues that Hitler killed the Jews because he loved them and wanted them to go to heaven faster and another argued the more traditional understanding, one is right and one is wrong—and both can be tested against what Hitler himself said.²⁷ Finally, the constant rewriting of history with an effort to improve our understanding of it reveals an implicit acknowledgment of objectiv-

23. Beckwith, "History and Miracles" 97.

24. V. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (SCM Press 1967) 109.

25. See the discussion in Beckwith, "History and Miracles" in *In Defense of Miracles* 87–88.

26. N. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Academic 1976) 297.

27. Beckwith, "History and Miracles" 89.

ity. As Geisler says, “Why strive for accuracy unless it is believed that the revision is more objectively true than the previous view? Why critically analyze unless improvement toward a more accurate view is the assumed goal? Perfect objectivity may be practically unattainable.... But be this as it may, the inability to reach 100 percent objectivity is a long way from total relativity.”²⁸ Having a viewpoint does not disqualify a claim, or else no claim could ever be taken seriously.

Naturalistic Objections. These objections are often framed in terms of miracles being *violations* of the immutable laws of nature. Since immutable laws cannot be violated, miracles are therefore impossible.²⁹

This objection begs the question and seems to imply that the laws of nature are prescriptive rather than descriptive. Further, this argument can only be true in a naturalistic worldview. If nature is all that there is, then of course there cannot be anything outside of nature that impacts what happens within. But if there is a supernatural force who can “reach into the box”³⁰ and manipulate laws which are not immutable and prescriptive, then miracles are indeed possible. As Westcott says, “To affirm that miracles are unnatural is to constitute general laws of observation into a fate superior to God, or to deny his personal action.”³¹

The question of God’s existence, then, is at the heart of this objection. Although this manuscript is not the place to discuss God’s

28. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* 297.

29. This is the summary of the argument of Jewish-Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) as found in N. Geisler and R. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Baker 1996) 76. Regarding this approach, Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend* 50–51 say, “When a metaphysical assumption renders a class of possible events so improbable that no amount of evidence ... could convince of us of their occurrence, our claim to being ‘scientific’ is compromised. We are no longer drawing probabilistic conclusions *from* evidence. We are instead superimposing a metaphysical assumption *upon* evidence. Or, more accurately, we are dictating at the start what is and is not allowed to count as evidence.”

30. See Ronald Nash’s illustration as summarized in Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* 202–203.

31. Westcott, *Gospel of the Resurrection* 23. He later adds, “Theology accepts without the least reserve the conclusions of Science as such: it only rejects the claim of Science to contain within itself every spring of knowledge and every domain of thought” (29).

existence,³² the logical possibility of miracles if God exists should certainly be understandable to even the most devout atheist. As Moreland and Craig say, “Only to the extent that one has good grounds for believing atheism to be true could one be rationally justified in denying the possibility of miracles.”³³ Indeed, if science has truly demonstrated that the universe is a closed continuum of cause and effect, then we must exclude the miraculous.³⁴ But if there is a supernatural being who exercises influence over the natural order of things, the miraculous is possible. Further, if this supernatural being is a *personal God* who cares about his creation, the miraculous is not only possible, but to be expected.³⁵

In fact, we regularly experience the suspension of natural laws by means of a higher power acting on them. I once heard philosopher and apologist Paul Copan speaking at a conference where he demonstrated how he liked to prove miracles could happen when addressing a secular audience. He stood stationary for a moment. Then he lifted his arm up. Inertia had been overthrown and nature had been defied! Or consider this example:

It is said that a miracle is impossible because it implies a disturbance and reconstruction of material relations. That a pebble might have been thrown by the waves fifty feet farther inland, would have required larger waves, a higher wind, a greater difference of temperature, a different relation to the sun, a change in all planetary bodies, and hence, a different adjustment in all their past history. It is impossible that the pebble should have been thrown fifty feet farther inland. But along comes a boy, chasing his butterfly, or whistling his tune; he picks up the pebble and hurls it at a squirrel. Behold! The impossible is accomplished, and the universe is reconstructed!³⁶

32. The general apologetics books in the Bibliography offer helpful discussion on that topic.

33. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations* 568.

34. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* 471.

35. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* 52 says, “If there is such a God, we would expect him to interact with his creation, at least occasionally, on a personal basis in response to the prayers of his creatures. Yet we would not expect him to intervene in the natural order frequently, for that would remove the predictability of the consequences of our actions and cause us confusion.”

36. H. Everest, *The Divine Demonstration: A Textbook of Christian Evidence* (Christian Publishing Company 1884) 23.

While there is something admittedly silly about these examples, they do make a point: a personal God who can act on nature makes the naturalistic argument nonsensical. As Poythress says, the God of the Bible is “a personal God, not a mechanical system. So he can bring about exceptions to the regularities when he wishes. Miracles are not only possible but understandable and natural, given the fact that at times God may have special purposes that lead to special actions.”³⁷ Or, to be more succinct, “If there is a God who can act, there can be acts of God.”³⁸

When approached this way, we might say that “natural law” is a description of how God ordinarily works in nature and “miracle” is a description of how God extraordinarily works. A helpful way of illustrating it is that God’s ordinary working is like a musician playing the music as it was composed and a miracle is an improvisation from that melody line (but still within the same piece of music).³⁹

Finally, it should be included that many objections to miracles are ethnocentric—the very thing so repellent to so many postmodern Westerners. It is rooted in the assumption that the modern, European, academic, naturalistic perspective is superior to all others, and does not allow for the humility to admit that it may be nothing more than the inability to rise above its own culturally shaped worldview.⁴⁰

Philosophical Objections. A recurring objection to miracles is that people in the ancient world believed in all sorts of myths, gods, and the like and we civilized 21st Century western thinkers are well beyond that.⁴¹

This objection clearly falls into the category of what C. S. Lew-

37. V. Poythress, *The Miracles of Jesus: How the Savior’s Mighty Acts Serve as Signs of Redemption* (Crossway 2016) 20.

38. Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* 209.

39. Thanks to Shane Scott for this point and illustration.

40. G. Boyd and P. Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Baker 2007) 27–28.

41. Hume, “Of Miracles,” 36 wrote, “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.”

is calls “chronological snobbery.”⁴² Do we really believe the ancients were so clueless as to not know that men who were dead for several days did not come back to life, men born blind did not suddenly start seeing, men could not walk on water, and five loaves of bread could not sufficiently feed 5,000 people—with more leftovers than the original offering? To say that the people of Jesus’ day were ready to believe in miracles because they did not understand the laws of nature is naïve.⁴³ As Lewis well argues, Joseph’s concern over Mary’s pregnancy was not due to what he did not know about the reproductive process but what he most certainly did know!⁴⁴

Further this argument begs the question, presuming that all people in the ancient world uncritically accepted miracles. By contrast, Harrison argues that much of the old mythology was dead, driven out by Greek philosophy.⁴⁵ While it is true that there was still belief in those things in some quarters, the same is true of our modern enlightened culture as well. Some uncritically disbelieve in miracles, some gullibly accept every alleged miracle, and some fall between the extremes. For anyone to say that we now live in an age where no critically thinking individual believes in miracles is flatly untrue.⁴⁶ Our time is not so dissimilar from theirs as we may suppose.⁴⁷

42. “The uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.” C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich 1966) 207.

43. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress 1996) 186n10. J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity* (DeWard Publishing 2017) 278–79 argues that the most uneducated person in society would be able to make such distinctions, going on to say, “the most unscientific men of common sense can know when a man is dead; when he is alive and active; when he has a fever; is a cripple; is paralyzed; etc. The cry, then, that the miracles of the New Testament were not wrought under ‘scientific conditions’ is totally irrelevant, and can mislead none but those who do not pause to think.”

44. Lewis, *Miracles* 48.

45. E. Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ* (Eerdmans 1977) 111.

46. In addition to the many who believe in New Testament miracles, this principle can be extended to continuationists, many of whom are intelligent, sophisticated people. By contrast, uncritical thinking is illustrated quite well by Hume himself who, after citing an example of a supposed miracle that had all of the criteria he said would be required to believe in a miracle, said, “And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation” (40).

47. L. Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Su-*

Religious Objections. Although there are other religious and theological objections that could be considered,⁴⁸ the one most frequently heard is that every religion points to its miracles as proof of its correctness, so they cancel one another out and no miracle can be trusted.⁴⁹

Again, this objection is flawed for a variety of reasons. First, it is simply not true that every religion features miracles. Among those that do, they are handled differently. The miracle stories surrounding the life of Buddha are not central to the teachings of Buddhism and the supernatural stories of Lao Tze are not relevant to the truth or falsity of Taoism. Similarly, the miraculous encounters between gods and humans in Hinduism occur in other realms and thus truly outside the scope of historical inquiry. No miracle claims at all are made for Muhammed in the Quran.⁵⁰

Second, this objection is rooted in the flawed logic that the mere presence of miracles in multiple traditions necessarily counteract one another. Even if all competing miracle claims had suffi-

pernatural (Zondervan 2018) 30 points to a Barna Research study he commissioned that shows 51% of U.S. adults believe the miracles of the Bible happened as they are described, 67% believe miracles are possible today, and only 20% were convinced that modern science had ruled out the possibility of miracles. As Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 48 says, “The contemporary secular, scientific worldview, devoid of the supernatural ... is not adequate to describe and interpret the breadth of human experience.”

48. See Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 44–50 for a good discussion of many such issues. One argument in particular that should be mentioned here is that Jesus’ miracles are merely copying from ancient myths. Common sources for this alleged copying include Apollonius of Tyana and the Egyptian god Horus. A closer examination shows that these sorts of supposedly-parallel myths either come from a time after Jesus (which would mean that any copying being done is the opposite of the allegation) or are not parallel at all. See C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (B & H Academic 2016) 678–685; M. Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic’s Challenges to Christianity* (Zondervan 2017) 85–103.

49. Hume, “On Miracles” 37–38 argues that the purpose of miracles is to prove their religion true (thus disproving other religions): “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.” For a thorough discussion of this issue, see D. Clark, “Miracles in the World Religions,” in *In Defense of Miracles* 199–213.

50. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* 537. Later oral traditions ascribe miracles to Muhammed.

cient evidence to take them seriously, they would only cancel each other out if the miracles “provide support for beliefs in those religions that are both incompatible and essential to those faiths.”⁵¹ This is to say that if all the miracles relate stories about a god or gods who care for people rather than providing unique, contradictory aspects of the religion in question, they do not logically contradict one another.

This leads to the final objection: it is false that the evidence for miracle claims in all religions are equal. In all cases outside the New Testament, the miracle stories do not appear until centuries after the events were said to have occurred,⁵² with no miracles attributed in the early and primary documents.⁵³ By contrast, the miracle claims related to Jesus appear early and often, in Christianity’s primary documents—which date to within a generation of Jesus—and documents both ambivalent and hostile to Christianity.

Geisler and Brooks conclude well:

Christianity has better evidence and more witnesses writing closer to the time of the events than any other religion. Besides this, no religion offers the kind of miracles that Christianity can claim. No other religion has the record of specific prophecy or divine deliverance that the Bible gives. And no other religion has any miracles that can be compared to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its grandeur or testimony.⁵⁴

The Miracles of Jesus as History

Even though the arguments against miracles fail, showing them to be unconvincing does not prove the miracles happened. What historical evidence do we have to show the believability of the miracles of Jesus? After all, no one—whether or not we believe in modern-day miracles—believes that miracles are normal. All other things being equal, we anticipate natural law to be the

51. R. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Zondervan 1988) 238.

52. G. Habermas and M. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel 2004) 143.

53. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* 538.

54. Geisler and Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* 98.

general way things operate. If miracles were common place, they would no longer be miraculous.

The Gospels as History. First, it should be noted that the Gospels present themselves as history. Luke's purpose statement (1.1–4) is clearly historical. Matthew and Mark do not contain a purpose statement, but they are undeniably of the same genre as Luke; if Luke is historical, all of the Synoptics are. John's purpose statement (20.30f), while more theological than historical, is rooted in the historical foundation of the narrative itself: John wants his readers to believe, but their belief should be based on the accounts (of the miracles!) he has relayed. All four gospels, then, intend to convey an accurate history. While the claim itself is not sufficient to prove historicity, it is essential.

The Impossibility of “Demythologizing” Jesus. One particular method of trying to eradicate the miracles from the Gospels not discussed above is the demythologization of the gospels.⁵⁵ Although there is more to the practice, a hallmark is to strip the miracles from the gospels. Unfortunately, to demythologize Jesus in this fashion cannot be done—because Jesus was never mythologized to begin with.

Manuscript Evidence. Although no autograph copies of the gospels exist, fragments of manuscripts go back to within a few decades⁵⁶ and almost-complete copies of Luke and John date to just over a century later.⁵⁷ The miracles of Jesus are present in all of these earliest manuscripts. As Bruce says, “Not even in the earliest Gospel strata can we find a non-supernatural Jesus.”⁵⁸ Not only is there no evidence of mythological development in the manuscripts, the manuscripts are so close to the date of the events in question that there is not enough time for a mythology to develop.

Coherence of the Story. Perhaps even more significant, the gospels only make sense with the miracles in place.⁵⁹ The miracles

55. German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) is among the best known to practice this method.

56. The oldest currently known fragment is P52, a few verses of John, which dates to as early as AD 125.

57. P75, containing most of Luke and John, dates to the early third century.

58. Bruce, *New Testament Documents* 62.

59. Much of this is drawn from C.A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars*

are not stories made up later and shoehorned into the narrative somehow; they belong there. His healings and exorcisms are an intrinsic part of his proclamation of the kingdom of God (Matt 10.1, 5–8; Mark 3.23–27; Luke 11.20). His miracles were viewed by himself and others as fulfillment of prophetic Scripture (Matt 11.2–6; *cf.* Isa 26.19; 35.5f; 61.1). He understood his entire mission in the context of his miracles, and expected others to do as well (Luke 4.16–19). In fact, the gospel authors saw his miracles as a revelation of his own identity: his authority being equal with that of the Son of Man (Mark 2.3–12 and Dan 7.13f); people falling down in shame of sinfulness before him like Isaiah did before God (Luke 5.3–10 and Isa 6.5–7); seeing Jesus in action is like seeing God in action (Mark 4.37–41 and Psalms 107.23–29). To strip the miracles out of the story is not to demythologize Jesus and figure out who he really was, but to eviscerate the story, leaving nothing at all behind.

The Connection of Jesus to Miracles after the Gospels. It is worth noting that the connection of Jesus with miracles does not end with the New Testament. The *Greek Magical Papyrus* (lines 3007–3041)⁶⁰ indicates that pagans invoked Jesus’ name to perform miracles. The Jewish Talmud discussed the legitimacy of being healed in the name of Jesus, indicating that some rabbis believed that it was better to die than to be healed in his name.⁶¹ Where might this broad testimony of unbelievers, Jew and Gentile alike, connecting the power of Jesus’ name and miracles have come from, if not an early source that Jesus himself actually performed miracles?

Historical Criteria. Perhaps most significant are historical criteria that can be applied to the miracles. These criteria are the very things historians can apply to any document to test its reliability.⁶² Consider how the miracles fare in regard to these tests.

Distort the Gospels (IVP Books 2006) 139–57.

60. See *Ibid.* 156–57 for the text.

61. *Ibid.* 157.

62. Admittedly, there is debate about various criteria of authenticity and how much weight they carry. Those listed here seem to be among the most “common sense” sort of criteria. See Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend* 376–380 for a helpful discussion of historical methodology.

Multiple Attestation. A key test of any event is multiple attestation. As indicated above, if multiple, independent witnesses testify to an event, it is more reliable.

To the believer, all of the Bible comes from a single source: God. This has the upside of giving confidence in its reliability, but provides little that will satisfy a skeptic. Here, it is helpful to allow the critic's own reckoning of the composition of the Gospels, for they will posit at least five unique sources: Mark, Matthew, Luke, Q, and John.⁶³ All five strands of testimony, as they consider the Gospels to have been composed, contain miracle stories.⁶⁴ Since the supposed Q document predates all of the gospels by their reckoning, it would be an independent strand of testimony dating back even closer to Jesus' life. Then, beyond the Gospels, Acts, various Pauline epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation,⁶⁵ all of which date to a generation after the time of Jesus, attest that he worked miracles.

In addition, there is independent testimony outside the New Testament. Josephus may have indicated that Jesus was "one who wrought surprising feats."⁶⁶ More certain is that of the Babylonian Talmud which, on more than one occasion, refers to Jesus as a sorcerer.⁶⁷ In fact, to the ancients who spoke of Jesus "the one option *not* on the table ... is that nothing took place; it is all made up in order to validate Jesus' status."⁶⁸

Opponents. What a character's opponents say about that individual is extremely relevant. Since an opponent would be extremely unlikely to willingly speak in favor of the person in question, it adds to the reliability of the testimony when they do. So, for ex-

63. Matthew's unique material is usually referred to as M and Luke's as L. Q is a hypothetical document (or perhaps oral tradition) of various sayings of Jesus found in Matt and Luke, but not Mark.

64. G. Habermas, "Did Jesus Perform Miracles?" in M. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Zondervan 1995) 129.

65. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability* 686.

66. *Antiquities*, 18.63–64. I say "may" because Josephus's passages on Jesus are notoriously debated and it is difficult to know for certain what he wrote and what was added later by Christian interpolators.

67. See Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* 254.

68. D. Bock, *Who Is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith* (Howard Books 2012) 71.

ample, when the Talmud says both that it is better to die than to be healed in the name of Jesus *and* that Jesus was a sorcerer, it suggests that there is something to the claim that Jesus did amazing things. In the Gospels themselves, Jesus enemies' witnessed his healings and exorcisms (Mark 2.1–12; 3.22; Luke 13.10–17) and knew about his “nature miracles” (Matt 28.11–15; Mark 5.40–42; John 11.47f). They did not distinguish between the two types of miracles,⁶⁹ nor suggest that either type did not actually happen.⁷⁰

The closest to this Jesus' enemies come is their attempt to explain away the miracles as being wrought by the power of Beelzebul (*e.g.*, Matt 12.24). But even this sort of charge (which clearly would not have been invented by the church!) would not be advanced unless it was needed to explain away some quite remarkable phenomena.⁷¹

Dissimilarity. What may be an unexpected criterion of authenticity is an event being unlike other records of similar events: its dissimilarity to an established pattern. For example, other miracle stories from Second Temple Judaism were said to invoke a deity, involve elaborate prayers and incantation, or use ritual paraphernalia. Thus, one would expect a fabricated story of Jesus to do the same.⁷² The fact that Jesus' miracle stories do not follow the pattern of the others suggests that it is not merely copying a known motif.

Embarrassment. The presence of details that would be embarrassing or otherwise detrimental to the author's purpose adds credence to an account's historicity. Why, after all, would the author invent something that runs counter to his intent? In regard to miracles, consider that Jesus' family sought to restrain him due to negative reactions to his miracles (Mark 3.20–35), he was incapable of performing miracles in his own hometown due to the people's lack of faith (Mark 6.5), a Gentile woman out-argues him, convincing him to perform a miracle he didn't really want to (Mark 7.24–30),

69. Some critical scholars differentiate between the two and give greater credence to the healing miracles—though in the same breath writing them off as psychosomatic cures or other such things. See Blomberg, *Historical Reliability* 688–695.

70. Habermas, “Did Jesus Perform Miracles?” 129–30.

71. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* 187.

72. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability* 684.

and, on one occasion, it takes Jesus two tries to get a miracle right (Mark 8.22–26).⁷³ And it is highly unlikely that, when Jesus is already being called a drunkard by his enemies (Matt 11.19), one of his biographers would invent a story about him mass producing the best wine anyone had ever tasted (John 2.1–11)!⁷⁴ Of course, you might chafe at the negative way I have presented these miracles and suggest an alternate interpretation that removes the embarrassment. But that is precisely the point: a forger would leave no room for the slightest possibility of embarrassment!

The Resurrection. A defense of the historicity of the resurrection is well outside the scope of this manuscript, but it is worth noting that the best attested miracle is Jesus' resurrection. Since it is the single miracle that substantiates his every claim, "If Jesus arose from the dead, the other miracles will be admitted."⁷⁵

General Reliability. Finally, in light of skeptics who dismiss the miracles because they have already dismissed the gospels as hopelessly inaccurate, it should be said that any evidence for the reliability of the corpus extends to the reliability of the individual narratives within it.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Even after all of this, miracles have not been proven. Showing the weakness of the objections and presenting a positive case for the reliability of the historical record are important steps—and there are good reasons to believe in the miracles of Jesus—but this is ultimately another aspect of the Christian life that is a matter of faith. The goal has been to show that it is a reasonable faith, for the Bible never commends blind faith, but the decision to believe or disbelieve the evidence remains in the hands of the reader.

73. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus* 140–41.

74. Habermas, "Did Jesus Perform Miracles?" 131.

75. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity* 281. See Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* for a defense of the resurrection.

76. This manuscript is already too long to incorporate a lengthy section arguing all of the ins and outs of the general reliability of the gospels. In addition to the books already listed, I would also recommend Timothy McGrew's video series on the topic and Peter Williams' "New Evidence the Gospels Were Based on Eyewitness Accounts." Both can be found on YouTube.

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I Am the Resurrection

Miracles in Culmination

Tommy Peeler

How can we adequately express the importance of the resurrection of Christ? Paul wrote, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day, according to the Scripture” (1 Cor 15.3f). The death, burial, resurrection, and appearance of Christ are the most important events in the life of the most important man who ever lived.¹ No series of events have impacted world history like these events have. When Christ was raised from the dead, the world was truly turned upside down. The resurrection of Christ is not simply the culmination of all that we have studied this week, but it is the center point of all history and the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24.25–27, 44–47; Acts 17.2f; 26.22f).

The Miracles Point to the Resurrection

The resurrection of Christ is the climax of all the miracles of Jesus. The other miracles of Jesus foreshadow His own resurrection. John 4.46–54 records the account of a royal official whose son was sick and at the point of death. The official begs Jesus to come down “before my child dies,” (v 49) and Jesus answers, “Go, your son lives” (v 50). Vv 47, 49 use the words “death” and “dies” and vv 50, 51, 53 use the words “lives” and “living.” The next account

1. He is the most important man because He is God come in the flesh (John 1.1, 14).

in John 5.1–18 is of Jesus’ healing a man who has been lame for thirty-eight years. Jesus tells the man, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk” (v 8).² The following discourse by Jesus beginning in v 19 ties to both of these miracles. Jesus says, “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes” (v 21). The word “raises” in v 21 is from the same verb translated “Get up” in 5.8.³ Even now, Jesus says, many who are dead are listening to the Son of God and are receiving life (John 5.24–26). The emphasis on the dead being given life points to the miracle of John 4.46–54.⁴ Both of these miracles ultimately point to His own resurrection. They also point to a future resurrection in which all those in the graves will hear His voice and come forth, some to life and others to judgment (John 5.28f).⁵

Jesus casts out a violent demon in Mark 9.14–29.⁶ When Jesus casts the demon out, in a final act of defiance the demon throws the boy into convulsions as he becomes like a corpse and the crowd thinks that he is dead. Jesus takes him by the hand and raises him up, and he gets up (Mark 9.26f).⁷ This miracle is to “prefigure Jesus’ death and resurrection.”⁸

The word used in Mark 9.27 to say Jesus “raised” the demon-possessed boy is the verb most often used for the resurrection

2. John 5.8 uses the imperative *egeire* from the dictionary form *egeiro*.

3. The first verb in John 5.21 is *egeiro* from the same lexical form mentioned in fn 2.

4. John 5.21 uses a compound word, *zoopoiei*, twice, and a form of *zoe* is also used in John 5.24–26, 29. All of these words are connected to the verb *zao* used in 4.50f, 53.

5. 1 Cor 15.12–19 demonstrates the link between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection at the end of time. Either one of these resurrections necessary implies the other.

6. The account also appears in Matt but is much fuller in Mark. “Mk 9:14–29 consists of 272 words, whereas Lk 9:37–43a tells the same story in 144 words, and Mt 17:14–20a in a mere 110.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Eerdmans 2002) 362. Mark’s accounts are frequently longer than the parallels in Matt and Luke. Compare, for example, Mark 5.1–20 with Matt 8.28–34 and Luke 8.26–39.

7. Jesus took the demon-possessed boy by the hand and he is “raised” and “got up.” The words “raised” and “got up” and taking by the hand all appear in the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead in Mark 5.41f.

8. J. Brooks, *Mark* (Broadman 1991) 146. Also notice in the placement of the casting out of the demon in Mark 9.14–29 that Jesus prophesies His death and resurrection immediately afterward in Mark 9.30–32.

of Jesus.⁹ This word is used repeatedly of Jesus' resurrection in the gospels.¹⁰ In the epistles the use of this word is applied to the resurrection.¹¹ Additionally, the word is often used of other miracles. For example, it is used of Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8.15; Mark 1.31), the paralyzed man (Matt 9.5–7; Mark 2.9, 11f; Luke 5.23f), the man with the withered hand (Mark 3.3; Luke 6.8), and giving sight to the blind man (Mark 10.49). This word is in the account of raising of a widow's son (Luke 7.14), the raising of Jairus' daughter (Matt 9.25; Mark 5.41; Luke 8.54), and the raising of Lazarus (John 12.1, 9, 17). This word describes the dead being raised after His resurrection (Matt 27.52).¹² These miracles all foreshadow His own resurrection.

The verb "he got up"¹³ in Mark 9.27 is also used in the context of Jesus' resurrection.¹⁴ This word occurs frequently in the context of Jesus' miracles. It is used in the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4.39), the healing of the paralyzed man (Luke 5.25), the healing of the man with the withered hand (Luke 6.8), the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5.42; Luke 8.55), and the raising of Lazarus (John 11.23).¹⁵ Often the related noun is used of the resurrection.¹⁶ The fact so many accounts use both of these words that are so

9. The verb is *egeiren* from *egeiro*.

10. Matt 16.21; 17.9, 23; 20.19; 26.32; 27.63f; 28.6f Mark 14.28; Luke 9.22; 24.6, 34; John 2.19, 20, 22; 21.14.

11. "The epistles of the NT never use 'egeiro', except in Phil 1.17, in any sense but that of resurrection from the dead." L. Coenen, "egeiro" in C. Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan 1986) 3.280. Coenen may be guilty of an overstatement and he may be overlooking a few metaphorical uses of this word in passages like Rom 13.11; Eph 5.14; and Jam 5.15.

12. The miracles in which Jesus raises the dead are especially foreshadowing His own resurrection. Jesus raising the dead is in effect an acted-out parable of His own resurrection. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker 2011) 237.

13. The verb is *aneste* from *anistemi*.

14. The word is used of the resurrection of Jesus in Mark 8.31; 9.31; 10.34; Luke 18.33; 24.7, 12, 46; John 20.9; Acts 2.24, 32; 17.3, 31; 1 Thes 4.14.

15. This verb appears 107 times in the New Testament, but "most instances of it do not refer to the resurrection." L. Coenan, "anastasis" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3.276. It is used of the resurrection of Christ in Acts 17.3, 31; 1 Thes 4.14, 16.

16. The noun is used 42 times, and most of these times refer to the resurrection of Christ. In 1 Cor 15 the verb *egeiro* is used 19 times. The noun *anastasis* is used 4 times.

frequently connected with the resurrection of Jesus underscores even more that these miracles all foreshadow the greatest miracle of Christ's resurrection.

It would be possible to go into much more depth on how the miracles foreshadow the resurrection. For example, notice how the words used in Jesus' eating with the two disciples in Emmaus in Luke 24.30 "took the bread," "blessed," "breaking," and "giving" are the same as the language of the feeding of the 5000 in Luke 9.16. The feeding of the 5000 foreshadows the resurrection.

Death: The Final Frontier

Death was the final frontier for Jesus to conquer. There are three records of Jesus' raising people from the dead: the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7.11–17), Jairus' daughter (Matt 9.18–26; Mark 5.21–43; Luke 8.26–39), and Lazarus (John 11.1–46).¹⁷ Even those who had great confidence in Jesus' ability to heal did not seem to entertain the possibility that Jesus could raise the dead. Death was final in their minds, and dead people stayed dead.¹⁸

Jairus was a synagogue official. In the gospel of Luke synagogues are often places of hostility toward Jesus (Luke 6.6–11; 13.10–17) and His followers (Luke 12.11; 21.12). The only other synagogue official in Luke is indignant when Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13.14). However, Jairus' only daughter is at the point of death (Luke 8.42),¹⁹ and he knows that Jesus is his only hope for her to get well (Mark 5.22f).²⁰ However, before Jesus arrives, the girl dies,

17. There may have been other cases of Jesus raising the dead that are not recorded (John 20.30f; Matt 11.5; Luke 7.22). When Jesus sent the twelve on the limited commission, He told them to "raise the dead" (Matt 10.8). There are two cases of raising the dead in Acts (9.36–43; 20.7–12).

18. Sometimes unbelievers act as if ancient people did not understand this. G. Boyd and E. Boyd, *Letters From A Skeptic* (Cook Communications 1994) 99–100. Even the next few paragraphs show how well this fact was understood.

19. It is only in Luke 8.42 that we find that this was the only daughter of Jairus. On several occasions Luke mentions only children's being blessed by the miracles of Jesus (Luke 7.12; 9.38). In a similar way the account in Luke 9.37–43 is paralleled in Matt 17.14–20 and Mark 9.14–29, but only in Luke is it mentioned that the son is an "only son."

20. The greatly abbreviated account of Matthew pictures the daughter as dead from the opening request of Jairus (Matt 9.18).

and all who care for the girl know that this is the end of the line. The friends of Jairus arrive with the bad news, “Your daughter has died,” and they ask, “Why trouble the teacher anymore?” (Mark 5.35; Luke 8.49). While Jairus and his friends seem to believe Jesus can raise a twelve-year old who is at the point of death, they do not seem to entertain the possibility He could raise the dead. When Jesus told the mourners gathered at the home of Jairus that the girl was not dead but asleep, they laughed at Him (Mark 5.39f; Luke 8.52f). But Jesus took her by the hand and instructed her to arise (*egeire*), and she arose (*aneste*) (Mark 5.41f).

When Jesus comes to the house of Mary and Martha, both express their confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal. Both of the sisters affirm, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11.21, 32), but neither seems to contemplate the possibility of immediate resurrection for Lazarus. Even when Jesus tells Martha, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11.23), Martha responds, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (v 24).²¹ The crowds understand Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying (v 37), but they have no expectation of what He is about to do. When Jesus says, “Remove the stone,” Martha objects that he has been dead four days and his body will stink (v 39). While these have no trouble accepting that Jesus can heal the sick of terminal diseases, they do not grasp that He is about to raise the dead. Death was truly the final frontier for Jesus to conquer.

The Disciples Are Slow to Believe Even When Faced with the Empty Tomb and the Risen Lord

This same acceptance of the finality of death can be seen in the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself. After the apostles confess Jesus as the Christ (Matt 16.13–20), He begins to diligently teach them that He will go to Jerusalem to be rejected and be killed, but He also that He will be raised on the third day (Matt 16.21; 17.22f; 20.17–19). Peter is so shocked by Jesus’ remark about suffering that he takes Jesus aside and

21. The gospel of John regularly ties the resurrection to “the last day” (John 6.39f, 44, 54; 11.24; 12.48).

rebukes Him (Matt 16.21–23; Mark 8.31–33). The disciples do not understand when Jesus tells them of His approaching death (Luke 9.43–45; 18.31–34; Mark 9.32) or of the resurrection of the dead (Mark 9.9f). The apostles have trouble reconciling their belief that Jesus is the Messiah with what He says about how He will suffer and die. Only after His resurrection do the disciples put these things together (John 2.19–22; 12.16; 20.9; Luke 24.6–8, 25, 45).

Between the death of Christ and His resurrection, there is no indication that His disciples anticipated the resurrection. “Apparently no follower of Jesus retained faith and optimism after the crucifixion.”²² The chief priests and Pharisees mention what Jesus said about His resurrection to Pilate in order to have greater security around the tomb (Matt 27.62–66), but there is no record of the disciples considering the resurrection. It is striking that on this point His enemies are paying more careful attention to Jesus’ words than His disciples.

When the disciples are confronted with the empty tomb, they are still slow to consider the possibility of resurrection. Mary Magdalene’s response to finding the empty tomb is, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they laid Him” (John 20.2, 13). In spite of the empty tomb, she is still weeping (vv 11, 13, 15). Then she speaks to a man she thinks is the gardener: “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you laid Him, and I will take Him away” (v 15). The women who come to the tomb in Luke are perplexed that they could not find the body of Jesus (Luke 24.3f). When the apostles hear the report of the women about the resurrection, “These words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe” (Luke 24.11).²³ Because the two on the way to Emmaus are amazed at the reports of the empty

22. L. Morris, “Resurrection of Jesus” in G. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans 1988) 4.151. Luke 24.21 may provide proof of this.

23. As has often been pointed out, if the gospel accounts of the resurrection were simply made up, why state that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women? Josephus writes, “But let not a single witness be credited, but three, or two at the least, and those such whose testimony is confirmed by their good lives. But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex” (*Antiquities* 4.8.15). *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Trans. W. Whiston (Henrickson 1987).

tomb and the resurrection, Jesus rebukes them as being foolish and “slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24.22–25). The disciples are not expecting a resurrection but they fear an enemy attack (John 20.19). When Thomas is told by the other disciples that Jesus has risen, he said, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20.25).

The resurrection of Jesus is so shocking that even seeing does not equal believing. When the risen Christ stands before the apostles, they are startled and think they were seeing a spirit” (Luke 24.37). Jesus asks, “Why do doubts arise in your hearts?” (v 38); when He shows them His hands and feet, they do not believe because of joy and amazement (vv 39–41). In Matt 28.16–20, Jesus appears to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, but some were doubtful (v 17).²⁴ The last thing the apostles and disciples expected was the resurrection. Even when confronted with the empty tomb and the risen Lord, they are still reluctant to believe.

The Resurrection of Jesus: A Source of Constant Controversy in Acts

There is nothing that the apostles preach in the book of Acts that engenders as much opposition as their preaching of the resurrection. In Acts 4.1f the Sadducees are grieved the apostles are teaching in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.²⁵ In Athens some derisively dismiss Paul as an “idle babbler” and “a proclaimer of strange deities” because he is preaching Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17.18). Paul’s mention of the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection led some to sneer and their decision effectively ends his sermon (vv 31f).²⁶ When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, he said, “I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on

24. The same note also appears in Mark 16.11, 13f, though I have placed them in a footnote because of the questionable manuscript evidence for Mark 16.9–20.

25. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of Christ (Matt 22.23; Mark 12.18; Luke 20.27; Acts 23.8). Josephus also mentions this in *Jewish War* 2.8.14 (164–165) and *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.4. A brief picture of the Sadducees appears in E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. (Eerdmans 2003) 519–20.

26. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress 2003). Chapter 2 gives information about ancient pagan concepts on death and life after death.

trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23.6). Paul’s statement about the resurrection is not simply a ploy to separate the Pharisees and Sadducees, but he consistently maintains that this belief in the resurrection is the difference between him and his Jewish opponents (Acts 24.14f; 26.6–8; 28.20).²⁷ Even Festus, the Roman governor, recognized that the case against Paul concerned “a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive” (Acts 25.19). The apostles’ preaching of the resurrection is controversial among both the Jews and the Gentiles. It is a cause of contention among the various groups of the Jews. The preaching of the resurrection causes controversy all the way from Jerusalem, where Acts begins, to Rome, where the book ends.

Is It Reasonable to Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus?

The main purpose for this lecture is not to provide evidences for the reality of the resurrection. However, it is difficult to conceive of how Christianity even survived if Jesus was not raised.²⁸ Christians were following a man who was rejected and sentenced to execution by both Jewish and Roman officials. He was killed in a way that was degrading to both the Jews (Deut 21.22f)²⁹ and the

27. *Ibid.* Chapters 3 and 4 deal with concepts of the Jews as can be gleaned from the Old Testament and the intertestamental times. Also see C. Brown, “Resurrection” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3.261–75. It is not that all of Paul’s Jewish foes deny any resurrection of the dead (Acts 24.14f), but Paul teaches the resurrection of Jesus within history is proof that He is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah and assures the resurrection of all at the end of history. This is the idea of Christ as “the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Cor 15.20, 23). Similar ideas are set forth in Col 1.18 and Rev 1.5.

28. Timothy Keller writes, “Every effort to account for the birth of the church apart from Jesus’s resurrection flies in the face of what we know about first-century history and culture.” *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books 2008) 219.

29. It is striking that in the New Testament the preachers and writers constantly call attention to the shameful nature of the death of Jesus on the tree (Acts 5.30; 10.39; 13.29; Gal 3.13; 1 Pet 2.24). Deut 21.22f states that the one who hangs on a tree is under the curse of God. While Deut 21 is not talking of death via crucifixion but the exposure of the criminal’s dead body after execution, the Jews made the connection between death via crucifixion and hanging on a tree. *4QpNah* and *Temple Scroll* 64.6–13 speaks of hanging a man on a tree so he shall die and those who are hanged upon a tree are accursed of God. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. 2nd ed. (Penguin 1975). Page 232 has the Nahum commentary and page 251 has the Temple Scroll. See also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 89 for a dispute about the Christian use of Deut 21.22f to apply to the Messiah.

Romans.³⁰ How did belief in Jesus as the Messiah survive His death when other movements claiming their leaders as Messiahs disappeared at the leader's death?³¹

How do we account for the change in the apostles without the resurrection? The leaders of Christianity (except Jesus) had shown themselves to be profoundly unstable. They had constantly argued about who would be the greatest (Mark 9.33–37; 10.35–45; Luke 22.24–27), but they had forsaken Jesus in the garden at the time of His arrest (Matt 26.47–56; Mark 14.43–50). Even the strongest of disciples fled in shame and disgrace, leaving Jesus alone (Mark 14.51f). They did not understand His teachings (Mark 6.45–52; 8.14–21)³² and sometimes displayed a stunning lack of faith (Matt 17.14–20; Mark 9.14–29; Luke 9.37–43). In the book of Acts these Christians were constantly persecuted,³³ and as the Jews in Rome said, “For concerning this sect, it is known to us that is spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28.22).³⁴ What were the odds that this movement would even survive a generation? Yet within fifty days of the crucifixion, this movement gained three thousand more followers right in the place these events transpired (Acts 2.41). The growth of Jesus' disciples in this city continued even as the opposition intensified (Acts 4.4; 5.14; 6.7; 12.25; 16.5; 19.20; 28.30f). The willingness of the apostles to endure persecution (Acts 5.40f) and even be killed for their faith (Acts 12.1–11) is remarkable when we consider how cowardly they were in the garden. What transformed these weak men into pillars of strength? It is hard to see how anything less than the

30. This is portrayed in the Alexamenos Graffiti. A picture and an explanation are provided by E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* 596–97. Cicero speaks of crucifixion in *Against Verres* 2.5.161–170.

31. A good article that gives information on one such leader is C. Evans, “Simon Ben Kosiba” in C. Evans and S. Porter, eds., *The Dictionary of New Testament Background* (InterVarsity Press 2000) 1112–16.

32. The disciples look particularly bad in the gospel of Mark. C. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Broadman and Holman 1997) 119–20.

33. Acts 4.1–22; 5.17–26; 8.1–3; 9.1f; 14.19f; 16.22–24 are a few examples. As we saw earlier, there is no message for which they are persecuted more than their preaching of the resurrection of Jesus.

34. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. He describes Christians as a “class hated for their abominations.”

resurrection could have made such a drastic difference in the disciples.

Muslim author Reza Aslan in his book *Zealot* tries to deal with the subject of the resurrection of Jesus in a chapter called “If Christ Has Not Been Raised.” While Azlan’s purpose is ultimately to deny belief in the gospels and their account of the resurrection of Jesus, he makes, in my estimation, a stronger statement in favor of the resurrection of Jesus than against it. He states that our immediate response to the resurrection may be to write it off “as a lie” and “the product of a deludable mind” (174):

However, there is this nagging fact to consider: one after another of those who claimed to have witnessed the risen Jesus went to their own gruesome death refusing to recant their testimony. That is not, in itself, unusual. Many zealous Jews died horribly for refusing to deny their beliefs. But these first followers of Jesus were not being asked to reject matters of faith based on events that took place centuries, if not millennia, before, They were being asked to deny something they themselves personally, directly encountered.³⁵

How Does the Resurrection of Jesus Relate to Our Look at the Miracles This Week?

There are other ways to look at the miracles of Jesus than the way we have viewed them this week. This week we have emphasized the miracles of Jesus stress Jesus as Creator, King, and Redeemer. It is not always easy to classify which miracles and which passages go with which of these themes. For example, the most extensive chapter on the resurrection in the epistles is 1 Cor 15. This chapter describes the resurrection of Jesus in terms of His role as Creator. Adam is specifically mentioned in 1 Cor 15.22, 45, and vv 21 and 47 clearly refer to him. Vv 21f allude to the story of Gen 3.17–19 and the entrance of death into the world through Adam’s sin and v 45 quotes from Gen 2.7. Christ, “the last Adam,” brings life, just as the first Adam introduced death. Christ is also pictured in this

35. R. Aslan, *Zealot* (Random House 2013) 174. Aslan on page 175 makes the argument that the very fact that many still acknowledge Jesus as Messiah while those who came before and after Him are forgotten is a reason not to immediately dismiss His claims. I believe Aslan raises questions for which he does not have good answers.

chapter as Ruler or King. Christ reigns and will continue to do so until He has defeated His last enemy (1 Cor 15.24–28). These verses pick up the wording of Psa 8.6 and 110.1³⁶ and tell us the last enemy that He will abolish is death. Vv 50–57 explain how Christ will completely conquer death at His return. 1 Cor 15 also reveals Christ as Redeemer who saves (v 2), dies for our sins (v 3), forgives our sins (v 17), saves us from perishing (v 18), will make us alive (v 22), and brings victory over sin and death (vv 54–58). The distinctions between these categories are not always hard and fast.

The Resurrection Demonstrates Jesus as Creator

The miracle of the resurrection stresses Christ as Creator. Repeatedly, Acts stresses that while wicked men put Christ to death, God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2.22–24; 3.13–15; 4.10; 5.31; 10.39f; 13.27–30). The resurrection of Jesus was God, the Supreme Judge, overturning the verdict of a lower court. In Acts 3.15, Jesus is called the “Prince of Life” (NASB). The word for “Prince” is used only four times in the New Testament.³⁷ The other passages that use the word are Acts 5.31 and Heb 2.10; 12.2. This word indicates a leader or ruler, one who begins something, an originator or founder.³⁸ Jesus is described as “the Life” and the One who gives life (John 1.4; 5.21; 6.33, 35, 48, 51, 54; 8.12; 11.25; 14.6). “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5.26). How can the Lord and the originator and Creator of all life ever be put to death? Obviously, only if He lays down His life (John 10.17f) since it is impossible for death to hold Him in its power (Acts 2.24).

The resurrection of Jesus is tied to God’s role as Creator. In Rom 4.17–25, God is described as One who “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (4.17). The supreme illustration

36. Psa 110 is a royal psalm, and these psalms stress the role of the king. This psalm finds fulfillment in the Messiah (Matt 22.41–46), but the Jewish people would understand the Messiah as a king like David in light of Psa 110.

37. The dictionary form of the word is *archegos*.

38. W. Arndt, F. Danker, W. Bauer, and F. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press 2000) 138–39.

of God's giving life to the dead is that He "raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (4.24). God provides hints of this glorious resurrection of Jesus throughout history as He brings life out of death. Abraham is "as good as dead," and Sarah's womb is described as dead (4.19), but the God gives Isaac to a couple who was old, advanced in age, with Sarah being past childbearing (Gen 18.11). God's bringing life out of death in the case of Isaac foreshadows God's raising Jesus from the dead.³⁹ The God who raises Jesus will raise our mortal bodies as well (Rom 8.11; 2 Cor 4.14). The resurrection demonstrates God as Creator, who through Christ gives life to all.

Clearly, each instance in which Jesus raises the dead is a demonstration of the fact He is the Creator who brings life out of death. The Creator holds life and death in His hands,⁴⁰ and nothing is too difficult for Him (Gen 18.14). He is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11.25). As Paul asks, "Why is it considered incredible among you if God does raise the dead?" (Acts 26.8).

Miracles that especially stress Jesus' role as Creator are miracles of giving sight to the blind.⁴¹ The first recorded words of the Creator are, "Let there be light" (Gen 1.3). The Creator gives light (2 Cor 4.6), and Jesus is the light (Matt 4.14–16; Luke 2.32; John 1.4–9; 8.12, 12; 9.5; 12.46). John 1.1–3 speaks of Jesus' role in creation and then describes Jesus as "the true Light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man" (John 1.9). The statement that Jesus is "the light of the world" (John 8.12; 9.5) is made in connection with His opening the eyes of the man born blind in John 9. It is interesting that there is no direct parallel to Jesus' opening the eyes of the blind in the ministries of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha.⁴² There is

39. Heb 11.17–19 shows that Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus, but even the birth of Isaac also foretells the resurrection.

40. Deut 32.39; 1 Sam 2.6; 2 Kng 5.7.

41. Jesus gives sight to the blind in Matt 9.27–31; 11.5; 12.22–24; 15.29–31; 20.29–34; 21.14; Mark 8.22–26; 10.46–52; Luke 4.18; 7.21f; 18.35–43; John 9.1–41; 10.21; 11.37. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans 1971) 475, says, "There are more miracles of giving sight to the blind recorded of Jesus than healings in any other category."

42. The closest parallels in the Old Testament are in the ministry of Elisha in 2 Kng 6.17f, 20. There are prophecies in Isa 29.18; 35.5f; 42.6f which were applied to the Messianic age.

also no direct parallel in the book of Acts.⁴³ When Jesus gave the twelve the limited commission (Matt 10.1, 8; Luke 9.1), and sent out the seventy (Luke 10.1–20),⁴⁴ He instructed them to perform miracles, but there is no reference to His instruction telling them to give sight to the blind. The words of the blind man seem to be literally true when he said, “Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind” (John 9.32). It is also striking how often Jesus’ opening the eyes of the blind is tied to His role as the son of David (Matt 9.27; 12.22f; 20.30f; 21.14f; Mark 10.47f; Luke 18.38f). The Lord is the one who gives people sight (Exod 4.11) and opens the eyes of the blind (Psa 146.8).⁴⁵ The fact that these miracles are unique to Jesus highlights His role in creation (John 1.1–3; Col 1.15–17; Heb 1.1f; Rev 5.13f).

Other examples also reveal how the miracles connect with creation. In Mark 7.31–37 Jesus heals a deaf man who has a speech impediment. The statement is made that “He has done all things well.” This statement “echoes the words of Gen 1.31 regarding God’s work at creation.”⁴⁶

The Resurrection Demonstrates Jesus as King

In Acts 2.22–36 Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost emphasizes Jesus as King. The sermon mentions David three times (Acts 2.25, 29, 34). Peter quotes from portions of Psa 16, 132, and 110. His interpretation of these psalms is built on a number of presuppositions that he would have shared with his audience.⁴⁷

43. The closest parallel in Acts is in Ananias laying his hands on Saul in Acts 9.12, 17f; 22.11–13. Paul strikes Elymas blind in Acts 13.6–12, but he is not recorded as giving sight to anyone.

44. While Jesus does not specifically commission the seventy to do miracles in Luke 10.1–16, they did cast out demons according to Luke 10.17–20.

45. God is also described as a God who “sees” and “hears” (Exod 2.24; 3.7, 9; 12.13; Deut 5.28; Isa 37.17; Zech 7.11–13). This contrasts the true God to idols who are blind and deaf (Psa 115.3–8; 135.15–18). This thought is from C. D. C. Howard, “Blindness and Deafness” in J. Green *et al.*, eds. *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Intervarsity Press 1992) 81–82.

46. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*. WBC (Word 1989) 397.

47. The idea and much of the wording comes from L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Sacra Pagina (Liturgical Press 1992) 54.

First, the psalms were written by David.⁴⁸ Second, David was anointed of God. Third, God promised an eternal dynasty to David through David's descendants. Fourth, the things spoken of in the psalms will refer to David or to his descendant, the Messiah⁴⁹

Psalm 16 is a personal plea by David to the Lord for deliverance and an expression of his confidence or trust that the Lord will deliver him. The Psalm, described in the heading as a *Mikhtam* of David, continually uses the terms "I," "me," and "my" to describe his experiences. It describes the rescue of David from a near-death experience. While he was delivered from many near-death experiences⁵⁰ eventually David, Israel's King and God's holy one, died (1 Kng 2.1–12; 1 Chr 29.28).⁵¹ Peter also said that David "died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2.29). Peter says of David, "He looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay" (Acts 2.31). In Acts 13 Paul uses the same passage, Psa 16, saying that David "served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay" (Acts 13.36). However, Paul argues that the words of this Psalm find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. Paul says, "He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay" (v 34). Paul quotes Psa 16.1, saying, "You will not allow

48. In the book of Psalms itself, 73 of the Psalms are connected with David. In the New Testament several Psalms are connected with David that are not in the Hebrew Old Testament. For example, Psa 2 is not connected with David in the Old Testament, but Acts 4.25–27 introduces a quote from it with the words, "who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David, Your servant said..." Heb 4.7 does the same thing with its use of Psa 95.

49. Heb 7.1–10 expresses the close relationship between the man and his descendants in their actions. Abraham paid a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek (7.4), and through Abraham's actions his great grandson, Levi, is said to pay tithes (7.9f). Based upon such logic, it is easy to see Peter's argument in Acts 2.

50. 1 Sam 18.10f; 19.8–10, 11; 20.3; 23.19–29; 2 Sam 17.1–4; 21.15–17 are some examples of David being delivered from near-death experiences.

51. In a sense every delivery of God's people from a near death experience is a foreshadowing of the final deliverance of the believer in the resurrection (2 Cor 1.8–11; 2 Tim 3.11; 4.16–18). In 2 Cor 4.13f Paul quotes Psa 116.10. Psa 116 describes deliverance from death, and 2 Cor 4 is about the resurrection. In such cases, "death is momentarily put in check, but never into checkmate." R. Oster, Jr., *I Corinthians*. 3rd ed. College Press NIV Commentary (College Press 2005) 370.

your Holy One to undergo decay” (Acts 13.35) and again, “but He whom God raised did not undergo decay” (v 37). When David died and was buried, all in Jerusalem knew the location of his tomb. David’s body did undergo decay. Who is buried in David’s tomb? Jesus is a different story. He died and was buried, but He was raised from the dead and His body did not undergo decay. No one is buried in Jesus’ tomb. The promise of Psalm 16 that God’s Holy One would not undergo decay found its ultimate fulfillment in the resurrection of King Jesus.

Peter quotes from Psa 132.11 in Acts 2.30 saying God would seat one of David’s descendants on the throne. Psa 132 is a royal psalm that retells the promises recorded in 2 Sam 7 and 1 Chr 17. 1 Chr 22.9f and 28.3–6 use the words of 2 Sam 7.13f about the Father and Son relationship between God and the King and the words about David’s son and applies them to Solomon. The words about the building God’s house are also applied to Solomon. However, Solomon died (1 Kng 11.43; 2 Chr 9.31), and the temple that he built was destroyed (2 Kng 25.9; 2 Chr 36.19; Jer 52.13). However, in Jesus, the Father/Son relationship was given a whole new depth of meaning (Matt 3.17; 17.5; Heb 1.5). While Solomon’s temple was made by hands (Acts 7.47f), Jesus promises to build a temple not made by hands (John 2.19–22; Mark 14.58).⁵² Jesus, not Solomon, is the ultimate king from the line of David.

Peter argues that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2.33) and quotes Psa 110.1 with emphasis on sitting at God’s right hand (Acts 2.34f).⁵³ The words of Psa 110 do not find their fulfillment in David because David did not ascend into heaven. The references to David in Acts 2.29, 34 are to emphasize that David was not the fulfillment of these words. The mention of

52. G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (InterVarsity Press 2008) ch 7, highlights the importance of things made without hands (Dan 2.34f, 44; Acts 17.24; 2 Cor 5.1; Col 2.11; Heb 9.11, 24). Idols are often said to be the work of men’s hands (Deut 4.28; 31.29; 2 Kng 19.18f, etc). John 2.19–22 shows that Jesus’ speaking of His temple refers to His resurrection.

53. Psa 110 may be in the background every time the New Testament speaks of Jesus at God’s right hand. D. Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* (InterVarsity Press 1975) 393 gives a brief but helpful discussion of the variety of ways Psa 110.1 is used in the New Testament.

David as “a prophet” (Acts 2.30) is to stress that he spoke of the Christ. Jesus was raised and exalted to God’s right hand, and He fulfills Psa 110.1.⁵⁴

Eph 1.19–23 gives the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as the basis of His authority. The surpassing greatness of God’s power is shown in Christ when He raised Jesus and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. He has been placed far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every name in this age and the age to come. The words “all” and “every” are used six times in vv 21–23 to emphasize the limitless authority Jesus has in our universe. Jesus is King exercising all dominion in heaven and earth (Matt 28.18). Jesus’ authority as King and Ruler is proven by His resurrection.⁵⁵

The miracles of Jesus are a demonstration of the boundless scope of His authority. When Jesus calms the storm, His disciples ask, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mark 4.41). Even the winds (Psa 148.8),⁵⁶ the waves, and the sea (Psa 65.7; 89.9; 107.29) are under His authority and do His will. He has authority that only God possesses. His resurrection shows He exercises dominion even over the dreaded foes of death and Hades (Rev 1.17f; 2.8). This King has all authority.

One group of miracles that especially call attention to the fact that Jesus is King is the casting out of demons.⁵⁷ Luke 11.14–26 and

54. Jesus’ resurrection is also tied to the fact that He is the Son of David in Rom 1.3f. Christ was “born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,” but He was “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” This is a clear assertion that “Jesus was the anointed Son of David, the royal Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes long cherished among the people of Israel.” J. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*. WBC (Word 1998) 12. 2 Tim 2.8 exhorts Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.” The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome death (Rev 5.5).

55. These same points are also stressed in passages like Phil 2.5–11 and Col 1.15–18.

56. Some other Old Testament verses that describe the Lord causing the wind to blow or restraining the wind are Exod 10.13, 19; 14.21; 15.10; Psa 104.4; 107.25, 29; 147.18; Jer 10.13; 51.16; Ezek 13.11; Hos 13.15; Amos 4.9, 13; Jon 1.4; 4.8; Hag 2.17.

57. Jesus casts out demons (Matt 4.24; 8.16, 28–34; 9.32–34; 12.22–32; 15.21–28; 17.14–20; Mark 1.21–28, 32–34; 3.11f, 22–30; 5.1–20; 7.24–30; 9.14–29; Luke 4.31–37, 40f; 6.18; 7.21; 8.2, 26–39; 9.37–43; 11.14–26; 13.32.) In the limited commission the apostles were told to cast out demons (Matt 10.8; Mark 6.7, 13; Luke 9.1). In the book of Acts this miracle is performed (Acts 5.16; 8.6f; 16.16–18; 19.11–20).

Matt 12.22–32 provide a particularly compelling account in this regard.⁵⁸ When Jesus casts out a demon that causes a man to be both mute and blind, the man can see and speak (Matt 12.22). The crowds are amazed at the miracle and ask if Jesus could be the Son of David (v 23). The Pharisees could not question the reality of His miracles, but they do attribute them to an evil source (v 24).⁵⁹ Jesus states that the charge that He casts out demons by the prince of demons is ridiculous because Satan is opposing Satan (vv 25f; Luke 11.17f). Satan has a kingdom and demons help him accomplish his will. However, even Satan's accomplices are ultimately controlled by Christ. Jesus questions them about their sons casting out demons and asks whether they attribute those exorcisms to Satan as well (Matt 12.27; Luke 11.19).⁶⁰ Jesus explains in casting out demons that He is binding the strong man (Satan) and taking away the armor on which He relies (Matt 12.29; Luke 11.21–23).

For our purposes, Luke 11.20 is especially important: “But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”⁶¹ There are several references to God's finger in the Old Testament (Exod 8.19; 31.18; Deut 9.10; Psa 8.3). “The image is often used for God's activity and intervention, whether in creation, miracles, or the giving of the law.”⁶² The casting out of demons demonstrates the arrival of God's kingdom (Matt 12.28;

58. Much of the same account occurs in Mark 3.22–30, but Mark does not record the casting out the demon which started the dispute.

59. Another such episode is recorded earlier in Matt 9.32–34. It is striking how many “hostile witnesses” attest to the reality of His miracles. Luke 9.7–9; 23.8 shows that Herod accepted the fact that Jesus did miracles. Those who criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath knew the reality of His miracles (Matt 12.9–14; Mark 3.1–6; Luke 6.6–11; 13.10–17; 14.1–6; John 5.1–18; 9.1–41). When His enemies shout that “He saved others” (Matt 27.42), they are acknowledging the reality of His miracles. The chief priests and elders do not even seem to try to convince the guards that the resurrection could not have occurred (Matt 28.11–15).

60. Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.2.5, refers to an Eleazar, “a certain man of my own country,” who casts out demons in the presence of Vespasian. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Trans. W. Whiston (Hendrickson 1987).

61. Matt 12.28 attributes the casting out of demons to “the Spirit of God.” This is interesting because Luke usually emphasizes the role of the Spirit more frequently than Matthew. Notice, for example, two references to the Holy Spirit in Luke 4.1.

62. D. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*. BECNT (Baker 1996) 1079. I believe that the event most likely in the background of Luke 11.20 is the plagues on Egypt and the Exodus.

Luke 11.20). The basic sense of the word “kingdom” is rule and reign. It refers to the rule, authority, and power⁶³ more often than it refers to the realm.⁶⁴ The casting out of demons demonstrates that Jesus is King and has all authority⁶⁵ and anticipates the ultimate demise of Satan and his kingdom (Rev 12.9; 20.1–3, 10).

When Jesus sent out the seventy, they came back rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them in His name (Luke 10.17).⁶⁶ Jesus then says, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (v 18). The reference to the fall of Satan in Luke 10.18 is in similar language to Isa 14.15.⁶⁷ This is not a reference to the fall of Satan before Gen 3, but it does emphasize that Satan’s defeat “is already becoming manifest through the mission of Jesus and by extension, through the ministry of his envoys.”⁶⁸ The defeat of Satan is also reflected in the language of treading upon serpents in Luke 10.19.⁶⁹ While the defeat of Satan is particularly demonstrated in the casting out of demons, the same applies to other miracles as well. The woman who had been stooped over for eighteen years and whom Jesus healed on a Sabbath was one

63. Some passages that use “kingdom” in the sense of rule or reign are 1 Sam 20.31; 1 Kng 2.12 ; Psa 22.28; 145.11–13; Isa 9.7; Dan 4.3; 6.26; Luke 1.32f; 1 Cor 15.24f; Rev 11.15; 12.10. G. Ladd, “The Kingdom of God-Reign or Realm?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 230–38.

64. The word “kingdom” is used in the sense of a realm in Gen 10.10; 1 Kng 18.10; 1 Chr 16.20; Ezra 1.1; Est 1.20; Psa 105.13.

65. Notice the connection between preaching the kingdom and the casting out of demons in Luke 8.1–3 and Luke 9.1f. Also, the crowds were astonished at Jesus’ authority and how even the demons obeyed Him (Mark 1.27 and Luke 4.36.) A. Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future* (Eerdmans 1979) 46–47.

66. Luke 10.17–20 is tied together by an inclusion mentioning joy, the demons’ being subject to them, and names in vv 17 and 20. J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT (Eerdmans 1997) 418.

67. Isaiah 13.1–14.23 is an oracle against Babylon. Babylon is mentioned specifically in Isa 13.1, 19; 14.4, 22. D. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Baker 1999) 231 presents a striking contrast between the king of Babylon in Isa 14 and the Suffering Servant in Isa 53.

68. Green, *Gospel of Luke* 419.

69. The serpent in Gen 3 is identified with Satan (Rev 12.9; 20.2). The link between Luke 10.19 and Psa 91.13 is particularly interesting in light of the use of Psa 91.11f by Satan in his tempting of Jesus in Matt 4.6 and Luke 4.10–11. Satan is calling attention to a passage that forecasts his ultimate demise. F. F. Bruce briefly traces the theme of the serpent through the Old Testament in chapter 4 of his book, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Eerdmans 1968).

“whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years” (Luke 13.16). Peter described the ministry of Jesus as “healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10.38). The rule and reign of Jesus is demonstrated by all His miracles.⁷⁰

The Resurrection Demonstrates Jesus as Savior or Redeemer

Jesus’ resurrection and His role as Savior are often connected. Acts 5.31 shows that Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand to be Prince and Savior. As pointed out earlier, Acts 13 focuses on the resurrection of Jesus: “From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13.23). Phil 3.20f speaks of Jesus as Savior “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” 2 Tim 1.10 ties Jesus’ role as Savior to the fact that He “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”⁷¹

Eph 2.1–10 reveals how God presents Himself as Savior in the resurrection of Christ. Eph 2.1–3 describes the desperate dilemma of man outside of Christ. Mankind was dead in their transgressions and sins (vv 1, 5) before God dramatically intervened to rescue them (vv 4–10). God raises people up and seats them with Him in Christ (v 6). The God who raises Jesus and seats Him at His right hand (Eph 1.20) also raises up believers and seats them in heavenly places (Eph 2.6). What God has done in the resurrection of Christ is linked with what He is doing in saving Christians.⁷² Through God saving Christians. He shows His rich mercy, His great love (Eph 2.4), His kindness (v 7) and His surpassing grace (vv 7f).

The miracles of Jesus are tied to Jesus’ role as Savior. The miracles show Jesus power to forgive and to save from the

70. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* 46–47, particularly discusses this in light of Jesus’ statement to John’s disciples in Matt 11.4f and Luke 7.22f.

71. Sometimes Jesus’ victory over death is presented as an accomplished fact (2 Tim 1.10; Heb 2.14f), and sometimes it is presented as still future (1 Cor 15.24–26, 54).

72. The ideas of God giving Christ as Creator (Eph 2.10), ruler (1.19–23), and redeemer (2.1–10) all merge here.

dreaded enemy of sin (Matt 9.2–8; Mark 2.5–11; Luke 5.20–26).⁷³ Often those Jesus heals cry out for and are shown mercy (Matt 15.22; 17.15; 20.30f; Mark 5.19; 10.47f; Luke 17.13; 18.38f).⁷⁴ People being shown mercy is often in the context of gift of eternal salvation.⁷⁵ Those who are blessed by His miracles are often said to be perishing or destroyed (Matt 8.25; Mark 1.24; 4.38; 9.22; Luke 4.34; 8.24).⁷⁶ The word translated ‘perishing’ often carries the idea of final destruction or eternal loss.⁷⁷

Many miracles use the language of salvation. While the New American Standard translates the Greek verb *sozo* with English terms like “made well,” “recover,” “restore,” it is most frequently translated “save” or “saved.”⁷⁸ This word is used in accounts of Jesus’ miracles.⁷⁹ It is the same word used in Matt 1.21; 18.11; 1 Cor 1.21; 9.22; 1 Tim 1.15; Heb 7.25, and other such passages.

For our purposes in this lecture, let us focus on a couple of these miracles that are connected with salvation. In Luke 18.35–43 a blind man sits by the road begging as Jesus is approaching Jericho.⁸⁰

73. The description of lepers and how they were treated in Lev 13–14 may be a living illustration of the picture of sin and its consequences. Therefore, Jesus’ cleansing of lepers is a picture of His ability to forgive sins. It is interesting that right before the accounts in Mark 2.1–11 and Luke 5.17–26 where Jesus forgives the paralyzed man is an account of Jesus cleansing a leper (Mark 1.40–45; Luke 5.12–16). Jesus is doing what God alone can do since the Lord alone can forgive sins (Psa 51.7; 103.3; Isa 1.18; 43.25; 44.22; Jer 31.34; 33.8) and the Lord alone heals (Exod 15.26; Deut 32.39; 2 Kng 5.7; Psa 103.3; Isa 30.26; Jer 33.6).

74. The verb is *eleeo*.

75. Rom 11.30–32; Eph 2.4; 1 Tim 1.13, 16; 2 Tim 1.18; Tit 3.5; Jam 2.13 are some examples.

76. The word is *apollumi*.

77. Matt 5.29–30; 10.28; 16.25; 18.14; Mark 8.35; Luke 13.3, 5; John 3.16; 6.39; 17.12; 2 Thes 2.10.

78. R. Thomas, ed., *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Holman 1981) 1686. Among other ways the word *sozo* is translated: “save” 36 times, “saved” 50 times, “made well” 11 times, and “get well” 3 times.

79. Matt 8.25; 9.21, 22; 14.30; 27.42; Mark 3.4; 5.23, 28, 34; 6.56; 10.52; 15.31; Luke 6.9; 8.36, 48; 17.19; 18.42; 23.35

80. In the account in Mark 10.46–52 the blind man is named Bartimaeus. The only other time one healed by Jesus is named is Lazarus in John 11. It is also recorded in Matt 20.29–34 and Matthew mentions two blind men. Matthew’s gospel sometimes mentions two being healed while Mark and Luke record the same account but mention only one. Compare Matt 8.28–34 with Mark 5.1–20 and Luke 8.26–39. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press 1987) 150–51.

The blind man realizes that Jesus is passing by and begs, “Jesus, Son of David,⁸¹ have mercy on Me!”⁸² Jesus heals this man with the words, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”⁸³ The next account is Jesus’ encounter with Zaccheus, which is recorded only in the gospel of Luke. Zaccheus is a chief tax collector⁸⁴ and is rich.⁸⁵ Both of these consecutive accounts involve Jericho (18.35; 19.1), men who wanted to see (18.41; 19.3, 4), the crowds who present obstacles between Jesus and the person (18.39; 19.3,7), and salvation (18.42; 19.9f). Zaccheus is a true son of Abraham.⁸⁶ Jesus’ giving salvation and sight to the man who was physically blind in Luke 18.35–43 prefigures giving sight and salvation to Zaccheus in Luke 19.1–10 on a deeper level.⁸⁷ While Zaccheus “was trying to see” Jesus, Jesus has come “to seek” and to save lost people like Zaccheus.⁸⁸ Both of these accounts reflect the purpose of Jesus’ ministry to give “recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4.18).⁸⁹ The miracles of Jesus reflect the fact that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” These miracles highlight His role as Savior.

A second “miracle of Jesus” that demonstrates Christ as Savior is the healing of the lame man in Acts 3. Acts is a continuation of what Jesus did and taught (Acts 1.1). In the gospels He acts first

81. Jesus is frequently addressed as “the Son of David” in Matt (12.23; 15.22; 20.30f; 21.9, 15). However, this is the only time that someone addresses Jesus as the son of David in Mark or Luke, though the same concept appears in Luke 1.32–35; 2.4, 11; 20.41–44.

82. This is the verb *eleeo*.

83. This is from *sozo*.

84. Tax collectors were highly disrespected in Jewish society (Matt 5.46; 18.17) though they are pictured among the Jews most likely to respond positively to Jesus in Luke (3.12; 5.27–32; 7.29; 15.1–2; 18.9–14).

85. The rich generally appear in a negative light in Luke (1.53; 6.24; 12.13–21; 14.12–14; 16.19–31; 18.18–30; 20.45–21.4).

86. This idea of being a son of Abraham is important in Luke (3.8; 13.16; 16.24f).

87. This same growing spiritual insight is seen with the blind man in John 9 as well. The man who was born blind in John 9 demonstrates increasing insight about Jesus throughout the chapter. Notice the development from vv 11, 17, 27, 33, 35–38.

88. The words “trying to see” in Luke 19.3 and “to seek” in Luke 19.10 are from *zeteo*. Jesus is the good shepherd who is seeking the lost (Ezek 34.11–16) and seeking those seeking Him (1 Chr 28.8f; John 4.23f).

89. Paul describes his ministry in the same terms in Acts 26.18.

hand and in Acts He acts “through the apostles.” When Peter heals Aeneas, he says, “Jesus Christ heals you” (Acts 9.34). The miracles of Acts are also particularly connected with Christ’s work in Acts 3.6; 4.30; 16.18; 19.13, 15. In Acts 3 Peter and John are on the way to the temple at the time of prayer.⁹⁰ They meet the lame man and say, “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene- walk!” Peter “seized him by the right hand and raised him up” (Acts 3.7).⁹¹ The apostles are arrested and put on trial for this miracle. The lame man is said to have been “made well” (Acts 4.9).⁹² The man is saved or made well by the name of Jesus in Acts 3.6; 4.9f. The healing of the lame man in Jesus’ name is a picture that salvation⁹³ is only in Jesus’ name (Acts 4.12). Jesus’ as Savior is tied to His resurrection from the dead. Even the place of baptism in salvation is tied to Christ’s resurrection (Rom 6.4f, 9; Col 2.12; 1 Pet 3.21).⁹⁴

The salvation that comes through Jesus’ resurrection will have no end. The resurrection of Christ serves as an assurance of the resurrection to all who are in Christ (1 Cor 15.12–19). God through Christ raises us from the dead and provides a body that is imperishable (1 Cor 15.42, 50, 52–54), immortal (vv 53f), raised in glory and power (v 43). Death is mocked (v 55), and God is praised for providing victory over our archenemies of sin and death (vv 56–57). Therefore, Paul encourages us to focus not on temporal things but on eternal things (2 Cor 4.18; 5.1) because “what is mortal will be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor 5.4).⁹⁵ “The

90. The temple is often shown to be a place of prayer in Luke 1.10; 18.9–14; 19.45f and Acts 3.1; 22.17–21.

91. The same word for “raised” in Acts 3.7 is used in Acts 3.15; 4.10; 5.30; 10.40; 13.30 for God raising Jesus from the dead. The raising up of the lame man is connected to the raising of Jesus from the dead.

92. The Grk *sesotai* is from *sozo*.

93. Grk *soteria*.

94. For good discussions on these passages about baptism and others, see J. Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (College Press 1989), G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1962), E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Eerdmans 2009).

95. 1 Cor 15.54 quotes Isa 25.8 and assures us that “Death is swallowed up in victory.” Death and Hades are pictured as monster who is never satisfied but who swallows up all (Prov 1.12; 27.20; 30.16; Isa 5.14; Hab 2.5). However, death, the great monster, will be swallowed in 1 Cor 15.54 and 2 Cor 5.4.

eternal weight of glory” God has prepared makes even Paul’s overwhelming persecutions into “momentary, light, affliction” (2 Cor 4.17). 1 Thes 4.13–18 shows the message of Christ’s death and resurrection brings comfort (v 18) because we will “always be with be with the Lord” (v 17). We have been begotten to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet 1.3f).” “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus touches every aspect of our lives. It raises our level of morality (1 Cor 15.33f). Belief in the resurrection motivates us to endure hardship and risk serving God in a dangerous world (1 Cor 15.30–32). This belief encourages us to do good to those who cannot repay us (Luke 14.12–14). In the face of innocent suffering we are reminded that God will right wrongs and punish injustices (Luke 16.19–31). The vanity stamped over human existence in Ecclesiastes is answered by Jesus’ death and resurrection. This most important event in human history inspires us, encourages us to put our trust in Christ until He brings us to that great day.

Part Two

The Day Lectures

Your Sins Are Forgiven

Pardon for the Paralytic

Calvin R. Schlabach

Jesus is God, Jesus saves. The deity and redeeming power of Christ Jesus are central to a disciple's understanding of the Lord. Embracing these rudiments of His nature is where your salvation begins. No story in the gospels more powerfully and plainly proves the Lord's deity than His healing the paralytic in Capernaum. He performed the sign near the beginning of His work on earth because the Galilean people needed this miracle's message as a foundation for their understanding of who He was. All three synoptics report the story: Matt 9.1–8; Mark 2.1–13; Luke 5.17–26.¹ Mark's account will be our focus here.

The Story (Mark's Chiasm)

A. Jesus and the crowd, 2.1f. Jesus had recently relocated from Nazareth to Capernaum and had spent an unspecified number of days preaching and healing in that part of Galilee (Luke 5.15f). His notoriety and popularity were rapidly rising. Mark tells us that the Lord had, a few days earlier, performed extensive healings and exorcisms in this city (Mark 1.32–34). Those were amazing days, but for some reason, the paralytic of ch 2 had been unable to get to Jesus during that episode, and when he was later told that the Man of God had gone away, we can imagine the heartbreak and days of

1. All Bible quotations are taken from the *NASB, 1995 Updated Edition*, unless otherwise noted.

disappointment as he was left alone with his shriveled limbs, wondering if he would ever have another chance to be made whole. But then, Jesus returned to Capernaum, and the news spread rapidly that He was back in town and was at home (Mark 2.1). Soon the house where He stayed (probably Peter's) was fully packed with people. Yet this crowd, unlike others that were focused on loaves and fishes, healings and wonders, seems to have been there primarily to hear Him preach. They were packed in, shoulder to shoulder, and "He was speaking the Word to them" (Mark 2.2). Preaching is what He had come for (Mark 1.38). This was the burden of His mission on earth; "The Sower sows the Word" (Mark 4.14). The healings and miracles were always secondary to His work of preaching. Souls come first, bodies second.

Luke adds that there were also various Pharisees and other religious professionals present, having traveled from all over Galilee, Judea, and even Jerusalem (Luke 5.17). They had heard the news of this phenomenal new preacher in Galilee, and these officials no doubt felt it was their duty to check things out and make a pronouncement as to His orthodoxy. "And," Luke adds, "the power of the Lord" was also present—the power inherent in Jesus to heal.² The Scribes and their associates had come with a critical eye, and they were about to receive an indisputable manifestation of the intrinsic power of Jesus to heal souls and bodies.

B. The Paralytic, 2.3–5. The Master's preaching on that day was interrupted by five urgent, unstoppable men. A paralytic was brought to Jesus, "carried by four men" (Mark 2.3). The four bearers were on a mission: to get their friend to the Nazarene, who was the paralyzed man's only hope for healing. Empowered by love their burden is light, the journey through town is joyful, their spirits soaring . . . until they see the impenetrable crowd between them and the Man of God. Jesus has packed the house

2. This is not to suggest that Jesus had a special power at this time which was absent at other times. The power is inherent in Jesus, just as, for example, the Sun inherently has the power to shine. The power is always present in the Sun, whether we see the shining (day) or not (night). The Sun shines effortlessly. In a similar way, the Son has the power, whether it is displayed (as in this story) or not. He is able to heal effortlessly.

with devoted and delighted listeners, “so that there was no longer room, not even near the door” (Mark 2.2).

Ordinary men might have sighed sadly at the sight of the crowd-packed doorway, sobbed with disappointment, and turned around. But these were no ordinary men. They were men of faith, persistent faith, a faith that scoffed at barriers. Like the diminutive Zaccheus, these four would not allow the crowd to keep them from Jesus. If the ordinary entrance was blocked, one of them imagined the most unimaginable entrance of all: they would go in through the roof. Up they went with the paralytic in tow. Disregarding all protocol and propriety, they dug down through the roof of their neighbor’s house. Let the reader be warned: if Jesus comes to your house, things can get messy. Imagine the scene below with all the dirt and debris from the excavation raining down on the overcrowded audience. The listeners were puzzled, the Pharisees were appalled, and Jesus must have smiled to Himself and continued teaching until the effort became futile. The attention of everyone was soon on the disabled man lying on the pallet, who with a little help from his friends, descended “into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus” (Luke 5.19).

All three synoptics report the next line almost identically: “And Jesus seeing their faith³ said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2.5). Their faith—everyone could see that. Men with “maybe” in their hearts do not tear apart a neighbor’s roof. But Jesus responded to their faith with words of *forgiveness* for the helpless man in front of Him. No one expected that, not the paralytic, not the crowd, and certainly not the scribes and Pharisees.

C. *The scribes, 2.6–10.* To the paralytic, Jesus could have said nothing better; to the Inquisitors He could have said nothing right. Now they have a morsel. For Jesus was not saying to the disabled man that at some time previous to this encounter he had already been forgiven by God. They would not have made much ado about that (*cf.* 2 Sam 12.13). Rather, everyone understood the Master to be actually, personally forgiving this man at this moment. The scholars

3. Take note that not one word is spoken by these five, yet their actions speak volumes.

began reasoning, calculating within themselves as to what this implied. “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2.7). All readers of the story are challenged to ask themselves this same question. Can anyone forgive sins, actually remove sins from someone’s soul, other than God Himself? The Pharisees’ conclusion: If this Nazarene, a mere man, were claiming a prerogative that is exclusively God’s, then He was thereby blaspheming, case closed.

What the Pharisees did not count on was Jesus overhearing their thoughts. “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?” Jesus challenged (Matt 9.4). What is your purpose in imagining these evil things, He was asking, and we all know the answer to that. They had heard enough of the Lord’s teaching (e.g. Matt 5–7) to know that if He succeeded, they were ruined. Their purpose was therefore to find or manufacture some heresy or theological crime with which to charge Him. That is “why” they imagined He was blaspheming, when in reality it was they who were guilty of blasphemy in reasoning that way about the very Son of God.

The Master, as He often did, turned the question back on the opponents. “Which is easier,” He asks, “to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk?’” (Mark 2.9). The reader may wish to pause here and reflect on Christ’s question, but we will come back to that later. For here Jesus does not pause, giving the critics time to concoct a clever escape. He waits for no reply from the teachers of the Law.⁴ He continues, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—” (Mark 2.10a). These words are reported identically in all three synoptic accounts. This is the core, the heart of the story. The narrative’s central purpose is to prove that Jesus, the Son of Man, does indeed have this authority on earth (Matt 28.18). The healing would serve as a visual aid to validate and illustrate His claim to forgive.

B1. The Paralytic, 2.10–12. Jesus immediately turned from the evil imaginings of the enemy and spoke directly to the paralytic. “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home” (Mark 2.10b). It was a simple command, albeit impossible. Impossible,

4. R. Lenski, *Mark* (Hendrickson 1998) 104.

that is, had the command come from any other than the one man on earth who was in Himself the embodiment of God. When Jesus commands, Jesus empowers (Phil 4.13). The healing was the key to toppling the evil imaginings of the clerics. The rabbis of that day believed that sin and sickness were linked. They said, "A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him."⁵ If this man were to be healed of his debilitating paralysis, it would be conclusive proof (according to their own beliefs) that he must have been truly forgiven of his sins, just as Jesus had said.

Jesus issued the command, and then all eyes turned to the paralytic. Without question or hesitation, "Immediately he got up!" (Luke 5.25). The New Living Translation captures the moment well: "And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God." The man's no-longer-useless legs, now strong and now responsive, raised him up before them all. Beaming with unimaginable joy, the man got up, threw the now pointless pallet over his shoulder, and strode confidently toward the door. The sight of his back silenced the scoffers and Scribes, their theological arguments melted before the very visible reality of the dead-limbed man now walking. The healed man's heart now has filled with gratitude, joy and praise. Tears streaming down his face, he lifted his jubilant voice in resounding praise, glorifying God on high. Hallelujah!

A1. The Crowd And Jesus, 2.12–13. Mark ended the narrative in the same way it began, with Jesus and the crowd. The paralytic has impossibly walked out the door, and the Scribes have evaporated into speechless insignificance. Jesus and the crowd now remain. Mark says of the crowd, "They were all amazed and were glorifying God,⁶ saying, We have never seen anything like this" (Mark 2.12). "Amazed," Mark says, meaning they were astounded (literally, "out of one's mind").⁷ Luke uses the word, "astonished," ("beside them-

5. *b. Ned.* 41A.

6. All three Synoptics end the narrative with the people "glorifying God" (Mark 2.12; Matt 9.8; Luke 5.26). To glorify God is man's great purpose in life (1 Cor 6.19–20; 10.31; 1 Pet 4.16). It was also the Son of Man's purpose on earth (John 17.4).

7. G. Wigram, *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon* (Christian Copyrights 1983) 299.

selves,” a “displacement of the mind”).⁸ Matthew goes further and describes the crowd as “awestruck,” literally filled with fear.⁹ This is more than simple amazement. The awe and fear they felt suggests that they sensed, at some level, that they were in the presence of God (Isa 8.13).

The astounded witnesses in Capernaum said to one another, “We have seen remarkable things today” (Luke 5.26). Various translations suggest they saw strange things, incredible, marvelous, extraordinary, or unimaginable things. Literally, the word in Luke’s record is, “paradoxes.”¹⁰ “Paradox” is a word for something that is contrary to expectations or to common belief. So many things in the story could be described this way. They saw a simple, untrained carpenter silence the well-schooled Scribes and Pharisees. They saw a man with dead limbs rise from his bier and march vigorously out of the house. Most amazingly, they saw a Son of Man exercise the power and authority of God Himself, forgiving and healing their helpless neighbor (Mark 2.10; Matt 9.6). These were paradoxes, to be sure.

“And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them” (Mark 2.13). The paralytic had walked away carrying his mat. The Scribes walked away plotting against Jesus. The crowds walked away glorifying God, ruminating on the meaning of the day’s events. And Jesus walked away, looking for more souls to teach, for teaching and preaching the Word is what He had come for. The healings and miracles were always secondary to His work of preaching. Souls came first, bodies second.

The Heart Of The Story

We would do well to pause here and return to the central point of the story. The synoptics all record the Lord’s question to the accusers: “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?” (Mark

8. *Ibid.*, 256.

9. *Ibid.*, 903.

10. A *hapax legomenon* in the NT.

2.9; see also Luke 5.23; Matt 9.5). It is important to note that the Lord was not asking which is easier *to do*, to heal or to forgive the man, for both would require the power of God. Nor was He simply discussing which words would be easier to pronounce. Neither would be difficult. Instead, He questioned them as to which of the two lines would be easier *“to say”* and not be exposed as an impious fraud, which is what they imply when they accuse Him of blasphemy. If someone speaks, declaring that another’s sins are forgiven, no bystander can look at that sinner’s soul and see whether the forgiveness were actually accomplished or not. Indeed, for centuries thousands have claimed to speak a congregant’s sins forgiven, but they never dare to say, “Arise, pick up your pallet and walk.” Clearly, it is easier to get away with saying, “You are forgiven.” The message of the miracle turns on this question.

All have understood as a first principle of true religion that only God can forgive sins (Isa 43.25, *etc.*). Sin is fundamentally an offense against God (Psa 51.4); therefore, only God can remove the offense, erase the stain of sin from one’s soul. A prophet might be able to assure someone that *“the Lord has taken away your sin”* (2 Sam 12.13), but no one believed that the prophet himself had the power to forgive. Everyone in the Capernaum house that day understood Jesus’ words to mean that He Himself was personally forgiving the man’s sin, and the Lord did not correct them.

Since it is true that only God can forgive, anyone who claims to have the power on earth to forgive sins is at the same time claiming to have divine authority. He is claiming nothing less than to be exercising the actual power of God. Jesus declared that the healing would demonstrate this very truth: “So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2.10). This, then, is the clearest claim Jesus ever makes that He is the embodiment of God, that is, that He is God in the flesh.¹¹ John’s gospel begins with this declaration (John 1.1–3, 14ff), but the synoptics approach the issue differently; they lay out the evidence that requires us to reason, reflect, and arrive at this understanding. The inescapable conclusion, then, that we must draw from this event,

11. Col 1.15–19; 2.9; Phil 2.6; John 5.18.

since Jesus here does what only God can do, is that He is, as Thomas confessed, “my Lord and my God” (John 20.28). Jesus is God.

Why Is The Forgiveness First?

One lingering question remains: why does Jesus forgive the man’s sins before healing him? This was not what anyone was expecting; it was not what Jesus typically did. Why, then, did He do that with this man? Remember, there was at this time a common belief among the Jews regarding the connection between healing and forgiveness. We have already observed that the rabbis taught, “A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him.”¹² Jesus certainly did not believe the rabbis’ restrictive doctrine, but in all likelihood the lame man did.

As the four bore their beloved burden across Capernaum to Jesus, they could think only about their friend being miraculously raised up from his paralysis, but the paralytic himself is thinking more about his soul than his body.¹³ When in illness people tend to think more about their spiritual wellbeing than they do when they are healthy. The paralytic knows that Jesus is a prophet of God (John 4.19; Luke 7.16; Mark 6.15). After all, He has filled Capernaum with miracles (Mark 1.32–34), and as Nicodemus concluded, “No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3.2). The man is about to be brought into the presence of a real Man of God, a true prophet, one in whom God is unmistakably present. When Isaiah saw himself in the presence of God, his only thought was, “I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isa 6.5). Peter felt the same when, in the boat, he began to grasp exactly who Jesus was: “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5.8). The closer one is to God, the more clearly he sees his own sinfulness. This very broken man does not doubt the healing power of Christ, but he does doubt his own worthiness, knowing his own sinfulness. Will God indeed deign to bestow a favor on such a detestable sinner as himself? Perhaps the words of Isaiah pound in his

12. *b. Ned.* 41A.

13. A. Cole, *Mark*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Tyndale 1980) 65.

heart, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God . . . ” (Isa 59.1f).

Now, with all his abhorrent sins churning in his guilty heart, he is dropped down into the lap of the Master. Nothing is hidden from the Lord. Jesus knows the man’s sins, knows his doubts, but He also knows his faith (Mark 2.5). The man’s sin-laden soul needs relief more desperately than his withered limbs do. “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Let the Pharisees feign outrage, let the crowds gasp in wonder, let the four friends disbelieve their ears—Jesus heals the paralytic’s soul. Then, having mended the inner man, Jesus heals his body as well (Psa 103.3). With Jesus, souls came first, bodies second.

Conclusion

Isaiah said of The Suffering Servant, “The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Isa 53.5). There is no better illustration of this spiritual healing than the story of pardon for the paralytic. The real need we have in life is the healing of our souls. Until you see your soul’s need, your need for forgiveness, you will not receive the help you seek from God. The healing, the blessings and strength, the protections, the many gifts you ask from God—they will not come until He first speaks your sins forgiven. Souls will come first, bodies second. The paralytic tells us that we will not be able to walk, make our way through this life, without the help of Christ Jesus, because Jesus is God; and only Jesus saves.

Were Not Ten Cleansed?

Cleansing for the Lepers

Brownie Reaves

It is clear from the teaching of the New Testament that the miracles of Jesus were extraordinary, diverse, and resulted in wonder and amazement among those who witnessed them. These miracles testified to the power and origin of the interruption of natural events and the interposition of someone who established and ruled over the ordinances of heaven and earth with unlimited power. The Jews believed that the power to perform the signs and wonders could only come from one source. Nicodemus, a ruler of the synagogue, acknowledged this when he came to Jesus by night and heard the Master teacher explain the new birth: “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).¹ While the works of John the Baptist bore witness to the truth concerning the identity of Jesus, the works Jesus did in his healing ministry gave even greater testimony that Jesus was the Messiah.

The signs confirmed His identity as the true Messiah and one and only Savior, the Son of God, to those who would believe in Him (John 20.30f). Furthermore, during the infancy of the Lord’s church in the first century, God’s revelation needed confirmation to be established (Mark 16.20). Signs were given that were a direct appeal to the intellect, wonders were performed that stirred the emotion, and gifts of the Holy Spirit were for the benefit and profit

1. All Bible quotations are from the NKJV.

of all (1 Cor 12.7). Without God bearing witness (Heb 2.4), distinguishing divine revelation from human wisdom would have been difficult. We are blessed today by God's good providence to have our confirmation in an objective, codified record in the 66-book volume of ancient texts, the Bible.

Jesus possessed the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3.34f), and with that power healed many from their infirmities, sicknesses, and diseases. The general benefit and blessing to Jesus' contemporaries during His 33-year incarnation was that "He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10.38). The numerous works that He did were done at times and places intended to convey a message, but those occasions also showed His compassion and care for the ones who were affected. Jesus did not come for the purpose of healing the body; performing miracles was incidental to His true mission of saving souls (Luke 19.10). However, if you had been one of the beneficiaries of His mercy and His power, and you had been cured or healed, you surely would have been thankful and grateful to Him for His compassion. Of the works done by Jesus, with the exception of the resurrection from the dead, few would have been more radical and life-changing than the occasion when he healed ten lepers of their terrible disease and cleansed them from their defilement (Luke 17.11–19).

The Scourge of Leprosy

Leprosy has terrified mankind since ancient times. It has been classified as a disease of the nervous system because it attacks the nerves. The causative agent of leprosy, *Micobacterium leprae*, was discovered by Gerhart Henrik Armauer Hansen in Norway in 1873, making it the first bacterium to be identified as causing disease in humans. Since that time, leprosy has been known as "Hansen's Disease." However, Biblical leprosy encompassed more than just Hansen's disease.

The Hebrew word *tsara'ath* included a variety of ailments and is most frequently seen in Leviticus, where it referred to leprosy as uncleanness or imperfections according to Biblical standards. A

person with any scaly skin blemish was *tsara'ath*. The symbolism extended to rot or blemish on leather, the walls of a house, and in the structure of woven cloth. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *tsara'ath* was translated as *aphe lepras*. These words in Greek implied a skin condition that spread over the body. Scholars are not clear whether today's disease, which still affects humans in various parts of the world, is the same as it was in Bible times. Though there are many different variations of leprosy, at its basic root the mycobacterium *leprae* anesthetizes the leper's body so that he has no sensations to protect him from self-inflicted destruction.²

As if being unable to feel harm to the body was not enough of a curse, few, if any, diseases would transform the outward appearance as would the scourge of leprosy:

Biblical leprosy was a slowly progressing and intractable disease characterized by subcutaneous nodules, scabs or cuticular crusts and white shining spots appearing to be deeper than the skin...The symptoms start in the skin and peripheral nervous system, then spread to other parts, such as the hands, feet, face, and earlobes. Patients with leprosy experience disfigurement of the skin and bones, twisting of the limbs, and curling of the fingers to form the characteristic claw hand. Facial changes include the thickening of the outer ear and collapsing of the nose.³

If contracted, it would begin to consume the entire body, from head to toe, and its progression made the subject a loathsome and ghastly spectacle. The withering of the skin was an indicator of what was going on within, for in the very marrow of the bones there was a most frightful rottenness, which in due time would utterly consume the victim. The physical effects of leprosy are sickening, but it was the added social and emotional consequences that made it truly devastating.

One might say that the priests were the local health inspectors, as it was only the priest who could determine that someone had

2. A. Gilles. "Biblical Leprosy: Shedding Light on the Disease that Shuns," *AIG Oct* (2009) 77-79.

3. A. Guillen, *The Genesis of Germs: The Origin of Diseases and Coming Plagues* (Master Books 2007) 138-41.

contracted leprosy. Lev 13 and 14 provide the most complete picture of the identification of and consequences of being diagnosed with leprosy. Imagine yourself noticing one day an unusual, unfamiliar sore on your body. Just as a modern doctor's announcement of cancer can be terrifying, so was the priest's pronouncement of the presence of leprosy on one's skin and in one's body. Your immediate reaction might be fear, shock, dread, or even depression; now you are declared unclean and defiled, an untouchable. Lepers were to rend their garments, let the hair of their head hang down disheveled, cover themselves up to the upper lip, like mourners, and warn off everyone whom they happened to meet by shouting, "Unclean, unclean" (Lev 13.45). The highly contagious nature of leprosy was such that the leper was not only loathsome in his person, but was defiled in all his acts. If he lay on a bed, the bed became unclean. If he touched the wall of a house, the wall became unclean and had to be purged. They defiled everyone and everything they touched. The very entrance of a leper into a house rendered it unclean. Imagine the depth of sorrow a leper would feel to not even be welcomed in his own home. Because he was the medium of contagion and defilement wherever he went, the Lord demanded that the leper should be expelled from a town or village, to abide with others who shared the societal quarantine (Lev 13.46); but the strictures went even further.

One of the greatest freedoms in our country is to be able to worship without restrictions, but even that privilege changed for a leper. If a leper "wished to attend the synagogue, [the community] was obliged to make him a separate compartment, ten handbreadths high and four cubits long and broad; he had to be the first to go in, and the last to leave the synagogue."⁴

He became unable even to socialize or speak privately with his fellow worshippers. The psychological damage of being unclean would be devastating enough, but the punishment for violation of these restrictions was enforced without bias. If the leper trans-

4. Maimonides, *On Leprosy*, 10:12. Quoted in "Leprosy," J. Strong and J. McClinck, eds. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Harper and Brothers 1880) 5.371–78 at 373.

gressed the prescribed boundaries, he was to receive forty stripes.⁵ This applies to all those who had been pronounced lepers by the priest, but not to those who were on quarantine. We must concur with the ancient historian who said that the Jews regarded leprosy as a living death.⁶

The Mercy of the Lord

Now we come to Luke's account of the lepers, standing afar off from Jesus and crying out for mercy, with a better understanding that their plea to Jesus was a desperate cry for help as they struggled daily with a disease that imprisoned them in a miserable existence. Did they know about Jesus and His ability to heal? Surely their appeal to Him as "Master" (*Rabbi*) would indicate that His reputation preceded Him. They had the problem and He had the power to solve it. What an awesome scene: these hopeless, helpless men standing before the Great Physician who had never lost a patient (the blind always went away seeing, the deaf hearing, the lame walking). The lepers ask for mercy (pity), a familiar cry that they have been uttering ever since they were diagnosed with leprosy and cast out of the village. Some had been crying for decades, some since their youth.

There was no respite, no recess, and no human remedy that could stop the progression of the onslaught of this disease. Imagine having a recurring dream every tortured night that you would awake whole and free from the leprous agony of each day. Then the day comes when Jesus Christ, through his incredible mercy, makes this dream a reality. You look at your once leprous arms and see smooth skin. You feel your nose and ears which are now whole. You gaze in awe to see flexible fingers. It is hard to even imagine their joy. Healed! Cleansed! At least for the Samaritan, God and his mercy would be glorified.

Mercy is a concept integral to an understanding of God's dealings with humankind. Merciful describes both a quality of God and

5. Pesachim, Seder Moed (Order of the Festivals), of the Mishnah of the Talmud, 67a. *The William Davidson Talmud*, (Koren Publishers 2013) 218.

6. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (11.3). Trans. W. Whiston (Baker 1984) 220.

a quality God requires of His people. The noun denotes compassion and love and action, more than just feelings or emotions. Several Hebrew and Greek terms explain the English term *mercy*. The chief Hebrew term is *hesed*, God's covenant *lovingkindness*. Twenty-seven different Psalms focus on God's mercy and man's need of it. In both the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX) and the New Testament, the definition of mercy is "the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it."⁷

In Luke's narrative, mercy, in the form of Jesus, reacted to their distress: "...there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off." Then pity responded internally with a heart of compassion as Jesus heard their cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Compassion responded externally to relieve the distress: "Go, show yourselves to the priest." True mercy acts even if the person in distress is the enemy: "...and he was a Samaritan." As a parallel, we, as were the lepers, are a people separated from God's holy heart by sin, but we *choose* to be a rebellious, perverted, selfish people. Like the lepers in their intractable *physical* condition, we need God's mercy on our *spiritual* condition. His mercy, prompted by His love for man, made possible the extraordinary gift of the Only Begotten Son who saved us and washed us clean by His blood. Even in judgement and discipline, God's mercy can be seen (Psa 57.1; Isa 55.7).

"Go Show Yourselves to the Priest"

In addition to the mercy Christ bestows on the lepers, this miracle demonstrates the awesome power Jesus manifests through his ability to heal, even from a distance. A leper, according to the law, when cured, was to show himself to the priest, who would admit him into the congregation, give him a testimony and certify his cure (Lev 13.1–6; 14.1–32; Luke 5.14). According to *Vine's*, the Greek word for *cleansed* in v 17 is *katharizo*, meaning to "free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless."⁸ In this case,

7. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (MacDonald 1989) 742.

8. *Ibid.* 196–97.

Jesus healed them so completely that there was no question in their minds that they were completely cleansed. But much more was required of them before they could be allowed to return to society. Once a person was pronounced by the priest to be free of his leprosy, a sacrifice had to be offered to God. Under the Mosaic law, there was a very specific and extensive ritual that was prescribed in the Old Testament scriptures in order for a leper to resume a normal life:

And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field. He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, and shall stay outside his tent seven days. But on the seventh day he shall shave all the hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows- all his hair he shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes and wash his body in water, and he shall be clean. And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. (Lev 14.4–11)

In our way of thinking, the process of being cleansed seems ridiculously detailed. Obviously, this was a very important sanctifying ritual. In v 14, the ritual continues in an almost comical form:

The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his righthand, and on the big toe of his right foot. And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall dip his

right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord. And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord.

There is still more detail concerning the cleansing and another entire set of stipulations and rituals for a man who is poor.

All of this shows the incredibly detailed conditions God gave to certify the leper's cleansing and to rid him of his defilement. Today, conditions are still necessary for a man to be forgiven and cleansed by God, but thankfully, it does not involve the stricture of ritual as it did under the law. The law of Moses required the killing and sacrifice of birds and beasts to make atonement and cleanse one from defilement. The Gospel, the power of God, required the blood of one perfect human to cleanse us, including our acceptance of His marvelous grace through the incredibly simple conditions of faith, repentance and baptism. "Knowing you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot... Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet 1.18–22).

The Virtue of Thankfulness

A third lesson, and perhaps the most obvious, involves gratitude. The surprise in this healing is that apparently only one healed leper was thankful, and that one was not a Jew. The mixed group of lepers had been made up of both Jews and Samaritans, their common disease uniting them despite their deep divisions of ancestry, religion, and history. A Samaritan returned to Jesus to give Him the praise and thanks that He deserved. He was so grateful to Jesus for removing the leprous sores, that on arrival back to Jesus, he shows his attitude in a number of ways. He shows it with an attitude of urgency when he returned. "As soon as he saw he was healed." He shows it with his intense passion as "... he glorified God

with a loud voice.” He shows it with humility when “[he] fell down on his face at His feet.” Finally, he shows a clear understanding of God’s worthiness as he, “...with a loud voice, glorified God, giving Him thanks” (Luke 17.14–16).

In response, Jesus asks him three rhetorical questions: “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17.17f). We do not know what happened to the nine or where they went, but, just like us far too often, they possibly went about living life without a heartfelt thanks to God, the source of all blessings. Surely they were glad to be healed. Our first reaction upon reading this dramatic story is shock that only one would return to Jesus to thank Him. We feel confident that we would have shown deep gratitude. Is that true? Stop and think; how many times do we let our job, our family, or entertainment deter us from giving God the time and the praise He deserves? We are so easily distracted. Are your prayers full of praise and gratitude? Is that a daily practice in your life?

A great story reminds us of the right attitude towards blessings. Two old friends met on the street one day. Bob looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears. George asked, “What has the world done to you, my old friend?” The sad fellow said, “Let me tell you: three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars.” “That’s a lot of money,” George replied. The sad friend replies, “But you see, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand dollars, free and clear!” Surprised, George says, “Sounds to me that you’ve been very blessed.” “You don’t understand,” sad-sack responded: “Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her.” Now George was really confused: “Then why do you look so glum?” Bob erupts, “This week ... nothing!”

That is the problem with receiving something on a regular basis. Even if it is a gift, we eventually come to expect it. The natural tendency is that if we receive a gift long enough, we come to view it almost as an entitlement. We feel hurt, even angry, if we do not receive it any longer. It is the same way with the blessings God gives

us every day. In our country it is easy to become complacent. Blessings abound. We drive cars with push buttons and heated seats. We have the latest digital technology. We watch Chip and Joanna Gaines to insure our homes are not only comfortable but stylish. Our closets are full of clothes that follow the latest trend and style. We shop for the fun of it. We are at “ease in Zion.” We need to be careful not to take our blessed lives for granted.

Maybe we are too often people like the protagonist in *Shenandoah* (1965), a classic Civil War movie, in which James Stewart plays the part of George Anderson, a farmer. The family is gathered around the table as George offers “thanks” for the meal: “Lord, we cleared this land; we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it; we cooked the harvest. It wouldn’t be here, we wouldn’t be eating it if we hadn’t done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for this food we are about to eat. Amen.” Upon honest reflection, we need to search our hearts to make certain that we give God the praise and glory He deserves in all things. Thanksgiving is not just a date on a calendar. Thanksgiving is a daily discipline that we should develop in our lives. Thanksgiving is a mindset that helped the one leper understand the incredible miracle that made him whole. Our thankfulness should be extended because of the great love of God that delivered us from the consequences of sin.

Sin and Its Defilement

Understanding the depth of leprosy’s curse, Jesus’ compassion and awesome power, and the need for gratitude to our God are clearly part of appreciating Luke’s account of the lepers’ healing. We can speculate as to whether or not we would have been the grateful one, or one of the nine. But make no mistake as to who we should relate to in this miracle: we are the lepers. Leprosy is a graphic Biblical illustration of sin; it does to the body what sin does to the soul. Leprosy’s defilement was systemic. Their plight was observable, wretched and required the need for divine help for relief. When we are in sin, our souls are no different, and we can only cry out to Christ for mercy. He and He alone can save us. We

observe in Leviticus that lepers languished in a prison created by their disease. Leprosy caused an extreme degree of isolation and was probably a lifetime sentence. However, spiritual death, the repercussion of sin, can last for an eternity cut off from God and all that is good. Christ alone can cleanse us completely from our state.

There is an internal recognition of power and mercy and goodness which brings us to Christ; back to His throne room in prayer, back to acknowledge His deity in kneeling before Him; back to cast ourselves at His feet as God's people, cleansed, made whole and free. Gone from a colony of lepers to a congregation of saints. In return for our cleansing, we need to follow the example of the lone Samaritan, fall at His feet in thanksgiving, and shout the glory of God. In the words of Fanny J. Crosby, published in 1875...

To God be the glory great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.
Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Refrain:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!
Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.⁹

9. F. Crosby, "To God Be the Glory," *Songs of the Church* (Howard 1977) 15.

Have Mercy on Me

Compassion For The Syrophoenecian

Jimmy Haynes

The miracle under consideration in this lecture is Jesus casting out a demon from the daughter of the Syrophoenecian Woman. This miracle is recorded for us in Matt 15 and Mark 7. Matthew's account reads:

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (vv 21-28)

There are two, not totally unique, but somewhat unusual, features of this miracle. First, the woman who asked Jesus for mercy was a Gentile. Matthew calls her a "woman of Canaan" and Mark says, "the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenecian by birth." Syro-Phoenecia refers to a region north of Galilee on the coast of

the Mediterranean. Matthew says Jesus was in the region of the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon.

There are only a few examples of Jesus performing miracles for Gentiles recorded for us. The other prominent example is the healing of the Roman centurion's servant in Matt 8. I believe these miracles foreshadow the fulfillment of the ultimate broad scope of God's plan, that it will include all mankind, both Jew and Gentile. This was a truth that was difficult for many of the Jews to accept. It is worth noting that the miracle under consideration in this lecture follows one of the most intense conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Immediately before this we have the confrontation in which Jesus warned His disciples concerning the Jewish leaders saying, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt 15.8f). He then said concerning the Pharisees, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt 15.13f). Immediately after saying that he goes into a Gentile region and heals the daughter of a Gentile woman. Both the Syphoenecian woman and the Roman centurion are commended for their faith (Matt 8.10, 15.28). I believe this was a statement to the Jews who were too proud to accept Jesus.

A second, not totally unique but somewhat unusual feature of this miracle is the fact that it is a "distance miracle," meaning the one who was healed was not in the immediate physical presence of Jesus. He did not see the daughter who was demon-possessed, speak directly to her, or touch her. Jesus said to her mother, "...go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter. And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed" (Mark 7.29f). Miracles at a distance illustrate the limitless nature of the power of Jesus. Not only can He heal someone, He knows where everyone is, and His power is not limited by space.

Should that surprise us? If Jesus can override the laws of nature

in person, why not at a great distance? Regarding miracles, consider that Gen 1.1 could be the most important verse on the matter. If we believe that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is true, then everything else in scripture, whether it be the parting of the Red Sea, Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, the raising of the dead, or miracles being performed in person or at a distance, is simple to accept. The account of the healing of the Syrophoenecian woman’s daughter illustrates the unlimited power and knowledge of God. Let us now consider the people involved in this miracle and some lessons we can learn from each.

The Woman

“And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed’” (Matt 15.22). The pain of this mother is the worst kind of pain there is. Most parents would gladly trade places with a suffering child. It is heartbreaking to see a child suffer. But this was more than physical pain. Her daughter was severely demon-possessed.

Other lectures in this series may teach us that while demon possession was not a result of personal sin or choice, it certainly was perceived that way in ancient times. There was a *stigma of sinfulness* attached to demon possession. This was seen in the Jewish accusations toward Jesus in John 8.48 which says, “the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’” In their view, the daughter of the Syrophoenecian woman would not only be a sick child, but a child under the influence of Satan. People would have been thinking the child was a sinner, a parent would likely have had feelings of shame, and there may have been insinuations that they had somehow failed to be a good parent. The Syrophoenecian woman was an outsider with a suffering child that was under the influence of Satan. She was heartbroken and living a nightmare, and her faith in Jesus has her begging for help.

The Disciples

Of all the characters in the story (the woman, Jesus, the disciples), it is perhaps the disciples that most challenge us to look at our own lives. After all, we too are disciples of Jesus. Sadly, they had very little interest in the woman's pain. It sounds as though they were annoyed by her presence. When the woman came crying for help, their response was "send her away" (Matt 15.23). They had no interest in helping this Gentile woman. Five chapters earlier we see that Jesus had given them the power to cast out demons. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt 10.8). They could have helped, possibly by casting out the demon, but certainly by showing compassion. Instead we see a total disregard for her pain. What about us? Do we feel compassion toward people who are different from us religiously or culturally and who are hurting?

The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves and the parable of the good Samaritan teaches that our neighbor is any human being who needs our help. Gal 6.10 commands "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." 1 Tim 6.17f says, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share."

Have there been times when we have seen someone hurting who is outside the body of Christ and did not feel conviction to do something because they were not "one of us"? The Syrophenician woman was hurting and the disciples had the opportunity to help and all they said was "send her away." There may be a strong, convicting parallel here. Just as the initial mission of the disciples (Matt 10.5f) was limited to Jews, most of us believe that the mission of the church as a collective body with respect to benevolence is limited to saints. This conviction is based on a pattern we see in 1 Cor 16.1f, Acts 11.29, and Rom 15.25f and other New Testament references. But even if that is an accurate interpretation and application of what we read in those verses, as individuals our mission

is not limited. Our individual responsibility is the broader “love your neighbor as yourself.” Let us not let our convictions about the limited mission of the church blend over in some way into our understanding of our personal responsibility toward all mankind, and diminish our compassion for those who are not like us in all details of the faith. Frankly, I am not sure that benevolence for the world at large has been one of our strong suits.

Shortly after I received this assignment I received the following text message: “In Sunday morning class last year, it was said about giving to people begging for food that, ‘you know that they just want the money for beer,’ then, laughter. So I have been real confused. I haven’t known what to do or what is right to do.” We have all probably been witness to such attitudes. It is wrong on two points: first, the assumption that the motives of people asking for help are always wrong or that they are lying, and second, the laughter at their plight.

In answer to the text message question regarding “what to do?,” my answer would be that we should always keep our focus more on Jesus, not his weak disciples. That is where this miracle gets interesting.

Jesus

People have often been critical of Jesus’ response, claiming He did not care. At first “He ignored her and then called her a dog,” they say. It is indeed one of the oddest exchanges in the Bible:

The woman: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

Jesus: (Silence)

The woman: “Lord, help me!”

Jesus: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

The woman: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Jesus: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”
(Matt 15.22–28)

In this case I want to assume Jesus was not rude, was not unkind, and did not sin. He had good reasons for responding the way He did. There is no evidence his responses were taken by the woman as insulting. She was not offended or discouraged by Jesus' statement. In fact, v 27 says she accepted the comparison and furthered the discussion using the same ideas. "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Comparing a woman to a dog alarms us, perhaps because of the rude and insulting way the term *dog* has been applied to women in our culture, but the fact is it is not uncommon to use animal characteristics to describe human behavior. We sometimes use similar language in an inoffensive way. An aggressive lawyer might be described as "a bulldog in the courtroom." Someone who has a string of good luck is called a "lucky dog." And when someone over 50 cannot figure out how to use the camera on their cell phone we say "you can't teach an old dog new tricks!" Kyle Butt summed it up: "Before people 'dog' Jesus for the way He used an animal illustration, they might need to reconsider that 'their bark is much worse than their bite' when it comes to insinuating that Jesus was unkind and intolerant. In truth, they are simply 'barking up the wrong tree' by attempting to call Jesus' character into question. They need to 'call off the dogs' on this one and 'let sleeping dogs lie.'"¹

The Woman, Part Two

Finally, one of the greatest lessons we can learn from the Syrophenecian woman is how she showed her faith by refusing to take "no" for an answer. She was like the persistent widow in Luke 18 who knew the unjust judge had the power to help her and refused to be discouraged by his rejections. Is there something about which we are "heartbroken and hurting"? Cry out to Jesus as the Syrophenecian woman did. Sometimes our prayers are not answered as we would desire, and this becomes a great test of our faith. It is easy to be a joyful Christian when life is good. It is when things are going badly, and we pray and do not get what we want,

1. "Jesus, the Syrophenecian Woman, and Little Dogs." <<http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=10&article=317>>

that we see what kind of faith we really have. Sometimes God has reasons for saying “no.” It may be to test our faith. It could be that there is a greater good that can only be accomplished through the less-than-ideal physical circumstances He allows to continue. We should never doubt His love for His children and His wisdom to do what is best. In spite of the disciples’ discouragement and Jesus’ initial “no,” the Syrophenecian woman still believed and kept asking and was eventually rewarded for her faith.

Two Applications

Let us not be like the disciples and ignore the pain of people in the world who are hurting. When we meet people who are different from us culturally and religiously and who are in a bad situation we should feel compassion and be willing to help if it is reasonable to do so. Imagine driving home from these lectures. You get off an exit to get gas, and see a family sitting at the intersection holding a sign, “Help Please.” What scripture comes to mind? I have asked this question previously and usually the response is either, “the poor you have with you always” (Matt 26.11), or “if a man will not work neither shall he eat” (2 Thes 3.10). In either case we excuse ourselves from getting involved. We might as well think “send them away” as the disciples said.

Why do we think of those scriptures and not how Jesus concluded the parable of the good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10.37)? Why do we not think of “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard” (Prov 21.13), or “as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6.10), or “whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3.17), or “who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses” (Prov 28.27)? We could go on and on because compassion the foundation of Jesus’ teaching.

In Jam 1.27, James, the brother of the Lord, taught that true religion comes down to how we treat other people, especially those who are in need. We must always respect God’s revelation regard-

ing the work of the church, but what kind of church are we if we are not encouraging obedience to the second greatest commandment? We need to love people and embrace opportunities to help others.

But this raises uncomfortable questions for us. What are we getting ourselves involved in? The good Samaritan apparently was not distracted by that question and his response to the man beaten and left to die is what “loving your neighbor as yourself” looks like.

How much is enough? How often and how much we should help is enough is a tough question, often agonized over by people of sincere conscience. I am afraid the answer might be, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matt 19.21). In other words, if it is our intent to merit God’s approval by our perfect deeds then we must go all the way. But even Jesus did not help everyone. It is a matter of judgment when and how much we might help. What we absolutely cannot be is unloving and uncompassionate, or worse, rude toward people of the world who are suffering.

What about their spiritual need? In addition to helping physically, we should look for ways to point them to God and the Gospel. James challenged us, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled;’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (Jam 2.14–16) We could take it a step further and ask, “If we do give them things which are needed for the body but give them nothing for their soul, what does it profit?” I do not believe that we should make Bible study a condition of our helping someone, but in the back of our mind we should be thinking about their far greater need for the gospel. Perhaps by helping we are building a relationship. Perhaps the approach is to pray during such face to face encounters that God would open a door of opportunity to speak about Jesus.

Finally, if God says “no” to our cries for help, we should not give up praying or being faithful but rather we should trust that He must have a reason. In Matthew’s account, the woman’s response to Jesus’ initial rejection was, “she came and worshipped Him, say-

ing, Lord help Me!” Our reaction of faith to a denied prayer request should be to worship! We might also keep asking, but worship. When Job learned that he had lost his oxen and donkeys and sheep and servants and camels and sons and daughters, the Bible says he “arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1.20–22). It is certainly easier said than done but the God we believe in always deserves to be trusted and worshipped.

Sometimes the answer is “no.” It is then that even greater faith will be demonstrated when we, like Paul with his thorn in the flesh, accept our less than ideal physical circumstances as the will of God, continue to trust God, and look for ways to glorify Him through them. Thankfully, however, when it comes to the spiritual need of salvation, God is always ready to say “yes” to those who truly call to Him for help. The Syrophenecian woman’s miracle (like all miracles) illustrates the spiritual work of the gospel of Christ which is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom 1.16).

Freed from Her Bond

Deliverance for the Bound Woman

Jerry Falk

In the thirteenth chapter of his gospel, in vv 10–17, Luke relates the account of a woman stricken with a terrible affliction for “eighteen long years” (v 16).¹ He adds the heart-wrenching detail that she was “bent over and could not fully straighten herself” (v 11 ESV). Further compounding the gravity of her condition is the Lord’s revelation that she had been “kept bound” by Satan the entire time (v 16 AMP). The woman was one of several in attendance at the local synagogue that Sabbath day, perhaps “either in Galilee or Judea,”² listening to Jesus as He taught about God and the coming kingdom. Her life was about to change more than she could have ever imagined.

Though the age of this “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13.16) is not mentioned in the text, life expectancy in first century Palestine was starkly different from what it is today in developed countries. In fact, some assert that subjects of ancient Rome may have been expected to live only “an average ... of twenty-eight years.”³ Thus, eighteen years most likely would have represented a large part of this woman’s life.

1. All Scripture references will be taken from the *NASB 1995 Updated Edition* unless otherwise noted.

2. J. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments: Luke* (The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc. 1999) 357.

3. A. Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (Metropolitan Books 2014) 32.

Despite modern medical advances, some are still faced with the prospect of living with debilitating diseases for many years. In 1989, my father was poisoned by a contaminated batch of an over-the-counter sleeping aid known as L-tryptophan. Unfortunately, he was not the only one. More than fifteen hundred souls in the United States who took the same pills developed eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome (EMS), an incurable, sometimes fatal, illness “characterized by elevations of blood eosinophils (a type of white blood cell[s]) and myalgia (severe muscle pain).”⁴ Dad went on to live another twenty-one years with this condition before breathing his last in 2010. Like the bound woman of Luke 13, many today have had to live for extended periods of time with arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, and other disorders that can cause partial or complete paralysis. In the midst of such suffering, it is comforting to know that there is One who takes note of our condition and, though we may not be cured by available medical means, He is able to free us of a much more serious affliction.

Luke 13.10 is the last record in the inspired writer’s gospel of “Jesus seiz[ing] the occasion of teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath to press His assault on the dominion of Satan.”⁵ The Greek word *synagoge* referred originally to “a bringing together”⁶ or to a “gathering (as of fruits).”⁷ Later, in New Testament times, it came to represent “an assembly of Jews formally gathered together.”⁸ About these convocations, which may have begun shortly after the destruction of Solomon’s Temple in 586 BC,⁹ Meyer says,

The *synagogues* were places of assembly for public worship, where on Sabbaths and feast days (at a later period also on the second and fifth days of the week) the people met together for prayer, and to listen to

4. G. J. Gleich, “Eosinophilia-Myalgia Syndrome,” Apfed.org, August 13 2018, <<https://apfed.org/about-ead/eosinophilia-myalgia-syndrome/>>.

5. J. T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press 2012) 282.

6. J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (American Book Company 1889) 600.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. “Synagogue,” Britannica.com, August 13 2018, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/synagogue>>.

the reading of portions of the Old Testament, which were translated and explained in the vernacular dialect. With the permission of the president, anyone who was fitted might deliver addresses.¹⁰

These Jewish houses of worship provided Jesus with excellent teaching opportunities, as was the case of those present for the healing of this partially-paralyzed woman. Luke's statement that Jesus was teaching in "one" (Luke 13.10) of the synagogues may suggest that the Lord was in a more populous area, where there were two or more of these local assemblies. Accordingly, John Gill states that in Jerusalem alone "there were three hundred and ninety-four synagogues; and other writers increase their number, and say, there were four hundred and eighty."¹¹

A later example of visitors being offered the chance to speak to a local gathering of Jews occurred during Paul's first evangelistic trip. Upon arriving at Pisidian Antioch, "on the Sabbath day [Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark] went into the synagogue and sat down" (Acts 13.14). After the customary reading of the Pentateuch and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue said to them, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it" (v 15). Paul, taking advantage of this tradition, introduced the congregation to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah of the Psalms and Isaiah (vv 16–41).

Among other things, the apostle told the Jews in Pisidian Antioch that "they did not recognize [Jesus] nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath" (v 27 ESV). The Sabbath day was an ideal opportunity to tell the Jews about the promised Prophet who, like Moses (Deut 18.15; Acts 3.22; 7.37), would redeem the people of God from bondage. Moses rescued the Israelites from Egyptian captivity; Jesus would later deliver both Jew and Gentile from the slavery of sin.

Jesus had the "custom" of attending these synagogue gatherings in His hometown of Nazareth "on the Sabbath" (Luke 4.16). This personal practice was carried over into broader areas of Palestine

10. H. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Gospel of Matthew* (Funk & Wagnalls 1884) 106.

11. J. Gill, *Luke* 357–58.

as the Lord reached out to others with the message of salvation. Matthew states that “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people” (Matt 4.23).

The teaching of the word of God in the synagogues, during which Jesus sometimes healed worshippers of physical and spiritual afflictions, was a vital part of His earthly ministry (Matt 9.35; 12.9; 13.54; Mark 1.21, 39; 3.1; 6.2; Luke 4.15f, 33–38, 44; 6.6; 13.10; John 6.59). To underscore this point, Jesus Himself said to the high priest during His mockery of a trial, “I have spoken openly to the world; *I always taught in synagogues* and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret” (John 18.20).

Jesus did not preach the gospel and do miracles in these congregations simply because it was the place where Jews would meet. The Lord knew that *the day* on which they came together was the most-fitting time to accomplish this work. He realized that He could find His fellow countrymen there on the Sabbath (Matt 12.9f; Mark 1.21; 3.1f; 6.2; Luke 4.16, 31, 33; 6.6; 13.10). The Great Physician deliberately took advantage of this day to heal broken souls, not only in the assemblies of the synagogues but also outside them (Luke 14.1–6; John 5.1–9; 7.21–23; 9.1–14). As a result, the Jewish leaders actively sought to destroy Him (Matt 12.14; Mark 3.6; Luke 6.11; John 5.16; 7.19, 23). This is why, in our text, the synagogue official complained to Jesus saying, “There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day” (Luke 13.14). To this ruler and other religious teachers, performing miracles on the Sabbath was in violation of the principle that on the seventh day one “shall not do any work” (Exod 20.10).

Why would Jesus insist on healing a woman on this day, knowing full well that it would create more opposition? It could be argued that instead of running from controversy, Jesus ran *to* it. The Lord could have limited the working of miracles to other days of the week, but, instead, purposely chose to perform these signs on

the Sabbath. However, His intention was not to be controversial for the sake of controversy. He had nobler motives. Jesus knew that, as the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12.8; Mark 2.28; Luke 6.5), the day foreshadowed true rest and deliverance, and He was prepared to do everything in His power to make sure that the hearers could avail themselves of these blessings.

In Exod 20, we find the proclamation of the Law on Mount Sinai by God Himself. After a short preface, He lists the Ten Commandments before a trembling crowd (vv 1–17, 19). With respect to the fourth commandment, God says,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20.8–11 ESV)

The Israelites were commanded to “remember” the Sabbath, which entailed “a scrupulous rest from ordinary work.”¹² They were to give this day special recognition, or “sanctify it” (Exod 2.8 YLT), by ceasing from the routine chores normally done on the other six days of the week. This would allow the Jews to set it apart for a special use, that of honoring the Creator by humbly fulfilling its sacred purpose.

The significance of the Sabbath is seen in the fact that “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen 2.3). The attribution of the human characteristic of rest to God (known as anthropomorphism) suggests that God ceased from His creative work. His “resting” on this day was not designed for an all-powerful Creator who “does not become weary or tired” (Isa 40.28), but ultimately for the Israelites, who would later be commanded to cease from their normal work activities on the same day. God inaugurat-

12. G. Rawlinson, *Exodus, Vol. 1*. The Pulpit Commentary (Funk & Wagnalls 1880) 148.

ed a day of rest *for their benefit* or, as Jesus put it during His earthly ministry, “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2.27). This fact, no doubt, also influenced Jesus in His decision to heal the suffering woman in the synagogue that day.

Moses’ revelation in the first part of Gen 2.3 that “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” looks forward to the day when God “came down on Mount Sinai” and made known to the people of Israel His “holy Sabbath” (Neh 9.13f ESV; cf. Ezek 20.10–12). It was on *this day* that God sanctified the day of His rest (*i.e.*, made it holy in the sight of Israel) by requiring them to do the same on the seventh day of the week. Until this precise moment in the biblical narrative, “there had been no commandment given to man to sanctify the day.”¹³ By ceasing to participate in their normal work activities on the Sabbath, the Jews would experience a small foretaste of God’s heavenly rest that would eventually be offered to all through Jesus Christ. The purpose of observing a temporal repose was to cultivate the desire among the people of Israel for an eternal one.

The command to rest on the Sabbath was by no means an absolute prohibition of all types of activity. This is evidenced by Jesus’ defense of His disciples when they became hungry and were “picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating [them]” (Luke 6.1–5; cf. Matt 12.1–8; Mark 2.23–28). The Pharisees insisted that the disciples were doing what was not lawful to do on the Sabbath; in contrast, the Lord pronounced them “innocent” (Matt 12.7; cf. Deut 23.25). Nor were the miracles performed by Jesus on the Sabbath in violation of the principle that “on it you shall not do any work” (Exod 20.10 ESV; cf. Matt 12.9–14; Mark 1.21–28; 3.1–6; Luke 4.31–37; 6.6–11; 14.1–6; John 5.1–9, 16; 7.19–24; 9.1–14). Neither picking heads of grain and rubbing them together nor healing afflicted souls on the Sabbath could properly be regarded as an infraction of the fourth commandment. The religious leaders knew all too well that “each of [them] on the Sabbath [would] untie his ox or donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it” (Luke 13.15 ESV). Thus, the healing of the woman bound by Satan

13. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* Trans. J. Martin (T. and T. Clark 1864) 2.119.

in the thirteenth chapter of Luke enjoyed God's full approval, despite the indignation of the synagogue official (Luke 13.14). It was the perfect moment for the Messiah to give this poor woman relief from her horrible infirmity and rescue her from her evil captor.

The theme of rest runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. From the very first book of the Bible, we see that Lamech named his son "Noah," declaring that "this one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed" (Gen 5.29). The meaning of Noah's very name, "rest,"¹⁴ "consolation, or ... comfort,"¹⁵ evokes thoughts of the true rest that would eventually come through Him who would deliver both Jew and Gentile "from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3.13; *cf.* vv 10–12), from its "yoke of slavery" (Gal 5.1), and from the futility of striving to be justified by its works (v 4; *cf.* Rom 3.9–20). We find rest, comfort, and consolation in the thought that "...Christ is the end [*i.e.*, fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10.4).

In addition to the original proclamation of the fourth commandment on Mount Sinai by God Himself (Exod 20.8–11; Deut 5.12–15), several other passages in the Old Testament focus on the Sabbath as a day of rest. For instance, after the people returned to their tents (Deut 5.30), unwilling that God speak to them directly, and "Moses approached the thick cloud where God was" on Mount Sinai (Exod 20.21), Jehovah repeated the requirement that the people rest on the seventh day (Exod 23.12; 31.12–18; 34.21; 35.2; Lev 23.3; Deut 5.14). He later referred to the day three times as "a sabbath of complete rest" (Exod 31.15; 35.2; Lev 23.3).

"Sabbath rests" that did not always fall on the seventh day were also commanded on six of the seven annual Jewish festivals: the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Feast of Harvest or Pentecost), the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Ingathering). It

14. W. Gesenius and S. Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Samuel Bagster & Sons Limited 1857) 539.

15. J. S. Exell, *Homiletical Commentary on the Book of Genesis*. The Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary on the Old Testament (Funk & Wagnalls 1892) 96.

is interesting to note that the last three of these observances (the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles), took place on the seventh month. The seventh day (*i.e.*, the Sabbath), the seventh month, and the seventh year (or “Sabbatical Year”) were reserved for times of repose. In contrast, as far as this writer can tell, no explicit mention of rest or prohibition of work is made in connection with the one remaining festival, the Feast of First Fruits. This observance took place “on the day after the sabbath” (Lev 23.11).

The fourteenth of *Nisan* (*Abib* or *Aviv*), the first month of the Hebrew calendar, signaled the beginning of Passover. The Jews were to take a lamb, “an unblemished male a year old ... from the sheep or from the goats” and kill it at twilight (Exod 12.5f). That same night, they were to prepare and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (v 8). This signaled the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted for seven days (v 15). Moses goes on to say, “On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you” (v 16). Thus, rest was associated with both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Jews were to count “seven complete sabbaths” (Lev 23.15) from the Feast of First Fruits and the following day, the fiftieth (v 16), would be the commencement of the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost or *Shavout*). On this same day, God told the Israelites through Moses, “You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations” (v 21). While it may not have been as far-reaching as the Sabbath day prohibition, nevertheless, it entailed rest from “ordinary work” (v 21 ESV).

The Feast of Trumpets, also called *Rosh Hashanah*, was to be observed once a year on the first day of *Tishri*, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. About this day, the Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation’” (Lev 23.24).

The Day of Atonement took place once a year on the tenth day of the seventh month. On this day, the high priest would enter the Most Holy place to make atonement for his sins and those of the people of Israel. Also known as *Yom Kippur*, it was the holiest and most solemn of all Jewish observances. Regarding the Day of Atonement, God said to Moses, “It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute” (Lev 16.31). Later, God adds, “It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath” (Lev 23.32).

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths and *Sukkot*, was celebrated beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. This feast would start “with a rest on the first day” and end with “a rest on the eighth day” (Lev 23.39).

A period of rest for the people of God was also commanded every seventh year (Exod 23.10f). During this “Sabbatical Year,” God told the Jews not to sow their fields, prune their vineyards, reap the aftergrowth, or even gather grapes from untrimmed vines (Lev 25.3–5). While this statute was limited to work on one’s land during the seventh year and may not have been not as all-encompassing as the seventh-day prohibition, it still was necessary to “let it rest” (Exod 23.11). By fulfilling this requirement, the Jews would enjoy a hiatus from their regular agricultural work for an entire year.

Furthermore, there was to be a year of rest every fifty years, known as the Jubilee. The Israelites were commanded, “You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years ... You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines” (Lev 25.8, 11). As in the case of the regular Sabbatical Year, the land was to lie fallow on the fiftieth year, thus providing rest from ordinary agricultural chores.

Even the Promised Land is described as a place where God would give the Israelites “rest from all [their] enemies” (Deut 12.10; cf. 3.20; 25.19; Josh 1.13–15). After the people of God en-

tered in, we are told that “the land had rest from war” (Josh 11.23; 14.15) and that “the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them” (Josh 21.44; *cf.* Josh 22.4; 23.1). Likewise, during the time of the United Kingdom, David said, “The Lord God of Israel has given rest to His people” (1 Chr 23.25). David’s son, Solomon, also made a similar statement when he blessed the assembly of Israel at the dedication of the temple (1 Kng 8.55f). Years later, during the time of the Divided Kingdom, King Asa said to Judah, “The land is still ours because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side” (2 Chr 14.7).

Asa’s statement, as well as that of other Old Testament characters, shows that the rest God promised the Israelites was conditional. They would enjoy it as long as they continued to seek Him and obey His will. Sadly, during the time of the prophet Isaiah, the people no longer desired the blessing of rest. Isaiah, as well as other faithful prophets, said to them, “‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’ and, ‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen” (Isa 28.12). In another passage the prophet says, “For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.’ But you were not willing” (Isa 30.15). Jeremiah gave a similar word of exhortation when he said, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls” (Jer 6.16). Regrettably, they refused.

In contrast, despite her prolonged debilitating condition, the woman of our story was one of those in attendance at the synagogue listening to the Lord’s teaching. While the religious leaders sought to destroy the Christ (Matt 12.14; Mark 3.6; Luke 6.11; John 5.16; 7.19, 23), this ill soul was seeking Him.

Perhaps she had heard Jesus’ invitation, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt 11.28–30). The Lord recognized that “there

remain[ed] a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4.9) and that this woman, a “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13.16), could have it. He understood that it was not the seventh day, observed incompetently for fifteen centuries by the Jews. He also realized that it was not the land of Canaan. Five hundred years after Joshua had given the Israelites possession of it, King David spoke of another rest for those who believe (Heb 4.3–11; Psa 95.7–11). The Lord knew that the Sabbath and the Promised Land were mere shadows of God’s eternal rest.

Luke 13.12f says, “When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God.” How invigorating and freeing it must have been for this woman to be finally cured! Any attempt here to express her elation would be inadequate. For the first time in eighteen years, she finally found rest from her physical affliction. However, the Great Physician’s treatment would not have been complete without a spiritual deliverance from the great oppressor of all humanity.

The Sabbath was to be more than just a day of rest. It was also meant to be a time of remembrance, a time to recall that they were a rescued people and God was their Deliverer (Exod 15.13; 18.8–10). God chose the Jews to be a people of His own possession, not because they were more powerful or greater in number than the rest, but because the Lord loved them and redeemed them from their oppression in Egypt (Deut 7.6–8).

In the second repetition of the Law, Moses reminds the people to “observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you ... so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (Deut 5.12–14). In this reiteration of the Law, however, he adds, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (v 15).

Along with refraining from ordinary work on the Sabbath, the Israelites were to recall two things: (1) that they (or their forefa-

thers) had been “a slave in the land of Egypt” and (2) that God had delivered them from their dreadful captivity with His great power. The children of Israel would eventually long to return to Egypt (Exod 16.3; Num 11.5), fooling themselves into believing that they were better off there, but God continued to call it a “house of slavery” (Exod 13.3, 14 ; *cf.* 20.2; Deut 5.6; 6.12; 7.8; 8.14; 13.5, 10; Jdg 6.8; Mic 6.4). Before being freed from their cruel imprisonment, “Israel was employed in slave-labour there, and treated as a slave population.”¹⁶ The reason for remembering their humble estate as Pharaoh’s servants was designed to keep them from regressing to a similar (or worse) predicament. As George Santayana ably wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”¹⁷

Likewise, the Sabbatical Year (*i.e.*, the Year of Release or Remission) was associated not only with letting the land rest every seventh year (Lev 25.1–7), as we have seen earlier, but also the freeing of property or slaves. About this, Moses told the people in the second repetition of the Law, “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed” (Deut 15.1f). Later in the same chapter he says,

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today (vv 12–15).

Accordingly, Exod 21.2 says, “If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man

16. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary* 2.34.

17. G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress* (Charles Scribner’s Sons 1905) 285.

without payment.” In this passage, “it is supposed that the term six years is to be understood as referring to the sabbatical years.”¹⁸

It is also worth noting that a remembrance of Israel’s captivity in Egypt and/or a proclamation of release were associated with the Passover, the Feast of Weeks (*i.e.*, Pentecost) and the Seven Sabbaths of Years or the Jubilee. With respect to the Passover, Exod 12.42 says, “It is a night to be observed for the Lord for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the Lord, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.” About the celebration of the Feast of Weeks, Deut 16.12 says, “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”

On the year following the Seven Sabbaths of Years, or Jubilee, the Israelites were to cancel all debts, return to all land that had been sold to its original owners, and free all Hebrew slaves. Moses told them, “You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family” (Lev 25.10). After instructions regarding the release of property, “comes the law for the discharge of all Israelites that were sold for servants [to fellow Israelites or to those sojourning with them], in the year of jubilee, if they were not redeemed before.”¹⁹ In connection with the releasing of Hebrew slaves on the Jubilee, God reminds the people, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God” (v 38) and, again, “For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt” (v 42).

The signs and wonders done by Jehovah in Egypt proved that He also had the power to redeem the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and lead them to the Promised Land. God was fully able to save them and did so on His schedule and in the manner of His wise choosing. Likewise, Jesus chose to “set free” (Luke 13.12, 16

18. A. Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments. A Commentary and Critical Notes* (G. Lane & P. P. Sandford 1843) 1.408.

19. M. Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament with Practical Remarks and Observations* (Ed. Barrington & Geo. D. Haswell 1828) 1.449.

NIV) this woman from her infirmity on the Sabbath. It was not a convenient time for the Lord, considering that it would cause Him greater opposition, but the seventh day was the best time to demonstrate to the Jews that He was the Redeemer of Israel and could rescue them from the slavery of sin. His ability to miraculously release the woman from physical bondage pointed to the fact that He could also deliver her (and them) spiritually from the power of Satan and offer true rest.

When Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth and entered the synagogue “on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4.16), He stood up to read and someone handed Him a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it and read the part that says, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (vv 18f; cf. Isa 61.1f). Almost thirty years earlier, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, extolled God, saying,

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), *salvation from our enemies* and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: *to rescue us from the hand of our enemies*, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1.68–75)

Just as the Israelites were commanded to set free Hebrew slaves on the Sabbatical Year (Deut 15.12–15) and the Jubilee, Jesus desired to set free this woman (and others) from the bondage of Satan and sin. These are the true enemies of God! Only Jesus could rescue her “from the domain of darkness” (Col 1.13) and transfer her to His eternal kingdom. Likewise, by giving Himself for our sins, He is able to “rescue us from this present evil age” (Gal 1.4).

The ruler of the synagogue was unable to see beyond his twisted view of the Law and understand that Jesus had picked the right

time to free this woman from Satan's bondage. It was right because the Sabbath was not merely for rest, but also deliverance. It was right because it was a matter of compassion, something in which the religious leaders were lacking (Matt 23.23).

This afflicted soul was much more valuable than a farm animal (Luke 13.15). She was a "daughter of Abraham" (v 16). Being a descendant of the father of the Jews entailed much more than an outward profession. It meant doing "the deeds of Abraham" (John 8.39). Being a physical descendant of the patriarch is not what really mattered because "from ... stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3.8). What was important was an active, submissive faith in the Great Redeemer who had entered their synagogue that Sabbath day. It is only when faith leads one to humble obedience that he may be a true descendant of Abraham (*cf.* Gal 3.26–29; Luke 16.19–31; 19.1–10).

Completely unable to answer the Lord's questions, Luke 13.17 tells us that "all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him." Jesus silenced not only the synagogue official but also "the Scribes and Pharisees, that were present, who followed him wherever he went, and were his implacable enemies."²⁰ In the end, truth will always triumph over falsehood, no matter how much it is opposed.

Jesus has the power to deliver us from the "house of slavery" today and lead us to the land of true rest. As in the case of the bound woman of Luke 13, He continues to call us today by means of the gospel (2 Thes 2.14). Regardless of the years that we have been in the bondage of sin, He patiently waits for us to come in order to return us to full sonship.

20. J. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments: Luke* (The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc. 1999) 371.

He Had Compassion on Them

Sustenance for the 5,000

Brad Hopkins

The apostle John declares that the gospels are a condensed account of all the things that Jesus said and did. In fact, Jesus did so many things that “the world itself could not contain the books” that could be written (John 21.25).¹ Although John is only referring specifically to the things he himself wrote, based on this statement we must draw the same conclusion regarding the things written in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Given that understanding, we should certainly take notice when a teaching, an event, or a miracle is repeated. Such repetition is an indicator that something significant has taken place.

Of the miracles of Jesus, the feeding of the 5,000 is perhaps the only one that is clearly seen in all four gospels.² Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the story without comment but, according to John, this event nearly led to an attempt to make Jesus king by force and it is this miracle that prompted some of the most challenging of Jesus’ teachings regarding himself (John 6.22–69). Indeed, the feeding of the 5,000 was a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. On one day, the multitudes are following him and going wherever he goes (John 6.22–24). By the end of that same day, “many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6.66). At issue is the nature of the compassion that the Lord offers to all of mankind.

1. All Scripture references are from the ESV.

2. Matt 14.13–21; Mark 6.30–34; Luke 9.10–17; John 6.1–15.

In order to appreciate that, it is necessary to come to an understanding of what compassion is. The English definition of the word is “pity inclining one to help or be merciful.”³ Depending on the translation used, the Greek word has been rendered either “compassion” or “pity” in the Bible, and the ESV actually uses both (Mark 1.41; 8.2). The two words are virtually synonymous. That is interesting because, generally speaking, compassion seems to carry a positive connotation while pity is often resented. Although the words mean essentially the same thing in the dictionary, colloquially *compassion* often carries the idea of sympathy while *pity* often carries the idea of judgment: the one being pitied is somehow below the one doing the pitying. The distinction may have more to do with the heart of the recipient than with the attitude of the sympathizer. For the purposes of this study, let us propose another distinction. From here forward, we will try to use *compassion* when we mean sympathy for another’s unfortunate circumstance and *pity* when we mean sympathy for another’s unfortunate state, remembering that both spring from the same impulse.

With those things in mind, consider the compassion of Jesus. On the day he fed the 5,000, “he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14.14). This sympathy for the troubles that befall all people is part of what made Jesus so attractive to so many, and it is a hallmark of his character as he conducted himself in the world, so much so that he became known for the good deeds that he did.⁴ When he came in contact with those who were physically suffering, he did more than sympathize with them. He helped them, healing their various infirmities publicly and privately and not always as a sign for the masses. On more than one occasion, he charged those whom he had healed to tell no one of what he had done, or he performed the deed privately, away from the crowds.⁵ His compassion, then, was intensely personal. It was a sympathy that motivated him to show mercy and, since he had the power to heal them, he did, and they loved him for it. He healed lepers

3. F. Abate, ed., *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, American Edition (1996) 283.

4. Acts 10.38.

5. Luke 5.14; 8.56; Mark 7.32–36.

and the demon-possessed. He caused blind people to see and he gave the mute power to speak again. He cured sicknesses and even brought people back from the dead. When he saw a widow whose only son had died, he brought the young man back to life and restored him to his mother.⁶ He filled the bellies of those who were hungry. Naturally, as more and more were helped, his fame spread and the crowds began gathering to him in order to receive such a blessing for themselves or for their loved ones:

And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that he might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched him were made well. (Mark 6.54–56)

Jesus did not simply do these things himself. He also taught his disciples to have the same mind and to do what they could to help alleviate the physical suffering of others. When describing the scene of judgment and separation of the sheep from the goats in Matt 25, the primary standard given by the Lord is whether one had compassion for the weak, the helpless, and the disadvantaged, or not:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the King will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. (Matt 25.35–40)

Such compassion is described in the Bible as the mark of true, undefiled religion,⁷ and true Christians throughout the ages have always been known by their earnest sympathy and willingness to

6. Luke 7.11–17.

7. Jam 1.27.

help those who are in need. It is impossible for us today to make any legitimate claim to Christlikeness or to justly wear the name of a Christian if love, compassion, sympathy, and mercy in action are not central to our character. It is not enough to merely wish someone well, for Scripture rhetorically asks, “What good is that?”⁸ It is not enough to just talk a good game. Rather we are to love one another “in deed and in truth.”⁹

In the parable of the good Samaritan,¹⁰ Jesus outlined a compassion that sets aside one’s own plans and desires. He exhorted believers to follow the example of the worthy Samaritan who way-laid his own journey, sacrificed his own time, spent his own money, and generally inconvenienced himself for the good of a complete stranger who had fallen into a desperate position.

On the day he fed the 5,000 he exemplified that character in himself. At that time, Jesus had just been told by his disciples about the death of John the Baptist.¹¹ He had been only recently rejected by the people in his own hometown.¹² The disciples had been sent out with authority to teach and to heal, and they had just returned.¹³ Along with all of that, Jesus had lately been involved in controversy and persecution from the leaders of the Jews.¹⁴ They had been so busy, and continued to be so busy and pressed by the crowds, that they did not even have time to eat.¹⁵

It is in this context that Jesus and his disciples were going away to the desert for a while. They were there to mourn the death of John, to rest, and to recuperate; they did not go there to teach and to heal. But when they got to where they were going, Jesus was recognized and the chaos began again. Jesus therefore laid aside his own plans for the day, his own weariness and sorrow, and that of his disciples and friends, and he began to heal and to teach again.

8. Jam 2.15f.

9. 1 John 3.16–19.

10. Luke 10.25–37.

11. Matt 14.12f.

12. Mark 6.1–6.

13. Mark 6.7–13.

14. John 5.18–47 (esp. vv 38, 40–47).

15. Mark 6.31.

Who can fail to be attracted to this? We lament the evils that befall us through no fault of our own. Healthy people get sick and are stricken sometimes with mortal illness. Innocent children are born with infirmities. Good, hard-working, responsible people sometimes face financial disaster. We appreciate those who come alongside in such times and, without a hint of judgment, sympathize and do what they can to help us.

We love that about Jesus. In ancient times, and still today, we want Jesus to help and we call on him to relieve us of the burdens we feel in this life. Many love the church for this same reason, and leave the church when these needs are not met. What we do not appreciate as much is the person who offers to help, but who also tries to tell us where we went wrong and how to change ourselves to keep it from happening again.

Imagine this scenario: You are on a trip and your car blows a tire. One person stops, commiserates for a moment with you about your bad luck, helps you change your tire, and you are on your way. Another stops and proceeds to point out that all your tires look pretty worn and you probably could have kept this from happening by checking things a little more closely. He helps you, but admonishes you to pay more attention to preventative maintenance in the future. Which one would you rather have stopped? Probably the first, but the second actually showed more concern and could have done you more good.

In my years preaching, I have seen people ask for financial help from the church and receive it. I have seen the same people get angry and leave the church when an accountant in the congregation offered to sit down with them to work out a better way of managing their money so that they would not need to ask for help again in the future. They were offended that someone would dare suggest that some failure on their part led to their bad situation. We do the same to Jesus, I fear. We want and welcome his help to alleviate the circumstantial burdens of our lives. But we get angry and offended when he starts to suggest that our outlook, attitudes, and beliefs could use some improvement, too. When he sympathizes with our problems, it is good. When he pities our weakness, in our minds it is bad.

There is more, however, to Jesus' compassion than just his sympathy and desire to help alleviate physical suffering. He is also concerned, compassionate, and moved to help us out of the hopeless and helpless spiritual state we are in. This, as much as his earthly compassion, is demonstrated in the feeding of the 5,000.

Matthew's gospel reveals that, in compassion, Jesus healed their sick. In Mark's account, Jesus' compassion also led him to "teach them many things."¹⁶ He saw that they were like shepherdless sheep, without understanding and without guidance, so he was moved to teach them. So, drawing the accounts together, the day became a magnificent day of healing and teaching, culminating with an incredible miracle in which Jesus demonstrated his absolute power over creation, and even his power to create anew.

Bread became a theme of Jesus' following this miracle. On another occasion, he fed 4,000 people in the same miraculous manner as the 5,000.¹⁷ Shortly after that, on a day when the disciples had forgotten to bring bread, Jesus cautioned them, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."¹⁸ When the disciples thought that he was rebuking them for forgetting to bring bread, he reminded them of the two great miracles and expressed astonishment that they did not understand that they truly did not need to worry about what they were going to eat. Instead, he was cautioning them about the weightier concern of spiritual sustenance. The leaven, the teaching, of the Sadducees and Pharisees would lead to death, but Jesus' words were and are the very bread of life.¹⁹

On the day after the feeding of the 5,000, the crowd once again followed Jesus to where he was, finding him in Capernaum, on the other side of the sea. It is impressive and commendable that they would go to such effort and go so far out of their way to be in the presence of Jesus again, but the Lord rebuked them, saying, "You are seeking me, not because you saw the signs, but because

16. Mark 6.34.

17. Matt 15.32–39; Mark 8.1–10.

18. Matt 16.5–12.

19. John 6.33–35, 47–50, 63.

you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.”²⁰

They sought him for his compassion. They loved the healing and the feeding. They did not want the teaching, but without it they were doomed to eternal destruction. In pity, Jesus sought to deliver them from that and pleaded with them to receive it.

That kind of compassion, however, is rarely appreciated. When Jesus relieved them of physical affliction, they were thankful. When he tried to relieve the deeper spiritual affliction, they grew angry. Why? On the one hand, the problems were circumstantial. It is no one's fault when they are born blind, or contract leprosy, or get sick. A person is not even always at fault for being poor. It is simply the misfortune that comes to all in one way or another. On the other hand, sin and separation from God is a different kind of problem. It is a state of being rather than a situation one finds oneself in. In order for it to be solved, it is required that one acknowledge that there is something wrong in him. There is a wrong outlook, a wrong philosophy, a wrong mindset leading to wrong action. When Jesus said, “believe in me,”²¹ he was also saying that they must stop believing in themselves. As they were, as they thought, and as they lived, they were doomed. In order to have life, they had to embrace the Spirit and give up on the flesh.²²

Jesus' teaching in John 6 is difficult. He used the graphic, horrifying imagery of feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood. He was exclusive; “I am the bread of life.” As they looked upon the man Jesus, they were offended. “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”²³ Jesus, however, did not back down at all in his teaching. If anything, he became more strident, even to the point of driving them away. His compassion, mercy, and pity for them kept him from rescinding any part of his essential message. This pity for man's sinful state is as evident

20. John 6.26f.

21. John 6.35.

22. John 6.63.

23. John 6.42.

in the Scriptures as Jesus' compassion for those in unfortunate circumstances.

The challenge we face is, will we be like the multitudes who merely want the benefit? When disaster strikes in life, we want to be able to say, "Lord, help me!" We want him to be able to give relief, and when we come into the kingdom, into the church, we want to associate with the kind of people who will sympathize and help when we are struggling. With Jesus, though, you cannot have one without the other. Even in this wonderful miracle, in which he showed mastery over the physical world, what is behind it is his desire that we embrace the eternal life that he is offering; that we eat of the everlasting bread. We see that pity in Jesus throughout the gospels. He did not only heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cleanse lepers and feed the hungry. He also constantly showed mercy to those who were separated from God, and he taught his disciples to do the same.

In the parable of the prodigal son,²⁴ Jesus conveyed the image of a compassionate father who only wants restoration with his wayward children. Consider the difference between two sons. One grows up and begins to make his way in the world. Along the way, misfortune happens to him. Perhaps he tries to start a business and it fails. He comes to his father and asks for help. Any respectable father would gladly try to help. It was just bad luck. Maybe the son comes down with a long-term illness. Again, any parent would gladly do all they could. The other son, however, grows up and says, "Dad, I hate you and everything you stand for. I disagree with your way of living. I disagree with the way you raised me. I don't want anything to do with you or your ways. I am leaving, and I am going to do what I want." That son then proceeds to ruin his own life through sin, greed, passion, and wickedness. When he reaches the depths of the consequences of his decisions, comes to his senses and crawls home, saying, "Dad, I need help," is there a difference between a father's response to him and his response to the other son? Should the father say, "You should have listened to me. It's too late now. I was right all along. I am not even sure I want you for

24. Luke 15.11–32.

a son?" Surely any worthy parent would be eager to do anything possible to set his son right again.

It is the same emotion. It is the same response of sympathy, mercy, and pity that causes one to help in both cases. In the parable, Jesus showed that this is the response the Father has toward us. When we are guilty, rebellious, and shaking our fists at God, his response, because of Christ, is not anger or condemnation, not yet. Rather, it is pity. It is compassion. It is sympathy. When we have made a disaster of our lives because of pride, stubbornness, and hard-heartedness, what God wants to do is put the robe back on us. He wants to bring us home and to give us all the glory, blessing, and benefit that we had before.

In John 6, when Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life,"²⁵ he was explaining the point of the miracle he had done the day before. His compassion is such that he will feed the hungry for a day, but it is so much bigger than that. In compassion and pity, he wants to feed the starving soul and sustain it, not for a moment, but forever. Multitudes ran to him in order to be healed of diseases, disabilities, and heartaches. Crowds flocked to him in hopes of a free meal, or to see something amazing. Would that many would run to him, saying, "Lord, I need help with me! Fix what is wrong with me. Make me truly know myself and see myself as you do. Give me a holy heart." He offers that. It is the bread of life that endures forever. How shallow it would be to only appreciate the momentary blessing while ignoring the eternal gift.

25. John 6.27.

Though I Was Blind, Now I See

Enlightenment for the Blind Man

Rusty Taylor

C. S. Lewis classifies the miracles of Jesus into two categories: Miracles of the Old Creation and Miracles of the New Creation. He contends that “each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of Nature.”¹ Indeed, one might argue that God’s original act of creation was more grand than any miracle, at least in terms of sheer magnitude and scope, if not in terms of spiritual import. Without creation there would be no diseases to cure, no storms to calm, and no bodies to resurrect. It is particularly appropriate, then, that today’s lectures focus our attention on Christ as Creator.

The NT affirms that “by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth...all things were created through him” (Col 1.16) and we read of Christ “through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1.2).² However, no other portion of Scripture is so filled with allusions to Christ’s role in creation as the Fourth Gospel.³ The opening words of John’s Gospel quote from Gen 1.1, “In the beginning...” We are then told regarding Christ that “all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that

1. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (HarperCollins 2001) 138–39.

2. Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated. *Cf.* 1 Cor 8.6; Rom 11.36; Psa 33.6; Heb 11.3; 2 Pet 3.5.

3. S. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (Oxford UP 2009) 212–34.

was made” (John 1.3). Creation imagery abounds in the form of several key themes throughout the book: light and darkness, life, work, the world, water, and the Spirit.⁴ As in the prologue to the Gospel, creation imagery fills the crucifixion and resurrection narratives.⁵ At the close of the book, Jesus breathes on his disciples and tells them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20.22), recalling Gen 2.7 where God breathes into Adam “the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”⁶

All of this creation imagery has a purpose. It combines to paint a striking portrait of Christ in response to the question asked by the man born blind in John 9.36, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”⁷ For John, Christ’s role as the agent of creation does not end with what Lewis calls the “Old Creation.” In John 5.17, Jesus responds to an accusation that he has broken the Sabbath by appealing to Jewish discussions about whether God’s work of creation continues beyond the original six days in Gen 1.⁸ He answers his accusers, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” Not only does he place himself on par with the Father in this verse, as he does in many other verses in the Fourth Gospel, he indicates that he came into the world for a purpose,

4. C. Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Bloomsbury 2015), 27–55. Other themes, such as familial relationships, could be added to this list. D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC (InterVarsity Press 1991) 114–16 argues that John’s use of *logos* also originates from the biblical creation account, rather than its various uses in Philo and broader hellenistic thought.

5. M. Coloe, “Creation in the Gospel of John” in M. Coloe, ed., *Creation Is Groaning: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Liturgical Press 2013) 71–90; J. Suggit, “Jesus the Gardener: The Atonement in the Fourth Gospel as Re-Creation.” *Neotestamentica* 33 (1999) 161–68.

6. Several authors have additionally proposed parallels between the seven days of creation and the literary structure of the Fourth Gospel, particularly in the timeline of John 2–5 or in the number of miracles in John 2–11. Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* 123–49 offers a detailed and compelling critique of such proposals. M. Rae, “The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John’s Gospel” in R. Bauckham and C. Mosser, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Eerdmans 2008) 303 adds, “I don’t find the case convincing, helpful though it might be to my argument.”

7. “John’s presentation of *who Jesus is* lies at the heart of all that is distinctive in this Gospel,” Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 95.

8. e.g. Philo, *Leg.* 1.1–6, 18. Cf. Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* 83. “John sees Jesus as God’s agent in *creatio continua*,” McDonough, *Christ as Creator* 223–25.

and that purpose has everything to do with what Lewis calls the “New Creation.”

Despite a spate of recent research emphasizing creation themes in John’s Gospel, few works reference the healing of the man born blind in John 9, and none address this chapter at length.⁹ This lecture will explore what the miracle in John 9 may reveal about Christ’s role as Creator, and about our role as his New Creation.

Christ the Creator: “I Am the Light of the World” *(John 9.1–7)*

John 9 records one of the most well-known and well-loved of Jesus’s miracles. Commentators often note the “consummate artistry” of the narrative: “We have here Johannine dramatic skill at its best.”¹⁰ The words of the man born blind in this chapter inspired even the most popular of hymns, John Newton’s “Amazing Grace:” “I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind but now I see.” Vv 1–7 focus squarely on the identity of Jesus.

The narrator is careful to mention at the outset that Jesus “saw” a blind man (John 9.1). In both the opening and closing scenes of the chapter, Jesus not only notices this man, but takes the initiative to interact with him. This detail may echo the refrain in Gen 1 that on each day of creation “God saw that it was good.”¹¹ If so, we are reminded that God is vitally interested in the well-being of the ones he has created.

When Jesus’s disciples ask him what led to the man’s blindness,

9. In addition to the works cited above *cf.*, e.g., A. Moore, *Signs of Salvation: The Theme of Creation in John’s Gospel* (James Clarke 2013); J. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal in the Gospel of John,” *CBQ* 72 (2010) 275–290; J. du Rand, “The Creation Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Perspectives on Its Narratological Function within a Judaistic Background” in G. van Belle, *et al.*, eds., *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peeters 2005) 21–46; J. Painter, “Earth Made Whole: John’s Rereading of Genesis” in J. Painter, *et al.*, eds., *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (Chalice Press 2002) 65–84. M. Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (Mohr Seibek 2002); C. Carmichael, *The Story of Creation: Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* (Cornell UP 1996).

10. R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 29 (Yale UP 1966) 376.

11. Gen 1.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. The phrase, or a close variation of it, appears on each day of creation except the second, and appears twice on the third and sixth days.

Jesus responds by emphasizing what the man's blindness will lead to.¹² Their question is rooted in a biblical principle from Genesis that all suffering in the world has its ultimate origins in human sin.¹³ However, they are apparently also informed by strong cultural conceptions predisposing them to associate blindness with sin in more specific ways.¹⁴ Jesus flatly denies their false assumptions.

Jesus then prefaces the miracle with a statement of his purpose. His language is the language of creation. "The works of God" (John 9.3) echoes "his work that he had done in creation" (Gen 2.3) and "God...put him in the garden...to work it" (Gen 2.15). The dual work of God and man in Genesis may be why Jesus continues, "We must work the works of him who sent me" (John 9.4). Jesus intends to "work the works of God" in the man's life so that the man may be able to "work the works of God" with Jesus.¹⁵

Next Jesus uses the language of light and darkness. The concept of "light" was closely related to "seeing" for ancient readers, so it comes as no surprise when the theme appears in this miracle account.¹⁶ "It is day; night is coming" (John 9.4) echoes "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." (Gen 1.5).¹⁷ In the following verse, "I am the light of the world" (John 9.5) draws the

12. C. Yuckman, "'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest': Vision and Vocation in John 9" *JTI* 12 (2018) 116.

13. Cf. Gen 3.16–19. Job demonstrates that suffering does not always result from sin in direct and identifiable ways. Ezekiel 18 refutes the idea that sin and its consequences are inherited from one's parents. More confounding to modern ears is the disciples' insinuation that the man may have sinned before he was born. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*. NICNT (Eerdmans 2010) 543 sees a possible correlation with "certain biblical pronouncements by those in despair, such as Psalm 51:5"

14. The Dead Sea Scrolls correlate sin with blindness more than with many other types of suffering. S. Olyan, "The Exegetical Dimensions of Restrictions on the Blind and the Lame in Texts from Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8 (2001) 38–50. Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Hendrickson 2003) 777–78 for additional background. Tobit 3.3–5 is particularly relevant given Tobit's blindness and healing.

15. Michaels, *The Gospel of John* 545–46.

16. Cf. Luke 11.34, "Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is evil, your body is full of darkness." John uses the word "light" more than any other NT author: in the ESV, "light" occurs 24 times in John, 29 times in Job, and 31 times in Isaiah.

17. Notice also the repetition of "evening and morning" in Gen 1.5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31. On the meaning of "night is coming when no one can work" cf. H. Mendez, "'Night' and 'Day' in John 9.4–5: A Reassessment." *New Testament Studies* 61 (2015) 468–81.

reader back to the same statement in John 8.12, to the opening words of the Gospel in John 1, and to the first words of God in Gen 1.

In Gen 1.3, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen 1.3). Similarly, John 1 associates light with God’s creation, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world...the world was made through him” (John 1.9f). For John, light and darkness represent “good” and “evil,” perhaps because “God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness” (Gen 1.4). Light is present in the ordered realm of God’s good creation, whereas darkness represents the chaos that existed in Gen 1.2.¹⁸

Jesus’s statement in John 8.12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” is a bold claim about his identity. Scholars generally acknowledge that Jesus’s frequent use of the phrase “I am” in John’s Gospel emphasizes his divinity, since it alludes to the words of God in Exod 3.14 and several passages in Isaiah.¹⁹ Both OT contexts emphasize the pre-existence of God, the fact that he is the only true God, and the fact that he created the world.²⁰ Jesus makes this “I am” statement while attending the Feast of Booths (John 7.2), at which a spectacular light display would represent God’s presence in the pillar of fire during the wilderness wandering (*cf.* Exod 13.21f). Jesus therefore claims to be the light that led their ancestors through the darkness of the wilderness.²¹ By repeating the “I am” statement in John 9.5, Jesus ties these bold claims to the miracle he is about to perform. Like OT prophets (*cf.* 9.17) who spoke oracles from God, then acted them out in order to confirm and

18. Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John*, 83. A. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Zondervan 2009) 337–47.

19. Isa 41.4; 43.10; 46.4; 48.12 LXX. Shafer, “The Divinization of the Blind Man: *Ego Eimi* in John 9:9” *Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society: Proceedings* (2005) 157–58.

20. D. Ball, “*I Am*” in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background, and Theological Implications*. JSNTSup 124 (Sheffield Academic Press 1996) 33–39.

21. S. Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ Healing the Blind Man in John 9” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010) 307–18. The miracle also has the effect of producing a tangible witness to Jesus’s claim to be “the light of the world,” a witness the Pharisees challenge him to produce in 8.13 (*cf.* 8.18f).

reinforce their message, so Jesus speaks in John 7–8, then demonstrates the veracity of his claim to be “the light of the world” by filling a blind man’s world, for the first time in his life, with light.

The account of the miracle itself is brief, but the process Jesus uses is uncharacteristically complicated for the Fourth Gospel. Prior to this, Jesus healed two individuals merely by speaking (John 4.50f; 5.8f). Here he speaks; then spits; then makes clay; then anoints the man’s eyes; then instructs him to wash in the water of a pool called “Sent.”²² Only then does the man “come back seeing” (9.6f). Ancient commentators frequently argued that Jesus’s method evokes the creation of Adam in Gen 2.7.²³ Some even go so far as to suggest that Jesus used the clay to form new eyes for the man.²⁴ Modern authors have generally been more hesitant to find an allusion to creation here and some argue that it is “improbable,” primarily because Jesus uses “clay” rather than “dust.”²⁵

However, Genesis is not the only OT text that discusses creation. In fact, there exists a rich biblical and extra-biblical tradition of describing God’s formation of Adam out of “clay,” using the same Greek word that appears in John 9.6.²⁶ The most notable biblical texts are found in Job and Isaiah.²⁷ “Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust?” (Job 10.9). In the immediate context Job asks God, “Does it seem good to you...to despise the work of your hands?...Have you eyes of flesh? Do you

22. The name of the pool in Isa 8.6 is “Shiloah” based on the Hebrew root “to send.” LXX translates the name as Siloam.

23. E.g. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.15.2; Ammonius, *Fr. Jo.* 317; Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 56.2; Ephrem, *Diat.* 16.28.

24. Nonnus, *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, Trans. S. Johnson, “Nonnus’ Paraphrastic Technique: A Case Study of Self-Recognition in John 9” in D. Accorinti, ed., *Brill’s Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis* (Brill 2016) 274.

25. C. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Westminster Press 1978) 358. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 363 simply says, “It is extremely difficult to decide just what this signifies.” Cf. McDonough, *Christ as Creator* 35.

26. Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* 114–18. McDonough, *Christ as Creator* 35. Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* 372; Michaels, *The Gospel of John* 546.

27. Isaiah is the most frequently cited OT book in the Fourth Gospel (Isa 40.3 in John 1.23; Isa 54.13 in John 6.45; Isa 53.1 in John 12.38; Isa 6.10 in John 12.40). The disciples’ question in John 9.2 implicitly alludes to Job.

see as man sees?” (Job 10.3–4). Elihu’s speech in Job 33.6 LXX reads, “It is the divine spirit that has made me...You have been fashioned from clay, even as I am.” God responds in Job 38.14 LXX, “Was it you that took clay soil and formed a living creature, and, able to talk, set him on earth?”²⁸ Isaiah uses similar language: “Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’” (Isa 45.9).²⁹ It is not insignificant that each of these passages occur in contexts discussing God’s infinite superiority and human frailty. In fact, the only other use in the NT of the Greek word for “clay” is found in Rom 9.20f, which borrows directly from Isaiah’s potter and clay imagery. Additionally, while commentators carefully downplay the significance of Jesus forming the clay out of spit in John 9.6, several passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls associate spit with the creation of Adam out of dust.³⁰

Finally, then, we find in the simple command that Jesus gives to the man in John 9.6 a subtle allusion to the simple command God gave to the man in the garden in Gen 2.16f. One simply obeys. The other does not. This will be the focus of the remainder of the chapter, but for now we must notice that Jesus has assumed the role of God in this re-enactment of that garden scene.

According to Isaiah, the Messiah would be one who would solve the problem of blindness (Isa 29.18; 35.5; 42.6f, 16). For that reason, it is probably no coincidence that “there are more miracles of giving sight to the blind recorded of Jesus than of any other

28. Trans. A. Pietersma and B. Wright, *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford University Press 2007). Cf. Job 4.19; 5.7.

29. Cf. Isaiah 29.16; 64.8; cf. 64.4.

30. “Kneaded from dust, his body is but the bread of worms; he is so much spit, mere pinched-off clay” (1QS 11:21–22). “But I, a creature of clay, what am I? Kneaded with water...” (1QHa 11:24–25). “According to my knowledge I speak. But I am mere spit, a vessel of clay, what shall I speak unless You open my mouth? How shall I understand unless You give me insight?...How shall I see unless You have uncovered my eyes?” (1QHa 20:35–36; 21:5). Trans. M. Wise, *et al*, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New English Translation* (HarperCollins 2005). Cf. D. Frayer-Griggs, “Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls” *JBL* 132 (2013) 659–70. “He uses the method of the Creator, making clay, infusing it with breath; and providing the moisture for which that dust had been waiting (Note moisture and breath in Gen. 2:5–7). That spitting might have magical properties is neither here nor there,” J. Derrett, “John 9:6 Read With Isaiah 6:10, 20:9” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1994) 251–54.

sort of miracle.”³¹ Jesus heals two blind men by touching their eyes (Matt 9.27–31), a demon-oppressed man who was both blind and mute (Matt 12.22f), a man by spitting on his eyes and touching him twice (Mark 8.22–26), a beggar named Bartimaeus by speaking (Mark 10.46–52), blind people brought to him by the crowds on various occasions (Matt 15.30f; 21.14), and when asked whether he really is the Messiah, Jesus responds by healing “many who were blind” (Luke 7.21–23; Matt 11.4–6). However, for John, Jesus’s healing of a blind man demonstrates more than that he is the promised ruler of Israel. It demonstrates that he is the pre-existent Creator of sight. He has both the authority to rule us and the power to re-create us.³²

Rejecting the Creator: “We Know that He Is a Sinner” *(John 9.8–34)*

The debate in the following verses makes up the bulk of the chapter and “narratively eclipses the miracle itself.”³³ Significantly, Jesus is absent from the story for 27 of the chapter’s 41 verses. In John 9.8–13, the man’s neighbors question him about his identity and the whereabouts of his healer. Apparently convinced that a miracle has occurred, but not sure what to make of it, the neighbors seek the input of the religious authorities.³⁴ In John 9.14–17, the authorities probe whether the man might be a suitable witness against Jesus.³⁵ They are not satisfied with his response. In

31. B. Witherington, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*. (Westminster John Knox Press 1995) 180.

32. Cf. Heb 11.3, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” “If God’s word did not fail at the creation—and a more impressive display of power and reliability of God’s word could hardly be found in Scripture—then God’s promise to glorify the faithful will not fail either.” D. McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrews* (Florida College Press 2010) 385.

33. Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 115.

34. M. Montonini, “The Neighbors of the Man Born Blind: A Question of Identity” in S. Hunt, et al, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (Mohr Siebeck 2013) 439–45. J. Staley, “Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: Reading Character in John 5 and 9” *Semeia* 53 (1991) 55–80 suggests more nefarious motives.

35. J. Tripp, “Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses: Reading John 9 in Greco-Roman Forensic Context” *CBQ* 80 (2018) 470–90 is probably correct that this is

John 9.18–23, the authorities question the man's parents, who are notoriously unwilling to defend their son. By claiming ignorance, however, they too prove to be unsuitable witnesses against Jesus.³⁶ In John 9.24–34, the authorities question the healed man a second time and it is here that the conflict reaches its climax. The man exposes the authorities' bias and inconsistency, and the authorities in turn wield their power to expel him from the community.³⁷

These verses explore ways people often respond to Jesus. The healed man resolutely defends him and the reality of the miracle he performed. The neighbors defer to their religious authorities. The parents simply try to not upset anyone. The authorities determine to oppose Jesus at any cost. Only one path leads to discipleship. The creation language in this section will help to illuminate where the others went wrong.

V 14 tells us that “it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.” This information not only sets up the central conflict of the chapter, it again places the story within the setting of creation. Exod 20.10 commands: “The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.” Exod 20.11 explains: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth...and rested on the seventh day.” While the OT contains only general prohibitions against work on the Sabbath,³⁸ Jewish interpreters took it upon themselves to define precisely what is and is not “work.”³⁹ Jesus often criticizes such efforts, not out of disdain

pre-trial witness preparation to prosecute Jesus, rather than a prosecution of the blind man.

36. John will later characterize them negatively in John 12.42f. M. Labahn, “The Parents of the Man Born Blind: The Reason for Fear without True Reason” in S. Hunt, *et al.*, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (Mohr Siebeck 2013) 446–50.

37. A large amount of literature is devoted to the historical circumstances of expulsion from the synagogue in John 9.22; 12.42; 16.2. The conclusion that this account is anachronistic is unwarranted. Cf. e.g. 1QS 7:1–2; 15–17.

38. Num 15.32–36 describes an execution for gathering sticks on the Sabbath. However, note the discussion of sins “with a high hand” in Num 15.30f. Jer 17.19–27 discusses carrying burdens on the Sabbath. Contextually the key issue is disregard for God.

39. Cf. e.g. the thirty nine categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath in *Mishnah Shabbat* 7:2, supposedly based on the types of work required to build the tabernacle in Exodus 25–40. Parallels between the Jewish Temple and the garden of Eden are prob-

for careful obedience, but because they inevitably elevate human opinion over what is written in the divine word.⁴⁰ The Pharisees quickly conclude in v 16, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” Yet although Jesus broke the Pharisees’ rules, he did not break any command of God.⁴¹ Because the Pharisees have replaced God’s standard with their own, they become oblivious to the fact that a miracle has occurred and eager to condemn the one sent by the God they claim to revere.

Three key themes in John 9.8–34 reflect the language of Gen 3.5, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” First, the phrase “your eyes will be opened” is repeated seven times in John 9. It marks out each of the four scenes: The neighbors ask the man, “how were your eyes opened?” (9.10). The authorities ask him, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” (9.17). The parents plead, “We do not know...who opened his eyes” (9.21). Then the authorities ask again, “How did he open your eyes?” (9.26). The phrase also identifies the conflict, “It was a Sabbath day when Jesus...opened his eyes” (9.14). Finally, the healed man uses the phrase twice at the culmination of his defense of Jesus: “He opened my eyes” (9.30) and “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind” (9.32). This last statement is the most direct reference to creation in the chapter.⁴²

Second, the phrase “you will be like God” in Gen 3.5 is central to the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees in the context of John 9. When the Pharisees claim to be like God in John 8.41, Jesus responds, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8.44).⁴³ Indeed, they prove to be like

ably relevant here.

40. Cf. Matt 12.1–12; Mark 2.23–28; 3.1–6; Luke 6.1–11; 13.10–17; 14.1–6; John 5.1–18; 7.22–24.

41. Of the categories in *m. Shabbat* 7:2, he likely violated the prohibition against “kneading.” Note also rabbinic prohibitions against “healing” on the Sabbath when one’s life was not in danger, cf. *Y. Shabbat* 14, 14d, 17f.

42. Each time the phrase occurs in John 9, the pronouns are placed before the noun, which is unusual in Greek. The same word order appears in the phrase in Gen 3.5 LXX.

43. John 8.44, “He was a murderer from the beginning...he is a liar and the father

their father. They lie (John 9.29; cf. 7.41). They challenge the healed man to deny his Creator (John 9.15, 17, 26; cf. Gen 3.1). They “re-vile” the healed man (John 9.28) carrying out the curse of Satan in Gen 3.15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.”

Third, the phrase “knowing good and evil” is reflected in the frequent use of the word “know” in John 9. The healed man does not “know” where Jesus is (9.12) or whether he is a sinner (9.25), but he “knows” that “though I was blind, now I see” (9.25). His parents “know that this is our son and that he was born blind” (9.20), but they “do not know” how he is suddenly able to see or who healed him (9.21). The Pharisees “know” that God has spoken to Moses (9.29) and they “know” that Jesus is a sinner (9.24), but they “do not know” where Jesus is from (9.29f).⁴⁴

The irony of these three statements in Gen 3.5 is that Satan is the one who speaks them. Satan promises the woman that if she will disobey God, then her “eyes will be opened,” she “will be like God,” and she will “know good and evil.” However, God had already given her all three of those things. God is the one who created her eyes (Exod 4.11), God created her in his own image (Gen 1.26f), and God created her mind with the ability to think and reason. Moreover, when she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3.6), she became blind to every other tree in the garden that God had already given her (Gen 1.29). The temptation of Satan distracts us from the majesty of what God has already done for us and convinces us that we need more—that we need to look elsewhere for sight, knowledge, and fulfillment.⁴⁵

of lies,” further alludes to the murder of Abel (Gen 4.7f) and the deception of Eve (Gen 3.4f). Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* 83.

44. “The portraits of increasing insight and hardening blindness are masterful. Three times the former blind man, who is truly gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance (vv 12, 25, 36). Three times the Pharisees, who are really plunging deeper into abysmal ignorance of Jesus, make confident statements about what they know of him (vv. 16, 24, 29),” Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* 377.

45. N. Ward, *The Growth of the Seed: Notes on Genesis* (DeWard 2007) 62. Cf. 2 Cor 4.4, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Rather than looking to God, the neighbors are distracted by their reverence for the Pharisees, the parents are distracted by their fear of the Pharisees, the Pharisees are distracted by an understanding that is rooted in their own power structures rather than in God's word. As a result, they are blind to the miracle that God has worked before their eyes. This problem is not new or uncommon. The OT frequently warns against doing "what is right in your own eyes."⁴⁶ Likewise, Paul writes, "His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made...but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom 1.20f). Seeking insight and knowledge is good (Prov 4.5–8). Seeking insight and knowledge apart from God, will lead your foolish heart to be darkened, just as it did the woman in the garden, and just as it did the Pharisees in John 9.24, who proudly and ironically announce, "We know that this man is a sinner."

Worshipping the Creator: "Lord, I Believe"
(*John 9.35–38*)

The contrast between the man born blind and the religious authorities grows ever clearer in the chapter's final section. Jesus reappears in the narrative, once again taking the initiative to engage with the man. Jesus finds him and asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9.35). We were told in the previous section that the religious authorities "did not believe" (9.18). But the man responds to Jesus's question with a question of his own, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?" (9.36). Jesus answers, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you" (9.37). In fact, the man had never seen Jesus before. The last time Jesus was present, the man was still blind.⁴⁷ But at this point in the story, the man has "seen" the reality that Jesus is from God (9.33). Moreover, the man "sees" in a way that those enamored with "what is right in their own eyes" can never see. When he realizes that he is speaking to

46. Cf. Deut 12.8; Jdg 14.3; 17.6; 21.25; Prov 12.15; 21.2.

47. "He shows no sign of recognizing Jesus," Michaels, *The Gospel of John* 550. The author may signal this nuance through the use of a different Greek verb meaning "to see, perceive" than the ones used throughout the chapter.

the one who healed him, the man confesses, “‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshipped him” (9.38).⁴⁸

G. K. Beale has observed that “we become what we worship.”⁴⁹ That truth forms one final link between Jesus’s healing of the man born blind and the story of creation in Gen 1–3. Gen 1.26–28 says that “God created man in his own image.” Likewise, several clues in John 9 show that as soon as Jesus heals the man, the man bears a remarkable resemblance to Jesus.

Like Jesus, the man born blind does “the works of God” (John 9.3–4). In Gen 2.3 God rests “from all his work that he had done” and in Gen 2.15 he puts Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it.”⁵⁰ Jesus, as the perfect image-bearer, continues the work of God (John 5.17). Similarly, in John 9.3 Jesus says that “the works of God” will be “displayed” in the man born blind. The unexpected plural pronoun which begins the following verse, “We must work the works of him who sent me” (9.4), probably refers to the fact that the man will begin to do the works of God as well, once he is healed. In John 6.28f Jesus’s disciples ask him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus responds, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” It is no coincidence that we find the man born blind confessing, “Lord, I believe,” by the end of ch 9. Prior to his healing, he was a beggar and physically unable to work (9.8). Now that he can see, he is able to begin an entirely new life of productivity, both physically and in the service of the One who (re-)created him.⁵¹

48. The word translated “worship” is “a strong word that occurs in John in only two other contexts (4.20, 21, 22, 23, 24; 12.20), with each case having to do with worshipping or ministering before God” Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 122.

49. G. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Baker 2011) 357–80. Psa 115 discusses the worship of idols which “have eyes, but do not see” (v 5) and insists that “those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them” (v 8).

50. Beale argues that “the divine image is not something that humans are in themselves but rather something that humans do.” *Ibid.* 30–33. Cf. Col 3.10; Eph 4.24.

51. Parsons, “A Neglected *Ego Eimi* Saying in the Fourth Gospel?” in R. Sloan and M. Parsons, eds., *Perspectives on John: Methods and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel*. NABPR Special Studies 11 (Mellen 1993) 145–80, at 170. Shafer, “The Divinization of the Blind Man” 160.

Like Jesus, the man born blind is “anointed” (John 9.6). “Very few commentators have made anything of the fact that Jesus anoints the man’s eyes.”⁵² Indeed, the Greek verb describing the action of applying the mud to the man’s eyes can mean simply “to smear.” However, the verb is built on the same root as the word “Christ” (literally “anointed one”).⁵³ Thus, in John 9.22, when the religious authorities issue the threat that “if anyone should confess *him* to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue,” it is unclear whether the pronoun “him” refers to Jesus or to the one who was anointed by Jesus. Surprisingly, the most likely reading is that the ambiguous “him” refers to them both.⁵⁴

Like Jesus, the man born blind is “sent” (John 9.7). Forty-three times in the Fourth Gospel, we are told that Jesus was “sent,” as recently as 9.4. After anointing the blind man in 9.6, Jesus sends him to wash in a pool called “Sent” in 9.7. The author notes the meaning of the pool’s name so that we do not miss this connection. Later in John 20.21, Jesus says to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”⁵⁵

Like Jesus, the man born blind speaks the words “I am” (John 9.9). Jesus’s frequent use of the phrase in the Fourth Gospel identifies him as divinity. The occurrence of the phrase in John 9.9 is the only time in the book that it is spoken by someone other than Jesus.⁵⁶ For that reason, this occurrence is usually seen as an exception to the rule that does not carry with it “the grand overtones

52. Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 117.

53. Connell, “Making Christ of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1–41): A Hypothesis” 314.

54. Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 120–22. Cf. Rev 3.18, addressed to the church in Laodicea, “I counsel you to buy from me...salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.”

55. Parsons, “A Neglected *Ego Eimi* Saying in the Fourth Gospel?” 169; Shafer, “The Divinization of the Blind Man” 160; Derrett, “John 9:6 Read With Isaiah 6:10, 20:9” 254. If we are to see an allusion to baptism in the man’s washing, there may also be an implied correlation between his washing and the baptism of Jesus mentioned in John 1.33. Cf. D. King, *The Gospel of John*. Truth Commentaries (Guardian of Truth Foundation 1998) 185.

56. Cf. John 4.26; 6.20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8.12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 10.7, 9, 11, 14; 11.25; 13.19; 14.6; 15.1, 5; 18.5f, 8. Note specifically that in 9.9 it does not take a predicate.

it has on the lips of Jesus.”⁵⁷ However, a handful of scholars have argued otherwise, and in view of what we have seen in this lecture I believe they are correct.⁵⁸ The healed man makes the statement in response to his neighbors’ debate about who he is. Marsh perceptively observes:

“The question troubling them was whether this was the same man; and Johannine irony has never been more quietly or effectively used than in reporting this discussion about the ‘new creation’ of a man remade by Christ. In answering the question some said, ‘It is he,’ echoing in human speech in the third person that ‘I am’ which is the divine name, and so suggesting that some contagion of divinity remains with the healed man. Others said ‘No, but he is like him;’ and both answers can be read as stating some real truth that the speakers do not know. There is a sense in which the man can now join his Lord and say ‘I am;’ there is a sense in which, by this encounter, he has been made ‘like Jesus.’”⁵⁹

Like Jesus, the man born blind is rejected by his own people. John 1.11 prepares us for this reality: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” Even many of those who believe in Jesus, bow to the pressure of the religious authorities and do not confess him (12.42). In the same way, not even the man’s parents will confess him (9.22). As insults begin to fly, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being “born of sexual immorality” (8.41), just as they accuse the healed man of being “born in utter sin” (9.34).⁶⁰ Yuckman observes that “the real consequences of playing Jesus’ stand-in should not be downplayed. Antagonism and rejection accompany it.”⁶¹

Like Jesus, the man born blind powerfully speaks the truth. In John 8.45, Jesus says to the religious authorities, “Because I tell the

57. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*. NCB (Eerdmans 1981) 344.

58. E.g. F. Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Eerdmans 2012) 577–78. W. Howard-Brook, *Becoming Children of God: John’s Gospel and Radical Discipleship* (Wipf & Stock 2003) 219.

59. J. Marsh, *The Gospel of Saint John* (Penguin 1968) 380.

60. Parsons, “A Neglected *Ego Eimi* Saying in the Fourth Gospel?” 171. Shafer, “The Divinization of the Blind Man” 161. Note that both are said not to have sinned (John 9.3; 1 John 3.5) although the text does not imply that the man was actually sinless.

61. Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 123.

truth, you do not believe me.” Likewise, the man speaks only the truth about Jesus, and the religious authorities do not believe him (9.18). In John 7.15, the Jews ask incredulously, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” In John 9.34, they declare about the healed man, “You were born in utter sin, and you are teaching us!”⁶² Then in John 9.25, 27, and 30 the man responds to their accusations with a cleverness and wit matched only by Jesus, “catching them in their own words by a similar satirical impulse.”⁶³ It may be that what Jesus claims about himself in John 14.10 is also true of the man born blind: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

Like Jesus, the man born blind becomes a child of God. In John 9, the man’s birth is mentioned repeatedly (9.1f, 19f, 32, 34) and his parents even arrive on the scene (9.2f, 18–23). The question asked of them, “Is this your son?” (9.19) is perhaps suggestive, because ever since the man “washed and came back seeing” (9.7) everything about him indicates that he has now been “born from above” (3.3–5). Genesis 5.1–3 defines the “image of God” in terms of sonship: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God...Adam fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image.” It is not insignificant that Jesus describes himself in John 9.35 as “the Son of Man,” a phrase which in Hebrew could be translated “son of Adam.”⁶⁴ Like the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15.45), who “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1.15), so too this man’s “washing” (Tit 3.5) causes him to be “renewed in knowledge after the image of his creator” (Col 3.10).

When Jesus heals the man born blind, the man becomes like Jesus. Jesus didn’t heal him merely to make his life more comfortable or more fulfilling. Jesus did not heal him merely to demonstrate God’s power. Jesus healed him in order to undo the effects of the curse in Gen 3. His healing caused him to see the way God sees. His healing caused him to do the works that God does. His heal-

62. ESV and most other versions translate the latter clause as a question.

63. Yuckman, “That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest” 121.

64. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* 358.

ing caused him to truly reflect the image of God, as God intended for all humanity from the beginning. This is why John wants us to clearly see Jesus as the Creator. Jesus's work is to make a New Creation out of each one of us.

Conclusion: "Are We Also Blind?"
(*John 9.39–41*)

Critical scholarship on John has been profoundly shaped by the work of J. L. Martyn who suggested that the story in John 9 was fabricated and reflects the historical situation of the late first century community in which it was written, rather than any historical event during the life of Christ.⁶⁵ His arguments have been soundly refuted, and there remains no compelling reason to suppose that this miracle never happened.⁶⁶ However, if anything of value may be taken from Martyn's work it must be the vivid reminder that this story was written with its readers in view. This story is meant to change us.

One Sunday morning, a thirty-year-old mother of four in San Pablo, California decided she needed to take her children to church for the first time. She and her children showed up at a little building down the road with a sign outside that read, "Welcome to the church of Christ." The preacher had kind eyes and an endearing smile. His name was Olen Holderby. The next week, she and her children were back. The Bible study that day was from John 9, and the preacher began reading from v 31, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners..." That was all she heard and all she needed to hear. She gathered her children and left before worship began.

When she did not show up the next Sunday, one of the ladies called to let her know they missed her. She lied and said one of her children was sick. The truth was that she had decided she was never going back. The next morning, after sending the children to school, she was busy painting her living room when someone knocked on the door. Annoyed, she opened the door, and there

65. J. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. The New Testament Library (Westminster John Knox Press 2003).

66. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 360–62.

was the preacher, gently smiling and apologizing for interrupting her. “Do you want me to lie to you, or do you just want me to tell you the truth?” she asked abruptly. “I believe I’d rather you tell me the truth,” he responded. “You said God doesn’t hear sinners. I’m a sinner, so I’m just wasting my time and yours by being there.” He smiled again as he pulled his Bible from his pocket and let her read for herself the good news of Jesus Christ. Then he offered to help her finish painting. A few weeks later, she was baptized.⁶⁷

Since that day, she has watched her children, her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren become Christians. She is my grandmother. Her story, and mine, could have been very different if she had been a little bit more like the religious authorities and a little bit less like the man born blind. She did not know much about Jesus, but one thing she knew: she was blind and she needed him to open her eyes.

Here we are surrounded by Christians, committed to studying and learning the word of God. In contexts like this, you would expect to find that it is particularly easy to “believe in him” and “worship him” (John 9.37–38). But we must remember the warning in the story of the man born blind. Satan is actively seeking to deceive us, and it is at times like these when we will be tempted to say, “We see,” when in fact we are blinded by “what is right in our own eyes.”

67. Adapted from an unpublished short story written by my grandmother titled “The Preacher.”

The Sons Are Free

Adoption for the Disciple

Robert Ogden

Those who knew my grandfather well know that he loved fishing. When the needs of the congregation and his family did not prevent it, he could often be found out on Lake Cumberland—sometimes with friends or family, but often by himself, fishing and thinking. The last time I saw my grandfather was in the summer before I came to Florida College. He, my father, and I spent part of the week out on the lake. As I recall, it was the usual case of “Popart” (as we grandchildren called him) catching all the fish off one side of the boat only to do the same on the other side after we demanded to switch. He was good. Yet, despite all his skill at fishing and the many thousands of fish he must have pulled out of that lake, he never once pulled up a fish that had money in its mouth. That would have been truly remarkable!

Matthew records just such a story (Matt 17.24–27), though we will argue that the real wonder of the story is in the mouth of Jesus, not the fish. Matthew is the only gospel writer to record this story.¹ The pericope sits awkwardly between the announcement that Jesus will suffer and die in Jerusalem (17.22f) and the beginning of a discourse on relationships in the kingdom (18.1–35). It is a text that seems to defy the usual categories for gospel pericopes. On the one hand, we might call it a “miracle story,” yet the narration of the mi-

1. If you believe that Mark was written first and that Matthew is using Mark as a source, then he has inserted this story between Mark 9.32 and 33.

raculous event itself is strangely absent. On the other hand, there are elements of a “conflict story” in which Jesus is in conflict with either the collectors of the *didrachma* or Peter (or both), yet the conflict is resolved in an unusual fashion, with Peter corrected but vindicated and the collectors apparently unaware that there ever was a conflict.² Moreover, there are difficult questions arising from the details of the story. All of this presents a challenge to the modern bible student. One commentator observes that this pericope “is one of the most difficult in the Gospel to understand, both in terms of the significance of certain details and in light of its location in this context.”³

However, the difficulties of this pericope are not insurmountable, and when the text is analyzed carefully, it can be the source of great comfort and awe for the people of God. In order to see that message, we must first learn about the cultural background of the story and take the time to tackle some of the questions that arise from close examination of the text. Ben Witherington III comments on the need to read this portion of Matthew carefully and with an eye for cultural context:

One thing is clear about all this material: it is frequently so Jewish in character and so culture specific . . . that unless one is prepared to give a modern audience some information about the context, learners are likely to miss the point of the stories and have endless questions, or worse, still read into these texts modern ideas foreign to the teaching and life of Jesus. A text without a context is a pretext for whatever you want it to mean.⁴

To avoid reading this pericope out of its historical and textual context, we will focus first on four specific questions. Then, we will

2. “Actually, this story, unique to Matthew’s Gospel . . . is so idiosyncratic that it is difficult to assign it to any form-critical category. Perhaps it is best classified as a kind of scholastic dispute story or pronouncement story,” J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Anchor Bible Reference Library 2 (Doubleday 1994) 880; cf. J. Bailey and L. VanderBroek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Westminster/John Knox Press 1992) 121; G. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study* (InterVarsity Press 1999) 137.

3. C. Blomberg, *Matthew*. The New American Commentary 22 (Broadman 1992) 269.

4. B. Witherington III, *Matthew*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Smyth & Helwys 2006) 334.

summarize our findings and seek to understand the significance of the pericope as a whole. Finally, we will ask how this story sharpens our understanding of Jesus.

What is the *didrachma*?

Matthew records that “the collectors of the two-drachma tax” approached Peter with a question: “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” (v 24).⁵ The ESV has here supplied the word “tax” to clarify for the modern reader what would have been obvious to the original audience—that Peter was approached by the collectors of the Temple Tax.⁶ The Temple Tax, sometimes referred to as the half-shekel tax, was collected annually in the month leading up to Passover for the purpose of funding the cultic activities of the Temple (sacrificial animals for the whole nation, tools and utensils, facility upkeep, etc.). It was not an oppressive tax; a *didrachma* was about two-days wages for laborers. Two *didrachmas* (four *drachmas*) were equivalent to a *stater*, which is the coin that Peter is instructed to use to pay the tax for two people (v 27b).⁷ The *stater* was evidently the preferred method of payment, specifically the high-quality Tyrian *stater* of which many examples survive.⁸

The expectation was that every adult male would pay the Temple Tax as a patriotic duty.⁹ It was especially popular in the dias-

5. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

6. Not all have agreed that the *didrachma* is the Temple Tax rather than a secular tax. In the centuries following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, many Christian writers understood this pericope in light of secular taxation. For a thorough list of patristic references, see W. Horbury, “The Temple Tax” in E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge UP 1984) 265 n2. More recently, a small minority of scholars have argued unconvincingly that the context is a secular tax collected by the Romans. For a summary and critique of the seven reasons given for this conclusion, see W. Davies and D. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. ICC (T & T Clark 1988) 2.738–40.

7. For a more thorough discussion of these equivalencies and the rationale for understanding the *didrachma* to be equivalent to the half-shekel, see J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC (Eerdmans 2005) 723–24.

8. Cf. *Baba Qama* 36b; *b. Bek* 50b. This, of course, would require a great deal of money changing, *m. Sheq* 1.3. However, see footnote 14 regarding the reliability of these sources.

9. According to the Mishnah, women, slaves, and minors were exempt while gentil-

pora. Josephus, explaining the immense wealth of the Jerusalem Temple, says that “all the Jews throughout the habitable world, and those who worshipped God, even those from Asia and Europe, had been contributing to it for a very long time.”¹⁰ Philo says that these contributions are made “cheerfully and gladly” and that,

practically in every city there are banking places for the holy money where people regularly come and give their offerings. And at stated times there are appointed to carry the sacred tribute envoys selected on their merits, from every city those of the highest repute, under whose conduct the hopes of each and all will travel safely.¹¹

Elsewhere, Philo writes that—unlike a tribute begrudgingly paid to rulers—the Jews pay their tribute to the Temple “gladly and cheerfully” and that they do so “with a zeal and readiness which needs no prompting and an ardour which no words can describe.”¹² Cicero, a Roman orator and lawyer, also mentions this Jewish practice in his defense of Flaccus, a former governor who had prohibited Jews in Asia from sending gold to Jerusalem.¹³ Finally, Rabbinical sources have much to say about the details of the Temple Tax.¹⁴

iles and Samaritans were forbidden to participate, *m. Sheq* 1.3.

10. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (14.7.2), trans. Ralph Marcus. Loeb Classical Library. Vol. 7 (Harvard UP 1950) 505. Elsewhere, Josephus mentions the *didrachma* in connection with the diaspora in Babylon, explaining that it was a “national custom for all to contribute to the cause of God,” *Antiquities* 18.9.1.

11. Philo, *Spec. leg.* (1.77–78), trans. F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 7 (Harvard UP 1962) 145.

12. Philo, *Spec. leg.* (1.141–144), *Ibid.* 181. Philo’s enthusiastic remarks have led some to conclude that the tribute was not viewed as a tax at all, but this misunderstands the contrast Philo is making, e.g., D. Garland, “The Temple Tax in Matthew 17:24–25 and the Principle of Not Causing Offense,” in D. Bauer and M. Powell, eds., *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*. SBL Symposium Series 1 (Scholars Press 1996) 74.

13. “It was the practice each year to send gold to Jerusalem on the Jews’ account from Italy and all our provinces, but Flaccus issued an edict forbidding its export from Asia.” Cicero, *Pro Flacco* (67), trans. C. Macdonald. Loeb Classical Library [Latin Authors] 324 (Harvard UP 1977) 515.

14. See especially *m. Sheq* 1.1–2.3; However, such rabbinical sources must be used with great caution because—although they attempt to record the teaching of earlier rabbis—they reflect the memories and perspectives of rabbis living a century (or, in the case of the Talmud, far longer) after the Temple was destroyed. The dating of specific rabbinical traditions is tricky business and conclusions reached by doing so should be taken with a grain of salt. If my survey of the commentaries on Matthew is any indication, the temptation to lean heavily on rabbinical sources is especially strong where our

The origin of the tax is hazy. The iteration that was current in the time of Jesus appears to date to the Maccabean period when the Pharisees enjoyed more political power.¹⁵ Precedent for the tax was found in Exod 30.11–16 where God commanded that “a ransom” of half a shekel be paid on the occasion of a census for atonement and “for the service of the tent of meeting” (that is, to pay for the cultic objects used in the tabernacle, Exod 38.25–28). A similar obligation is laid on the returned exiles in Neh 10.32f, but there the burden is one third of a shekel, not half, and the context indicates that this was an innovation, not part of the Law.¹⁶ The originators of the Temple Tax understood it to be a continuation of the census tax and thus binding on all the people of Israel.

However, in spite of the popularity of the tax (at least in the diaspora), the scriptural precedent claimed by its proponents, and Philo’s enthusiastic claims about how happily it was paid, we have strong evidence that not everyone thought this tax was legitimate, and understanding this is essential to understanding what the collectors of the *didrachma* were asking Peter. The priests (many of whom were Sadducees) refused to pay the tax, probably on the grounds that the Temple activities should be funded by voluntary offerings, not compulsory taxes.¹⁷ The community at Qumran seems to have found itself in a tight spot with regard to the tax. On the one hand, their movement was founded in precisely the time when such Pharisaic innovations were being instituted. On the other hand, they were also fierce critics of the (mostly Sadducean) Temple authorities. Perhaps this explains the compromise

text is concerned.

15. J. Liver, “The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963) 185–90.

16. Liver, “The Half-Shekel Offering” 181–85. Statements by Philo (*Spec. leg.* 1.77–78) and the author of 4Q159 link the Temple Tax to the “ransom” of Exodus 30, but I am unaware of any ancient source that explicitly links the tax to Nehemiah 10. However, a connection seems obvious, and while the main precedent for the tax is in Exodus, it seems unavoidable that Nehemiah was also in the background.

17. The Mishnah remembers that the tax was not exacted from the priests “for the sake of peace” and appears to accuse the priests of selfish motives, *m. Sheq.* 1:3–4; However, another source may indicate the more likely reason: that they believed the Temple activities should be funded by freewill offerings, not taxation, *b. Mena* 65A.

stance that is preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls: “[Concer]ning [the ransom:] the money of valuation which one gives as a ransom for his own person will be half [a shekel,] only on[ce] will he give it in all his days.”¹⁸ This one-time payment seems to both affirm the connection with Exod 30 (note the “ransom” language) and deny the legitimacy of treating the *didrachma* as an annual tax.¹⁹ One can only imagine that there were others who—whether they chose to pay it for patriotic reasons or not—had their doubts about the legitimacy of the Temple Tax.

It is in this context that the collectors of the *didrachma* approach Peter and ask what Jesus’s stance is. I understand this to be a question about his view of the tax as a whole, not just his own private practice. Their question is worded such that it expects a positive answer, which is understandable given the general popularity of the tax, but the fact that they are asking at all indicates that they are aware of the possibility that Jesus may have objections. Peter assumes that Jesus has no objections and confidently answers, “Yes.” It is only in private afterwards that Jesus reveals that he does, in fact, have an objection to the *didrachma*.

Who Are the “Sons”?

Jesus expresses this objection by means of an analogy.²⁰ The analogy is simple: kings of the earth do not tax their sons and neither does the King of heaven; the sons are free. However, the interpretation of this analogy depends on how “sons” is understood. First, who are the “sons” of the earthly kings in the analogy? Some argue that the “sons” are the servants of the king—high government officials—and that Jesus is claiming an exemption based

18. 4Q159 (frag. 1.6–7), F. Martínez and E. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, Vol. 1 (Brill 1997) 309.

19. Nothing in the context of Exod 30 indicates that God intended the census tax to be anything more than a one-time provision or, at most, a provision for whenever a census was taken, so the Sadducees and the Qumran community are not unreasonable in questioning the use of this text as precedent for a compulsory, annual tax.

20. It is important not to confuse the analogy with the context in which Jesus uses it. Jesus is not concerned in this pericope with taxation in general (as he is in 22.15–22). Rather, he uses the analogy of secular taxation to make a point about the Temple Tax specifically.

on the fact that he was “going about his Father’s business” (Luke 2.49).²¹ However, there is little evidence that officials of the king would be called “sons” in Jesus’s day.²² Others argue that the “sons” are the citizens and that only non-citizens were taxed.²³ Yet, kings routinely taxed their own citizens. More likely, the simplest understanding is the best: the “sons” of the earthly kings are the royal family, their literal sons.²⁴

More importantly, what “sons” of the heavenly King does Jesus have in mind for the application of the analogy? What “sons” are free? Three explanations are offered. First, some understand Jesus to be referring to his divine sonship. Jesus is the divine Son of God and is, therefore, exempt from any tax levied by the Father.²⁵ The special sonship of Jesus has been noted by Matthew throughout the gospel thus far (*e.g.*, 2.15; 11.25–27; 14.33).²⁶ Earlier in this same chapter, the Transfiguration emphasizes that Jesus is the Father’s “beloved son” (17.1–13). In this context, it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus’s reference is to his own divine sonship. However, there are some difficulties with this view. First, Jesus uses the plural “sons” both in v 25 and v 26 when he could have more naturally used the singular if he were referring to himself as the only divine Son of God. Second, v 27 implies that Peter shares equally in whatever sonship Jesus has in view, and he is certainly not a son in the same divine sense as Jesus (as was just vividly demonstrated on the mountain!). Furthermore, this view assumes that the Temple Tax was a legitimate tax levied by God the Father—the very question that was in dispute.²⁷ In my judgment, this is the weakest option.

21. *E.g.*, J. Derrett, “Peter’s Penny: Fresh Light on Matthew 17:24–7” *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963) 8.

22. Nolland, *Matthew* 726.

23. C. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans 1999) 445.

24. For a more thorough answer to this question, see R Bauckham, “The Coin In the Fish’s Mouth,” in D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, eds., *The Miracles of Jesus*. Gospel Perspectives 6 (JSOT 1986) 221–22.

25. *E.g.*, D. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Sacra Pagina 1 (Liturgical Press 1991) 262; D. Carson, “Matthew” in T. Longman and D. Garland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Rev. ed. (Zondervan 2006) 394.

26. Also, note that Jesus frequently refers to “my Father,” *e.g.*, 7.21; 15.13; 16.17.

27. If the tax (and the interpretation of Exodus 30 that served as the rationale for it)

The second view, held by the majority of commentators, is that the “sons” refer to the disciples of Jesus as the unique sons and daughters of God.²⁸ Jesus’s disciples, as children of God, are exempt from the tax in a way that others—including the Jews who do not follow Jesus—are not. It is, of course, undeniable that disciples of Christ enjoy a unique relationship with God. John writes that, although Jesus’s own people did not receive him, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man” (John 1.11–13). Paul teaches that even those who were already sons and heirs under the Law are made true “sons of God through faith” in Christ (Gal 3.26–29) and that some who are physically children of Abraham are not truly children of God (Rom 9.6–8). Therefore, it is no surprise that those who enjoy this special relationship with the Father will enjoy privileges that others do not—in this case, exemption from the Temple Tax. This is a much stronger option than the first and may be what Jesus means, but there is some reason to wonder if this is really the point. While the unique status of Jesus’s disciples as children of God is found elsewhere in the New Testament, it has not been a topic in Matthew’s gospel up to this point.²⁹ Jesus has frequently spoken of “your Father,” but he does so without distinguishing between when speaking to the disciples privately (*e.g.*, 10.20) and when speaking to Jewish crowds publicly (*e.g.*, 6.5–15). That being the case, it seems strangely subtle to introduce such a radical and glorious doctrine only by way of what can be inferred from the inclusion of Peter in the payment of the tax.

is illegitimate, then Jesus’s divine sonship is irrelevant because the Father is not levying the tax. Rather, others are levying the tax illegitimately in God’s name.

28. *E.g.*, U. Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch. Hermeneia 2 (Augsburg 1989) 416–17; Witherington, *Matthew* 332; Nolland, *Matthew* 726–27.

29. A conceivable exception might be 12.46–50 where Jesus speaks of his disciples as “my mother and my brothers.” However, without prior knowledge of the teaching that comes later in the New Testament, a reader would be hard pressed to conclude from this one statement that Christians are “sons of God” in a way that is exclusive and unique. In the context of Matthew, this statement says more about Jesus’s prioritization of and close relationship with his disciples than about their unique relationship with God the Father.

Thus, we come to the third option, a minority view that I think has some merit and should at least be considered. This view understands the “sons” of the heavenly King, who are free with regard to this tax, as the people of Israel.³⁰ In this understanding, Jesus is neither claiming a personal exemption based on his relationship with the Father nor extending privileges to his disciples in anticipation of a doctrine to be fleshed out at a later time. Rather, Jesus is rejecting the legitimacy of the Temple Tax itself by showing how it conflicts with a proper understanding of God and his relationship to his people.³¹ God does not treat his people like a ruler demanding tribute; he treats them as sons and daughters for whom he makes provision. That the people of Israel are children of God is not a new concept in Matthew’s gospel. In addition to frequently referring to God as “your Father” while speaking to Jewish crowds (eleven times just in the Sermon on the Mount), he also teaches that faithless Israelites are “sons of the kingdom” of heaven who will nevertheless be thrown into the outer darkness as a result of their faithlessness (8.10–12) and that the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” are the “children” to whom Jesus was sent (15.24–26).³² As we have seen, if Jesus did object to the Temple Tax or to the use of Exod 30 to justify it, then he would not be the first to do so. Again, the very fact that the collectors of the tax ask the question implies that they foresaw at least the possibility that Jesus would have objections similar to those raised by other groups.³³

30. Horbury, “The Temple Tax” 283; Bauckham, “The Coin in the Fish’s Mouth” 222–23; Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 2.745.

31. “The Jews, then, are God’s sons, and (it is argued) an interpretation which pictures their divine king as exacting something like a tribute from them does not rise to a true theology. Jesus’s teaching is thus implicitly but radically critical of the Pharisaic view. The overturning of the money-changers’ tables in the cleansing of the Temple would be consistent with this saying, even though the principal motives of the cleansing were probably different,” Horbury, “The Temple Tax” 283.

32. The frequent allusions in the Old Testament to the paternal nature of God’s relationship with Israel are, of course, the foundation for Jesus’s speaking of them in this way (e.g., Deut 32.6; Jer 3.19–20; 31.9; Psa 103.13), and notice that Matthew identifies Jesus as God’s Son by depicting him as the antitype of Israel (Matt 2.15); cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 2.16–18; 5.5.

33. Most commentators either ignore or fail to consider this option. Among those who explicitly reject it is Witherington who says, “We can come at the question from

If the “sons” are the people of Israel and Jesus is objecting to the Temple Tax itself, then how is this story relevant for his disciples? Why does Matthew record it? In reality, the second and third options are not so far apart. Matthew can record this story for his later Christian readers because, in Christ, *they* are the restored and renewed Israel. God’s relationship with Israel is how he has demonstrated the love that he has for his people, and now, in Christ, those who were “far off” and separated from God (gentiles) have become fellow heirs of the promises and fellow citizens (Eph 2.16–19), grafted into the family of God alongside the Jews (Rom 11.17–24). Those who are citizens of this renewed and restored Israel—whether from a Jewish or gentile background—enjoy the blessing of God’s paternal love, a love which provides for rather than burdens his people.

Who Might Be Offended and How?

In spite of his objection, Jesus decides that the tax will be paid so as “not to give offense to them” (v 27).³⁴ The word translated “to give offense” is *skandalizo*, which in many contexts means “to cause someone to sin” (e.g., Matt 5.29; 18.6; 1 Cor 8.13).³⁵ However, as in all languages, Greek words have ranges of meaning, and *skandalizo* in some contexts means “to shock through word or action, give offense to, anger, shock” (e.g., Matt 15.12; John 6.61; 2 Cor 11.29).³⁶ It is difficult to see how *skandalizo* could mean “to cause

the other direction—Who are the others[in the analogy]? The temple tax would not be collected from non-Jews, so then it would appear that the others must be Jews, and thus the “sons” are those who have the special relationship with God the Father like and through Jesus,” Witherington, *Matthew* 332; However, Witherington is *assuming* that the tax is legitimate and that the Father is the one levying it, rather than it being levied in his name (through a dubious extension of Exodus 30). Proponents of this third view argue that the “others” in the analogy are irrelevant because the freedom of the “sons” shows that the Father is not behind the tax in the first place, cf. Bauckham, “The Coin in the Fish’s Mouth” 222.

34. Note that whatever the nature of Jesus’s objections, he has no problem with money being sent to the Temple voluntarily. The rejection of the Temple is not the point of this pericope.

35. W. Arndt, F. Danker, W. Bauer, and F. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press 2000) 926.

36. *Ibid.*; Matthew 11.6 and 13.57 seem to have a similar meaning.

someone to sin” in our text, though some have argued that the collectors would be sinning by compelling Jesus to pay the tax.³⁷ More likely, Jesus wishes to avoid offending or shocking someone over this matter. Many believe that Jesus is avoiding the unpopularity and public scandal that not paying might bring, undermining the effectiveness of his message.³⁸ Yet, this explanation is problematic because Jesus is not shy about shocking the public at other times—even when it costs him followers (*e.g.*, John 6). Perhaps the best explanation in this context is that, unaware of Jesus’s objections, Peter has just committed Jesus to paying the tax by telling the collectors that he will do so. Will Jesus and Peter now turn around and not pay? Of course not! To do so would be to give offense to the collectors.

The Fish Tale: Did It Happen?

V 27 is perplexing for several reasons. It is strange that the tax will not be paid from the common funds (*cf.* John 12.6; 13.29).³⁹ It is stranger still that Jesus instructs Peter to get the *stater* with which to pay their share from the mouth of a fish, and furthermore, it is unclear why Matthew does not report, as we would expect him to, that Peter went out and did it.⁴⁰

Naturally, those who approach Scripture through a naturalistic lens will be skeptical of this story, attributing it to later legend or to Matthew’s own invention.⁴¹ But even those who believe in the

37. Derrett, “Peter’s Penny: Fresh Light on Matthew 17:24–7” 10; However, this assumes that the collectors had such power. No doubt at various times the supporters of the Temple Tax enjoyed enough political power to actually compel the payment of it, but this does not seem to be the case in Jesus’s time. Rather, patriotic fervor and social pressure appear to have been the force behind the collection.

38. *E.g.*, Bauckham, “The Coin in the Fish’s Mouth” 224; G. Osborne, *Matthew*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 1 (Zondervan 2010) 663–64.

39. Some conclude from this that Jesus and the disciples were impoverished at this time, R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT (Eerdmans 2007) 670–71; I am skeptical that such an assumption is justified.

40. The reference to fishing with a line and a hook is also unique in the NT where we normally see references to the casting of nets, Nolland, *Matthew* 728.

41. Against the notion that Matthew invented this story is the fact that it appears to have been passed down independently well into the second-century where we find it (with differences consistent with oral transmission) in the apocryphal *Epistle of the*

inspiration of Scripture have wondered if there might be something more to the story which would have been evident to the first readers but is obscure to us. Specifically, some have suggested that Jesus may not be serious, that he may be making a humorous allusion to a common folkloric trope in which valuables are discovered in fish.⁴² To paraphrase: “Now that you’ve committed us to paying a tax that I have objections to, Peter, get out there and catch that lucky fish we’re always hearing about so we can pay up!” In support of this suggestion are examples in both pagan and Jewish literature of valuable objects discovered in fish. The following story from the Babylonian Talmud is exemplary of the kind of folkloric tale that Jesus, Peter, and the first readers of Matthew’s gospel may have been familiar with:

Joseph the Sabbath Lover: There was a gentile in his neighborhood who had a lot of property. The Chaldaeans told him, “Joseph the Sabbath Lover is going to consume all your property.” He went and sold all his property and bought a jewel with the proceeds; this he put in his turban. As he was crossing a bridge, the wind blew off the turban and threw it into the water.

A fish swallowed it.

The fish was caught and brought to market on a Friday afternoon before sunset. They said, “Who will buy it now?”

They said to them, “Go show it to Joseph the Sabbath Lover, because he usually buys.”

They took it to him. He bought it, cut it open and found the jewel in it. He sold it for thirteen roomfuls of gold coins. A certain old man met him and said, “He who lends to the Sabbath—the Sabbath pays him back.”⁴³

The similarities with the pericope in Matthew are clear, but there are also important differences: a jewel rather than a coin, a lost item rather than a new item, ironic justice against an anti-se-

Apostles 5. Cf. Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew 2.747.

42. E.g., Witherington III, *Matthew* 334.

43. *Shabbat* (119A), J. Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary 2* (Hendrickson 2005) 543. I am not suggesting that this specific tale would have been known by Jesus.

mitic neighbor rather than provision with which to pay a tax, etc.⁴⁴ Furthermore, we do not know enough about which stories were circulating in Jesus's day, how widely, or with what nuances of humor to read what Jesus says as a joke. In my judgment, it is best, absent a great deal more evidence, to take the instructions of Jesus a sincere expectation of what Peter would do.

Why, then, does Matthew not record the actual miracle? And why is Jesus going about the payment of this tax in such unnecessarily dramatic fashion? Why not just pull a coin out of the moneybag and be done with it? I suggest that Matthew does not include the narration of the miracle itself because the miracle is not the point of the pericope. Jesus did many miracles that the gospel writers did not bother to include in their gospels (John 20.30f). This pericope is recorded, not to tell about yet another miracle, but to teach an important lesson about God's paternal relationship with his people and to lay the stage for the discourse that follows in which Jesus talks about relationships within God's people. The mention of the miracle is important to making the point, but the narration of the event itself would add nothing to it. The point, it seems, was to go a step further than his analogy had. The analogy demonstrated that the heavenly King does not tax his own family, but the miracle demonstrates that, moreover, the heavenly King provides for his family what they need (*cf.* Matt 6.31–33).

Summary and Significance

Having reflected on these more detailed questions, let us pause to broadly summarize the story and its lesson, noting especially the significance that this story had and has for the readers of the gospel. Peter is approached by the collectors of the *didrachma* and asked a very reasonable question given the objections that some had to the

44. Other fish tales are found in Heroditus, *Histories* 3.39–40 (the story of Poly-crates who casts his favorite item into the sea to appease Fate only to have it returned by a fisherman) and in *b. B. Batra* 133B (where a young couple find a pearl in a fish and contrive to give only half of the proceeds to the Temple treasury). *Genesis Rabbah* 11.4 is often cited as another example, but there the valuable object is the fish itself which is purchased at an absurd price by a Jewish tailor who explains to the king that he outbid even the royal officials for the fine fish because it was to be eaten on a high holy day.

collection of this tax—“Your teacher pays the *didrachma*, right?” The question anticipates a positive response, and Peter does not hesitate to give it—“Of course he does!” But in the privacy of the house, Jesus corrects Peter by revealing that he does object to the tax. He uses an analogy to show that the heavenly King does not demand tribute from his own family; the sons are free. In order to demonstrate further the paternal love of the Father, Jesus arranges for the payment of the tax because Peter has already committed them to paying it. He does so by means of divine provision. God not only does not burden his family, he provides for their needs; he loves them. The theme of the discourse that follows is the love that they ought to have toward one another as a result (18.1–35).

This pericope contains valuable instruction that has been significant to the church in many different contexts. The earliest recipients would have understood its value in helping them navigate life as Jewish Christians. Should they pay the *didrachma* or not? This story allows for voluntary payment of the tax if a person so chooses, but does not justify pressuring brothers and sisters who object into paying. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Romans appropriated the Temple Tax so that it became a compulsory payment to the *fiscus Judaicus* which was used to fund the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.⁴⁵ In this context, the contrast between the heavenly King’s provision and the earthly king’s oppression would especially stand out.

The story continues to instruct in our own context. How many of us have had our faulty assumptions about Jesus and the Father challenged like Peter (sometimes immediately after sticking our foot in our mouth!)? We all have biases and assumptions, and it is good to be reminded of the need to humbly acknowledge the possibility that we do not have Jesus as figured out as we think. Also, if Jesus is objecting to the legitimacy of taxation in the name of God, then this may be significant for the issue of tithing—a practice that many would like to extend to the church in much the same way that the originators of the Temple Tax sought to extend

45. Garland, “The Temple Tax in Matthew 17:24–25 and the Principle of Not Causing Offense” 78–83.

the census tax of Exod 30 to their own time.⁴⁶ We are also reminded here of the freedom that we have as sons and daughters of God. Formerly we were enslaved, either as heirs of the promises who were nonetheless under the discipline and tutelage of the Law (Jews, Gal 4.1–3) or as those who were without God and alienated from God’s people (gentiles, Gal 4.8). In Christ, there is neither Jew nor gentile because we are all made free as heirs indeed, sons and daughters of a heavenly King and Father. As such we enjoy, by God’s grace, a relationship of love and provision rather than oppression and burden.⁴⁷

Jesus, the Fish, and the Family of God

Finally, the theme of this year’s Lectures challenges us to see Jesus more clearly through the lens of this “miracle story.” As we have noted, Matthew’s omission of the miraculous event itself indicates that the meat of this pericope is not in the fish but in the teaching that accompanies it. What does this pericope teach us about who Christ is and what he does for his followers? First, it shows us that Jesus is the creator of the family of God in the sense that it is through faith in him that we are made sons and daughters of the heavenly King. The people of Israel could be called “sons” of God and heirs of the promises, but they did not become sons indeed until Christ came, restoring and renewing true Israel (Gal 4.1–5). We who are gentiles were even worse off before Christ came. “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in

46. I would include in this both those who explicitly call for compulsory tithing in the church and those, even among our own number, who fixate on the 10% number in an effort to put social pressure on disciples to give a certain percentage. Interestingly, Bauckham has suggested that Paul may have known of Jesus’s objection to “theocratic taxation” and that this explains Paul’s insistence that participation in the collection for the saints in Judea must be voluntary, Bauckham, “The Coin in the Fish’s Mouth” 230.

47. I deny the supposed tension between the love and provision of God (his grace) and his holding us to high moral standards. Any father worth a hill of beans will at the same time do everything in his power to provide for his sons and daughters and maintain high expectations for the conduct of those same sons and daughters. It is a dark path we go down when we begin to perceive the loving expectations and standards of our Father as oppression and burden.

the world” (Eph 2.12). Excluded from the family of God, gentiles did not enjoy the privileges of a heavenly Father, but in Christ, we have been redeemed and adopted into that family—citizens of the restored Israel (the followers of Christ) and sons and daughters of a heavenly King who loves us as our Father (*cf.* Eph 2.19). “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph 1.4–6). It is indeed “to the praise of his glory” that such a wondrous plan was enacted in which all the families of the earth are blessed and invited to be *the* family of God (*cf.* Gen 12.3). All of this he accomplished through Christ, whose blood makes that relationship possible.

Also, when we reflect on the willingness of Jesus to voluntarily pay a tax that he objected to, we are reminded that Jesus is the creator of peace, that in the age of Christ, we are to be reconciled with our neighbor. Regardless of who you understand “sons” to refer to, Jesus includes himself in those who are “free” with regards to this tax. Therefore, Jesus would have been within his rights to withhold the *didrachma*, but to do so would be to give offense to those who had just been informed that he would be paying, so he uses his freedom for peace (*cf.* Gal 5.13). In an increasingly vitriolic and tribal society, in which neighbor is frequently willing (and sometimes eager) to give offense to neighbor in the name of rights, privileges, and superior positions on pet topics, it is imperative that disciples of Jesus pause and reflect on the attitude that Jesus, our brother in the family of God, adopted on this occasion. He was a son, and he was free, but he shows us by example that neither our relationship to the Father nor the freedom that comes with it are license to treat our neighbor with anything but love and empathy, even when our neighbor is wrong. Jesus does not pay the tax because the law required him to, out of a sense of patriotic duty, as a result of social pressure, or to avoid being controversial; he pays the tax because he loves his neighbor. God forbid that his people should think that because they are his people or because they are on the right side of a particular issue that they should do otherwise.

This short pericope is challenging in some ways. We are called upon to learn something of the culture and historical situation in which the events took place, and we must make some interpretive decisions concerning the details: Who are these “sons?” Who might be offended and how? And why does Jesus send Peter fishing? However, when we have carefully reflected on these things, a comforting and glorious picture emerges: a picture of a loving, heavenly King, the Father, who frees his royal sons and daughters of their burdens and provides for their needs and a picture of our royal brother, Jesus, who both gives us the opportunity to be called children of God through faith in him and exemplifies the kind of self-sacrificing love that we ought to adopt as his brothers and sisters.

The Child Is Sleeping

Life for Jairus' Daughter

Shawn Jeffries

It took about 32 years for it to finally happen. I had seen people going through it on numerous occasions, but never had I gone through it myself. Never had I hurt in this way. Never had I felt this kind of grief, pain and sorrow. Back in November of 2014, for the first time, someone very close to me died. It actually all began with a phone call six months earlier. In May of 2014, my grandmother (who raised me from the time I was a baby) called me and told me that my uncle (who was my big brother growing up) had Stage 4 stomach cancer. He was only 49 years old at the time and had three young children. He had just earned his Master's Degree in educational leadership and was looking forward to one day becoming a school principal. He felt he still had much to live for, which is why after being diagnosed, he immediately started chemo treatments at M. D. Anderson, in Houston, Texas. At first, things looked very promising. The tumor in his stomach shrunk substantially, but after a couple of months, the cancer started to get more aggressive. Sadly, six months later he died and I performed his funeral in Beaumont, Texas. His death marked the first time when death impacted me personally. It was terrible watching someone I loved transform from being healthy, strong and being full of life, to suffering to their last breath.

Have you ever felt that kind of pain before? Have you ever felt helpless in saving someone you loved? If you can understand how

that feels, then you can also relate to a certain man mentioned in the gospel of Mark, named Jairus. Mark introduces us to Jarius in Mark 5.22. Here we learn that Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue. “Rulers of the synagogue were not chief priests, rulers of the priests, or priests at all; they were administrators or custodians who supervised and prepared the synagogue for the Sabbath service, which included among other things opening the proper scrolls for the weekly reading.”¹ Evidently, Jairus had heard about the miraculous power of Jesus and was desperate to meet Him and beg for His help. Sadly, Jairus had a very sick twelve-year-old daughter. In Luke 8.42, we are told that she was his “only daughter.” She was sick to the point of death. After Jesus returned from the land of the Gadarenes, Jairus meets Him and begs for Him to come and save her. This man had faith in the power of Jesus. “He is confident that by the touch of Jesus she will live.”²

What Jairus does here is what we all need to do whenever we are faced with a problem. Whenever we find ourselves going through a rough patch of life, our first inclination needs to be to go to Jesus. Our first instinct needs to be to humble ourselves and turn to the Lord.

The rest of the account in Mark 5.24–43 is powerful. Jesus will travel with Jairus to his home. Along the way, the Lord heals a woman who had been suffering with a medical problem for twelve years. By the time He eventually arrives to Jairus’ home, the little girl has died. Jesus will clear the room (except for Peter, James, John, and the girl’s parents), and raise her from the dead. This marks one of three times in the gospels where we read about the Son of God reaching into the realm of the dead and pulling out death’s victims.

It is important to emphasize that the events described in Mark 5.21–43 are historical. They are not to be treated as fantasy or fairy tales. They actually happened. The question is, what can we learn from these powerful moments in history? How can a story

1. L. Stauffer, *Mark*. Truth Commentaries (Guardian of Truth Foundation 1999) 115.

2. *Ibid.*

like this one help us with the tragedies we face in our lives? Consider four ways in which the power demonstrated by Jesus here should impact our lives.

It Should Impact How We View Death

It is no secret that most people in our society are terribly afraid of death. Why is that? Here are a few possible reasons. First, many fear death because it dwells within the realm of the unknown. No living person knows what it feels like to die. Since they have yet to experience it, many are terrified by it. In fact, many view it as the worst possible thing that could happen to a person. Second, some fear death because they believe it is the end. People like the atheists believe that this life they have now is all there is and there is nothing left to come. They believe death marks the complete end of their existence. Third, others fear death because they know they are not living right. They know that they are currently living lives of sin, outside of the will of God and if they die today, they will be lost eternally. The person who has this fear actually needs to fear death. The scriptures describe death as being a blessing for the righteous, but not for the wicked (Rev 14.13; Luke 16.19–31).

While there are several reasons as to why many people fear death, notice carefully how Jesus viewed it. Jesus did not view death as the end, or as something to fear. Instead it is merely sleep (Mark 5.39). In the case of the young girl who had died, she did not cease to exist, “but in the presence of the power of Jesus she is no more than asleep, as was stated of Lazarus, who had been dead four days and whose body had already begun to decay.”³ In other words, Jesus knew death was only a temporary condition.

The Lord’s mentality in regards to death was different than those who had gathered at Jarius’ home. Many of these people found it humorous when the Lord suggested that the little girl was not dead, but merely asleep (Mark 5.39f). One can only imagine how shocked they must have been when they learned of Jesus reuniting the little girl’s soul with her body and reuniting her with her parents (Mark 5.41f). Other powerful episodes of Jesus rais-

3. *Ibid.* 121.

ing the dead include the raising of the widow's son in Nain (Luke 7.11–17) and the famous case of Lazarus (John 11.11–14, 38–46).

From the account given about the raising of Jairus' daughter, we learn that even though death is inevitable, we do not have to fear it. We do not have to live in agony over our one day dying, because we serve a Master and King who has power over it (Rev 1.18). The Lord has complete power over the realm where the dead go, after they depart from this life. This truth was fully realized when He Himself was raised from the dead (Rom 1.4).

Our Lord's power over the grave needs to impact our perspective about death. It needs to encourage us to not be afraid of death, but instead press on and continue in faithfulness to God. It needs to lead us to always remembering that contrary to what the atheist believes, death is not the end; it is not something that will cause us to cease in our existence. Instead it is something that is only temporary. It is something that will one day be brought to a complete end because our Lord Jesus has power over it (1 Cor 15.50–58). Since Jesus Himself was raised from the dead, we can have confidence that we too will be raised when He comes again!

It Should Impact How We View Others

It is interesting how, in Mark 5.21–43, not only do we find Jesus performing one miracle, but we actually find Him performing two. We actually find Him helping two different people, both of whom are totally different from one another. In the main one under consideration, we have Him helping Jairus. Remember Jairus was a man of authority. Jairus was well-respected in His society and was a supervisor of a synagogue (a religious center of learning).

It is interesting that before even reaching Jairus' home to heal his sick daughter, Jesus first healed a woman with an issue of blood. This is likely a reference to some kind of hemorrhaging. Since she was a Jew, "She was ceremonially unclean and could not be purified by sacrifices as long as the hemorrhaging continued."⁴ This woman was not someone who was a ruler or highly respected person. She would have been viewed as unclean by the Jews and as an outcast

4. *Ibid.* 116.

in her society. And yet, like Jairus, she too had faith in the Lord's ability to help her. In fact, she believed that if she could (literally) get her hands on Him, her sickness (which doctors could never help her with) would immediately be taken away (Mark 5.25–27).

Jesus helped two people who were totally different from one another in life, but should that really surprise us? Isn't that what we find Jesus doing all throughout His ministry? Throughout the gospel, do we not find our Lord giving attention and grace to people from all different parts of society? Do we not find Him helping lepers, the blind, and the poor (Luke 17.11–18; 18.35–43)? Do we not find Him helping those viewed as terrible sinners (Luke 5.27–32; 19.1–10)? Do we not find Him helping Samaritans (John 4.7–45)? Do we not find Him giving attention to those who are looked down on by society (Mark 10.13–16; Luke 7.3–39)? Indeed, throughout the gospel we find the Lord helping and giving attention to all kinds of people. Why did He do that? It was because He viewed every person as important. It was because He loved every person and He knew that every person had sinned against God and needed the gift of salvation that only He could provide (Luke 19.9f).

What about us? How do we view others? How do we view those in the world? How do we view the co-worker who may be shacking up with their boyfriend or girlfriend? How do we view the people who are homosexuals? How do we view the couple who lives next door to us in an unlawful marriage? How do we view the poor? How do we view those who have criminal backgrounds? How do we view those who may have a different skin color than us? How do we view those who may have much worldly baggage with them when they come visiting our worship assemblies?

Do we view them like Jesus did? Do we view them as people who were also loved and valued by God? Do we understand that God also desired a relationship with them? Do we take to heart that Jesus also died for them (John 3.16)? Do we see them as people who were also made in the image of God? Do we understand that before anything else, these folks need Jesus, and the gospel, and for us to teach them the gospel (Matthew 28.18–20; Mark 16.15)? Or, are we guilty of being like many of the religious leaders in the time

of Jesus? Are we guilty of having a haughty spirit and viewing others in contempt because they are currently lost in their sins (Luke 5.30; 7.39)? May God bless us to always look at those in the world with love in our hearts and a willingness to shine our lights before them and build relationships with them, so that we can ultimately help them make their way to the Savior, Jesus.

It Should Impact How We View Our Problems

No problem we face in this life is too big for Jesus to handle. Keep in mind that both of the people Jesus helped in Mark 5.21–43 had serious problems. In the case of the woman, she had been suffering for a long time with this issue of blood: twelve long years (Mark 5.25). For over a decade, she had been to numerous doctors and spent much money, but she was not getting any better. In fact, she had actually gotten worse (Mark 5.25). Compare that to the case of Jairus and his wife. Jairus and his wife suffered one of the worst things that a person can endure in this life. They had lost a child. They experienced watching their daughter suffer and eventually die.

Both of these people were suffering with different problems. And yet, no matter how severe their problems seemed to be, the Lord was able to help them. The Lord cared about their problems and wanted to relieve their pain. “If it is pain, He feels our pain; if it is sorrow, He feels our sorrow; if it is rejection or loss, He feels that too. What hurts us, hurts Him. Thank God it is so.”⁵ The Hebrew writer says, “For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4.15). In the case of the woman with the issue of blood, once she exercised faith in Him by touching his garment, her medical problem went away and her suffering ceased (Mark 5.30–34). In the case of Jairus and his wife, Jesus was able to raise their daughter from the dead and restore her to them (Mark 5.41f). Not even death was something that Jesus could not handle.

What problems are you facing in your life right now? Do you have a medical problem? Do you have a marriage problem? Do you

5. K. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew* (K. Chumbley 1999) 179–180.

have a financial problem? Do you have a sin problem? No matter what problem(s) you are currently going through, understand that none of them are too big for Jesus. None of them are so big that Jesus cannot help you, but you must be willing to put your faith and trust in Him. While our problems may be too big for us at times, they are never too big for Jesus. Even though we live in a time where the dead are not being raised and people are not being healed miraculously (1 Cor 13.8–13), we need to always remember that Jesus is still fully capable of helping His people. Jesus is still watching over us and He is willing to help us with any problem we face. We just have to make sure we turn to Him (1 Pet 5.6f).

It Should Impact How We View Ourselves

Over the past few decades, as human beings, we have been able to achieve some amazing things. We have been able to build space shuttles that launch into outer space. We have been able to achieve medical breakthroughs that enable people to have extended lives. We have been able to build amazing aircrafts and ships. We have been able to invent the Internet, I-Phone, social media, and so many other things that people a hundred years ago never would have thought could have been possible. And yet, no matter what great things we have been able to accomplish, none of them compare to the power demonstrated by Jesus. While we can discover all kinds of treatments and medicines that can extend people's lives, we cannot raise people from the dead when they do eventually die. We cannot instantly take away terrible bodily diseases that people have. We cannot cure man's greatest disease, sin, which leads to spiritual death (Rom 6.23). Only Jesus has the power to do these things. As great as many of our accomplishments and discoveries are, they do not begin to compare to the things that Jesus did when He stepped out of eternity into our world 2,000 years ago. 2,000 years ago, Jesus constantly demonstrated that there is no limit to His power. Sickness cannot restrain Him. Time cannot restrain Him. Death cannot restrain Him.

This truth about the Lord impacts us in some very powerful ways. It should humble us. It should lead us to being in awe of Him.

It should help us to understand just how little and feeble we are before Him and how nothing we do compares to what He can do. Nothing we do comes close to the kind of power He exercised while on this earth. It should lead us to trust Him. It should lead us to understand that Jesus can do so much more for us than we can do for ourselves. It should lead us to understand that while the physically dead are not being revived today, Jesus is still in the reviving business. He is still able to revive bad marriages, and bad relationships that may exist between brethren, and broken homes, and those who are spiritually dead. Even in our time today, Jesus is still in the business of reviving these types of things, but we have to trust in Him (Mark 5.35f).

Conclusion

Praise God that we serve a Master and King who has unlimited power. Praise God that the Lord Jesus is fully capable of keeping every promise He has made to us and blessing us in ways far beyond what we can possibly imagine. In fact, the greatest blessing that the Lord can provide us with, is the blessing of salvation. It is the blessing of taking away our sins and making it possible for us to be reconciled to God (Rom 5.6–10). This is essentially what His miracles were designed to demonstrate (John 20.30f). Above anything, the miracles of Jesus were designed to demonstrate that He is everything He claimed to be and that He is fully capable of saving our souls. They were designed to prove that He is fully capable of giving us spiritual life when we believe in Him, trust Him, and follow Him completely.

I Know Who You Are

The Inbreaking of the Kingdom

Leon Mauldin

Peter introduced the Gospel to the Gentiles with the words, “*You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him*” (Acts 10.38).¹ While we would not rule out other ways in which Satan could oppress, an obvious affliction was that of causing victims to be demon-possessed. Our lecture will deal with one outstanding case, that of the healing of the man possessed by the Legion of demons (Mark 5.1–20).

A Summary of Mark 5.1–20

To summarize, our text of Mark 5 describes a man who was truly wretched (vv 1–5).² A multitude of demons have total control of this man, but Jesus, whom the demons fear, orders the demons to come out of the man (vv 6–10). The demons make the request to enter a herd of swine, which Jesus permits, with the result that the swine plunge down the steep bank and drown in the Sea of Galilee (vv 11–13). When it is reported that the formerly demon-possessed man is perfectly healed, and that the herd of swine is destroyed, Jesus was asked to leave the region (vv 14–17). The cured

1. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Updated Edition* (Lockman Foundation 1995).

2. Matthew tells of two demoniacs (Matt 8), whereas Mark and Luke mention only one (Luke 8).

man requested that he be permitted to go with Jesus, but instead, Jesus told him to “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you.” He readily complied with Jesus’ instructions (vv 18–20).

Who Then is This?

Every passage has a context; context is always important. Mark 4 records the great storm on the Sea of Galilee which Jesus calmed by rebuking the wind and saying to the sea, “Hush be still” (vv 35–39). The disciples asked one another “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (v 41). Our text of Mark 5, the healing of the “demoniac,” is designed to help answer that question. Who is Jesus? He has mastery over wind and sea, He commands demons who are helpless before Him, He has power over disease and its uncleanness, and even death itself. These miracles, then, help answer the question as to who Jesus is. He is God manifested in the flesh (John 1.14). He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt 16.16).

This miraculous event in our text of Mark 5 also speaks to the kingship of Jesus. Mark had previously, in the immediate context, recorded kingdom parables (Mark 4.1–33). The kingdom is the Lord’s; the word is His word, He is the king. “Success is tied to listening well, which allows the word of God to take deep root.”³ Here in Mark 5 Jesus is the One in charge. The demons certainly recognize His authority. Indeed, whether “demons or men or whatever it be,” all are subject to the authority of Jesus. M. D. Hooker suggests, “The story forms a pair with the account in 4.35–41 of the stilling of the storm: Jesus is able to control both the raging of wind and waves and the raging of a possessed demoniac, since in both cases the forces responsible for the outbursts recognize his superior authority.”⁴ To this I would add the connection with what follows with two more miracles: the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, and the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter (5.21–43). He has power over disease which none could cure and He has power over death.

3. D. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* (Zondervan 2015) 360.

4. M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Continuum 1991) 141.

Geographical Setting

The setting of the miracle is in the Decapolis, on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (“the other side,” Mark 5.1). There are variant readings in the manuscripts, including the country of the “Gerasenes,” (Mark and Luke, NASB), and “Gadarenes” (Matt 8.28). It sounds rather ominous when a scholar like Bock says, “The geographic setting of the exorcism involves a major textual problem. . . .”⁵ “Greek manuscripts are divided on the precise location involved, citing three names: Gadarenes (Matt 8.28), Gergesenes (from Origen), and Gerasenes. . . . Reliable evidence favors the name Gerasenes which probably referred to the small town Gersa (modern Khersa) located on the lake’s eastern shore.”⁶

The recently published *Archaeology Study Bible* has this information:

The geographic setting of Kursi fits the details of the story of the demoniac healed by Jesus. A boat pier adjacent to the first-century village has been found on the shoreline. Gergesa, the likely location of the healing of the demoniac in this chapter, was a Decapolis village dependent upon Hippos. Although some Jews lived in the Decapolis, the population and overall worldview of the region was predominantly Gentile.⁷

On the other hand, Garland suggests, “Most likely, however, this is territory controlled by Gerasa, which extends to the Sea of Galilee.”⁸

Bock, after acknowledging that we do not know for sure why variant readings occurred, proposes an explanation for the difference as that of the more specific versus the wider general region:

. . . the difference between Matthew and Mark = Luke is like that in various writers’ references to an event that happened in Denton, Texas, a small city an hour’s drive north of Dallas-Fort Worth. One

5. D. L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* (Baker Academic 1994) 771.

6. J. D. Grassmick, *Mark*. The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Vol. 2. (Victor Books 1985) 122.

7. P. H. Wright, *Archaeology Study Bible, ESV* (Crossway 2017) 1439–440.

8. D. Garland, *Mark*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Zondervan) Kindle Locations 1568–570.

writer might describe it as happening at Denton (the specific location), while another may say it took place at Dallas-Fort Worth (the more well known region). The region of one author may merely be more comprehensive than that of another. Being certain of any particular solution is difficult. What is clear is that the event took place in Gentile territory opposite Galilee. It also seems likely that Luke is reading Gerasa.⁹

There are many resources which pursue this textual question for those interested in further study.¹⁰ What is clear is that the events of our text transpired on the eastern side of the sea, in close enough proximity to the water that the swine rushed down the steep bank and were drowned. Most of the inhabitants of this area were Gentiles. As to the demon-possessed man, “It is not certain whether the demonized man is Jew or Gentile, though clearly Gentiles constitute the vast majority in the Decapolis, where Greek culture is dominant. The presence of a herd of swine indicates the Gentile character of the region.”¹¹

Striking Features of our Text

Whereas it would seem there were no “ordinary” cases of demon possession, the one narrated in our Mark 5 text would surely be considered extraordinary on several levels. To say that the unfortunate man was possessed by numerous demons would be a mild understatement, for their collective name was “Legion” (a unit in the Roman Empire, 6,000 soldiers). Then there is the length of the narrative: twenty verses. Further, the response and reaction of the community is nearly as long as the account of the miracle itself. The request of the demons to enter the swine and then the subsequent destruction of the herd in the sea further

9. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* 783–784.

10. Included would be Guelich in the Word Biblical Commentary on Mark. Todd Bolen, in his Photo Companion to the Bible on “The Gospels” defends Gadara as the preferred reading; the CD has numerous photos as well as his lecture notes. See also Godet’s commentary on Luke, which defends Gersa/Khera as the best reading. Origen’s view may be found in his Commentary on the Gospel of John. Lemke discusses this in his *Academic Use of Gospel Harmonies*.

11. T. J. Geddert, *Mark*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Herald Press 2001) 115.

add to the uniqueness of this narrative. Additionally, in vv 3–5 there are five *hapax legomena*.¹²

The demonized man lived in the tombs, as is mentioned three times in the text (5.2f, 5). If the man was Jewish, he would thus be rendered unclean (Num 11.16). He has an unclean spirit (Mark 5.2), so many that the collective name is Legion (5.9). What we have here, as Bock put it, is “a maximum of demonic concentrations.”¹³ Jesus “confronts a huge force of demons in one screeching person.”¹⁴ He cannot be controlled; his massive strength breaks the shackles and chains. His screaming and howling like that of a wild animal could be heard during the night. His screaming was joined with self-destructive activity, as he mutilated himself with stones (5.5). We cannot imagine the terrible state of mind the man was in.

Who is speaking to Jesus, the man or the demons? (5.7). It would seem that the demons, who have control of the man, are doing the speaking. The demons readily recognize the Lord as “Jesus, Son of the Most High God (5.7, the equivalent of the Hebrew *Elyon*). Note that the demons *implore* Jesus not to torment them (5.7; cf. v 10 “to entreat Him earnestly,” “they entreated Him,” v 12). They know who is in charge, and it is not the Legion! They knew Jesus, and they knew what Jesus could do to them.

Why did Jesus ask, “What is your name?” (Mark 5.9). This would help His disciples as well as the locals see that He was not dealing with one demon, but many, enough to terrorize 2,000 hogs. The question served to show the terrifying severity of the case. It also would help clarify the unusual and uncontrollable strength and conduct of the man.

In Mark’s gospel record, the demons consistently recognize the deity and the authority of Jesus and the consequential threat posed to them. For example, consider this summary statement: “Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, “You are the Son of God!” (Mark 3.11, cf. 1.24). Indeed, “the demons also believe, and shudder” (Jam 2.19).

12. R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary 34A. (Word 1998) 277.

13. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* 774.

14. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* 123.

According to Luke 8.31, the demons (*Legion*) were afraid that Jesus would send them into the *abyss* (*abussos*). I would understand that to be that place of punishment awaiting the final judgment referenced in Jude 1.6: “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” Likewise, Peter wrote, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartaros*) and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment . . .” (2 Pet 2.4). Apparently thinking that any other option would be better than the abyss, they request to enter the herd of swine. Bock writes, “The motive for the request is not clear. It seems likely that the spirits hoped by their request to avoid confinement. If Jesus would not permit them to indwell a man, an animal would do. Anything was better than the abyss. It was too foreboding a place.”¹⁵ Despite their number, despite their power, the demons know what is awaiting them on that last day, the Day of Judgement, when Jesus will say to those condemned, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25.41). It is unfortunate and ironic that many people today do not believe in the reality of judgment or eternal hell. The demons do.

Note that Mark 5.13 states, “Jesus gave them permission¹⁶ (*epitrepo*)” to enter the herd. Jesus has authority over the demons. They could not act without His permission. There were about 2,000 swine. “2000 uncontrollable swine demonstrate the immense power of the forces that had taken control of their victim.”¹⁷

Why did Jesus allow the destruction of the swine? This visual lesson dramatically showed that the demons were real, and that genuine deliverance had been granted. Remember, as Creator, all things belong to Jesus (Psa 50.10). Long ago Nebuchadnezzar had been instructed, “But He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can

15. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* 776.

16. But note also Mark 10.4, where *epitrepo* is used regarding divorce where the meaning is “allowed” or “suffered”; cf. its usage in Acts 14.16, “In the generations gone by He permitted (*epitrepo*) all the nations to go their own ways.”

17. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* 282.

ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4.35). Furthermore, demons are destructive. Previously they had destroyed the demon-possessed man (*daimonizomai*), next they destroyed the hogs. How could the bystanders not take demonic influence seriously? But again, it is Jesus’ power over the demons that was so vividly seen.

When the herdsmen reported “in the city and in the country” what had happened, the people came to see. What a transformation was to be seen in the healed man, a transformation due to the power and authority of Jesus! He has his life back. In a complete reversal of his former condition, Mark records that he is now sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind, “the very man who had the “legion” (5.15). Significantly, Luke add that he was “sitting down at the feet of Jesus” (8.31). Certainly the man is grateful; but some suggest that this expression means he is seeking instruction from Jesus.¹⁸ This would be consistent with his request to go with Jesus (Mark 5.18).

The People’s Reaction

The real tragedy in the narrative is the people’s reaction: “they began to implore (“beg, *ESV*) Him to leave their region” (5.17). This request is recorded by all the Synoptics (Matt 8.34; Luke 8.37). How sad! We might expect that they would bring their sick to Jesus to be healed. They could have urged Him to stay longer, as the Samaritans did (John 4.40). But instead they asked Him to leave. After all, He had deprived some of them of their property. He had disturbed their accustomed mode of life. They were more comfortable with the former demon-possessed condition of the man than they were with having Jesus in their midst!

The Healed Man’s Request

In stark contrast, “the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him” (Mark 5.18). But Jesus had other plans for this man. He was to first “go home to your

18. Consider Luke 10.39, where Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. Also Acts 22.3, where Paul references his being brought up under the feet of Gamaliel *KJV*, *ASV*, *CSB*.

people” (v 19). Luke’s parallel reads, “Return to your house” (8.39). Whereas before his condition had made him untamable, unclean and ostracized, now he had a home and people¹⁹ to go to. “He has indeed been domesticated by one who could do what no one or nothing else had been able to do. These instructions demonstrate that his healing was not simply a momentary lapse into sanity or behavior controlled by the presence of one superior. The man was free to be his own person and reenter normal human relations. He had been delivered.”²⁰

One lesson here would be that evangelism begins at home. I have heard some say, “I want to be a missionary in Russia,” who are teaching no one in their own community. It does not work that way. But Hendriksen makes this interesting observation:

What may well be considered the main lesson is this: by ordering the man to go to his own “folks”—the term not to be taken too narrowly (see verse 20), and with the implied idea that neighbor will tell neighbor—, Jesus is showing a great kindness, and this not only to the former demoniac but also to the entire community that had so shamefully rejected him. *They* had asked him to leave, but he, in his great love, cannot completely separate himself from them. So he sends them a missionary, in fact the best kind of missionary, one who can speak from experience.²¹

The conclusion of the narrative brings us back to the question, “Who is this?” (Mark 4.41). He is the Lord who has done “great things . . . for you” and “had mercy on you” (5.19); He is Jesus (v 20). The healed man was obedient to Jesus’ instructions. He proclaimed in Decapolis “what great things Jesus had done for him,” to the “amazement” of all (v 20).

This “Decapolis” was a league of ten Hellenic cities: Scythopolis (located west of the Jordan River); east of the Jordan: Philadelphia, Gerasa, Pella, Damascus, Kanata, Dion, Abila, Gadara, and Hippos. See the sketch. These ten cities, at one time deprived of their freedom

19. This reference to his people is unique to Mark.

20. Guelich, *Mark 1–8*:26 285.

21. W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Baker Book House 1975) 197.

by the Maccabees, had by the Romans been delivered from their yoke and had even been given a considerable measure of home rule.²²

“Jesus’ next venture into this area will meet with far greater success (7.31–37).”²³

Demons and Demon Possession

Having given attention to the narrative of Mark 5.1–20, there are important topics contained therein which merit further discussion. Among these is the matter of demon possession. (We should note that there is one devil, but many demons.) “In the NT *daimonion* (“demon”) is the most common term; *daimōn* is found only once (Matt 8.31). *Daimonizomai*, “to be possessed by a demon” or “to be a demoniac,” is used frequently”²⁴ (including our text of Mark 5.15).

In our age of scientific research and reason, should the biblical references to demon possession be shrugged off, and relegated to a time of ignorance and superstition? Inspired men as well as Jesus Himself “speak of them, without any hint of the slightest doubt as to their real existence.”²⁵ As to their nature, “the demons are spoken of as spiritual beings at enmity with God and having power to afflict man with bodily diseases.”²⁶ They are “unclean spirits” (Mark 1.23).

As to their origin, I would cautiously suggest the reference to the angels who sinned, those “who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 1.6). Satan is called “the ruler of the demons” (Matt 9.34; Luke 11.15). Matt 25.41 refers to “the devil and his angels.” The disciples’ conquest of the demons was seen as a conquest of Satan (Luke 10.17f).

The biblical picture is that of demons entering men’s bodies with various afflictions resulting, including being deaf and dumb,

22. *Ibid.* 198.

23. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* 124.

24. “Demons, Demon Possession” in D. Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Eerdmans 1992).

25. G. Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (College Press 1976) 237.

26. *Ibid.* 238.

or symptoms resembling epilepsy (Mark 9.14–29), though the specific symptoms are not always mentioned. Sometimes it is argued that what we would understand to be sickness and mental illness was designated by the umbrella term of demon possession. But the biblical record makes the distinction between symptoms caused by demon possession, and other diseases (see Mark 1.32; Luke 6.17f). “Not all disease was thought, however, to be associated with demonic influence. Jesus described his ministry as involving both the calling out of demons and the healing of illness (Luke 13.32; *cf.* Matt 8.16; Mark 1.32–34).²⁷

The question arises as to whether demonic possession is a phenomenon which exists today. Reese points out that it was “especially in the days of our Lord and his apostles” that demons were permitted by God “to exercise a direct influence over the bodies of certain men.”²⁸ Homer Hailey, discussed the significance of Zechariah’s prophecy: “In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. “It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord of hosts, ‘that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land’ (Zech 13.1f). Regarding the removal of the unclean spirit, brother Hailey stated, “In the conquest of Christ over Satan and his forces, unclean spirits have cease to control men as they did in the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles (*cf.* also Mic 5.12f).”²⁹ When the condition of demon possession existed, there existed concurrently the miraculous cure, the authority to cast out demons. Since the miraculous has served its purpose and thus ceased, it would seem reasonable that demon possession has ceased also.

Though much of this phenomenon may be inexplicable to us, “no one has the right to eviscerate the strong expressions of Scrip-

27. “Demons, Demon Possession,” in D. Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*.

28. Reese, *Acts* 240.

29. H. Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Baker 1972) 392.

ture in order to reduce its declarations to a level with our own ignorance.”³⁰ Further, the “opinion that Jesus spoke merely by way of accommodation does not match the evidence.”³¹

Inbreaking of the Kingdom

Events such as Jesus’ casting out demons was an overwhelming inbreaking of the kingdom, of God’s presence among men. Jesus Himself makes that connection. For example, when refuting the charge that He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, Jesus said, “But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11.20). “The finger (*daktulō*) of God is an expression which stands for Divine power in action.”³² The parallel in Matthew reads, “Spirit of God” (12.28). Regarding the expression, “then the kingdom of God has come upon you,” brother Caldwell states:

The appearance of the anticipated Messianic kingdom was upon them. The rule of God would defeat the rule of Satan and Jesus had arrived to execute the plan. Casting out demons illustrated that God was beginning to bring about that victory. The kingdom had “come” in the sense that Jesus had entered the world to begin the fulfillment of Messianic forecasts and bring to pass the realization of God’s kingdom prophecies, not in the sense that they could yet fully enter it. The kingdom would not be completely delivered with men allowed into it as citizens until after the King had completed His mission and ascended back to heaven to take up the throne (see Acts 2). His exorcisms would provide incontrovertible proof, however, that this is what the prophets had foretold.³³

The kingdom of God was the long-awaited subject of prophecy (2 Sam 7.12f; Dan 2.40–44). John the Baptizer preached that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3.2). Then when Jesus began His Galilean ministry Mark summarizes, “Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching

30. Reese, *Acts* 243.

31. *Ibid.* 244.

32. C. Caldwell, *The Gospel According to Luke*. Truth Commentaries (Guardian of Truth Foundation 2011) 664.

33. *Ibid.* 664–665.

the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1.14f). The message of the seventy disciples on the limited commission was, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10.7). What was foretold by the prophets was now near; this was a time of preparation. Accordingly, Jesus preached about the nature of His kingdom and its citizens (Matt 5–7). He spoke about how greatness in His kingdom is achieved (Matt 18.2f; 20.25–28). The apostles’ hope for precedence and rank, basking in glory “will all be rudely dashed. The kingdom of God does not fulfill human dreams of earthly triumph.”³⁴ “Those who want to be first in status, first in glory, first in authority, and first in honor are the one who will fail to receive the kingdom.”³⁵

The kingdom has to do with Jesus’ glory, His right to rule, His authority, His dominion, His power. It is a spiritual sphere. As stated in the Revelation, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev 5.12). For Jesus to say in the context of casting out demons, “the kingdom of God has come upon you,” (Luke 11.20) was to affirm that the King was in their midst. The kingdom of God was manifesting itself in the Person, actions and message of Jesus.

Note further that Jesus went on to say, “When a strong *man*, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder” (Luke 11.21f). The “strong man” is Satan; the “someone stronger than he” is Jesus! Always remember the Bible says, “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4.4). Isa 53, which foretells in detail Jesus’ suffering and death, states, “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (v 12). Jesus defeated Satan at the cross, and

34. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* 352

35. *Ibid.* 360.

took Satan's spoil. Paul made known Jesus' victory over Satan and his forces, saying, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col 2.15).

When the seventy disciples joyfully reported to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name," He responded, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven (Luke 10.17–20). The "Seed of Woman" that would bruise the head of Satan (Gen 3.15) had come. Though Satan would be defeated specifically and with finality when Jesus died on the cross, the casting out of demons by Jesus and His disciples showed that he was already beaten and conquered. Even while on earth Jesus was conquering Satan. The emphasis is christological; Luke puts the focus and emphasis on Jesus' power and authority. Men were seeing evidence of the inbreaking of the rule of God, the kingdom of God.

Some Practical Considerations from our Text

I appreciate Bock's statement about any unanswered questions we may have:

Of course, the transfer of the demons raises questions that the text does not attempt to answer: "How can animals be possessed?" "Why would Jesus allow such a use of animals?" "What happened to the demons?" "Why did the spirits feel compelled to dwell somewhere rather than roaming the earth?" None of these issues are answered here. The text does suggest that demons can possess animals. The pigs serve as a visual demonstration of the man's healing (along with the later evidence of his changed demeanor). In addition, it seems that the man's welfare is more important than that of the beasts. The swine will also bring into play the region's response, but none of these observations answers the questions raised. One must be content to treat the account at the level it is offered and not try to answer questions it does not address.³⁶

36. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* 776.

“We may still be wondering whether the pigs needed to be lost for this to happen. But if we mourn the economic loss more than we rejoice in the man’s full salvation, we side with the Gerasenes; Mark’s goal is to draw us to side with Jesus, and to speak also to our family and friends of the Lord’s great mercy.³⁷

In Mark 5, Jesus is seen to be the One who can do what no one else can do. Jesus is the hope of the hopeless. He delivered the man who could not be tamed (Mark 5.1–20); He healed the woman who could not be cured (vv 25–34); and the father who was told that he could no longer be helped (vv 21–24; 35–43) received his little daughter raised from the dead.

“Confronted with Jesus, some draw near and others want distance.³⁸ Jesus declared neutrality toward Him to be impossible. “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters” (Luke 11.23). How close do you want to be to Jesus? If one recognizes Him as Lord and King, it means that He has the right to tell us what to do in every area of life (Luke 6.46). It means “a change of one’s way of thinking, one’s outlook, one’s value system and expectations, one’s commitments, and one’s behavior as one puts faith in God’s sovereignty.”³⁹

It is tempting to think, “Yes, people ‘like that man’ are pitiful. It is wonderful that Jesus cared and cares for them.” What we must see is that his story, and that of so many other helpless people whose lives Jesus touched, is our story. We have been taken captive by Satan to do his will, for all have sinned (Rom 3.23). All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. Sin affects every area of life. It defiles us and makes us unclean; it separates us from our God and makes us spiritually dead. We need the deliverance and cleansing that only He can give. One only hope is Jesus. ““My sin, Oh the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin, not in part, but the whole; Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh my soul!”⁴⁰

37. Geddert, *Mark* 118.

38. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* 782.

39. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* 359.

40. H. Spafford, “It Is Well with My Soul” (1873).

They Have No Wine

The Banquet of the Messiah

Bryan Moody

Weddings do not always go according to plan. About ten years ago, my wife and I attended a beautifully-prepared outdoor wedding. Unfortunately, a strong thunderstorm with torrential rainfall came uninvited. The event coordinator set up a tent in the parking lot which covered the wedding party and most of the guest seating area. When the rain did not let up, a pond quickly formed across the asphalt. The deepest spot collected at the back, where the procession would begin. With a smile on her face, the bride lifted the hem of her dress and walked barefoot down the makeshift aisle. Fortunately, “happily ever after” does not depend upon a perfect wedding. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding to prevent a crisis (John 2.1–11).¹ Considering the many amazing miracles He did, why would He choose turning water into wine as His first? What meaning did John expect his readers to find in this sign? By studying the setting, the connection this story shares with key concepts in John, and the Messianic symbolism related to this event, we will see the importance of this miracle as Jesus’ first sign.

The Setting

The wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. While several locations have vied for identification over the centuries, Khirbet Qana

1. Biblical quotations are from NASB.

has emerged as the likely place.² Located nine miles northwest of Nazareth, the site accords with Josephus' descriptions.³ Excavations have confirmed occupation in the Early Roman era, unearthing three economic tiers of housing.⁴ While none of the houses reflect the wealth of aristocratic Jerusalem families, some families were prospering in this mid-sized Galilean town. Archaeologists estimate its first century population was 1,200.⁵

Writers frequently associate weddings with rejoicing and feasting (Gen 29.22; Song 3.11; Isa 61.10f; 62.5; Jer 33.11; 1 Macc 9.37–39). Several of Jesus' parables refer to wedding feasts (Matt 22.2; 25.10; Luke 12.36; 14.8). The bridegroom motif also relates to rejoicing and feasting (Matt 9.15; John 3.29). Spread throughout fifteen hundred years of biblical and associated literature we find references to wedding celebrations lasting a week (Gen 29.27; Jdg 14.12; *b. Ket.* 8b) or even two weeks (Tobit 10.7).⁶ The shortage of wine makes sense in the context of an extended celebration.⁷

A wealthy person could invite an entire town to a wedding.⁸ In the villages of Galilee the whole town would notice the celebration taking place, but the actual guest list might be quite small.⁹ Since Jesus' family is from another town, they most likely were relatives.

Three features in John 2 provide clues about the social status of the wedding hosts and their cultural practices: the servants, the headwaiter, and the stone jars. The miracle occurred when the

2. An excellent summary of the various places identified as Cana can be found online <http://www.bibleplaces.com/Identification_of_Cana_of_Galilee_by_J_Carl_Laney.pdf>.

3. Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*. Trans. W. Whiston (Kregel 1960) 16, 41.

4. D. Fiensy and J. Strange, *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, Vol 1* (Fortress 2015) 197.

5. *Ibid.* 137.

6. *bKet.* 8b refers to *Babylonian Talmud* tractate Kethuboth Folio 8b. The Talmud was compiled *ca.* AD 200. <http://come-and-hear.com/kethuboth/kethuboth_8.html>.

7. Later Rabbinic tradition stated that a virgin should be married on Wednesday (*Ket.* 1.1). It is possible, though unprovable, to align the sequence of day references in John 1–2 to fit this tradition resulting in Jesus and the disciples showing up on the final day of the feast.

8. C. Keener, *The Gospel of John Vol 1* (Hendrickson 2003) 499.

9. D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Fortress 2003) 39.

servants (*diakonoi*) obeyed Jesus' instructions. The fact that the hosts had servants implies some degree of wealth. The headwaiter (*architriklinos*) is the key character of the final scene. Long before the first century, Jews incorporated Greco-Roman banqueting practices into their celebratory meals. Though we cannot say with certainty, the designation and function of the headwaiter probably reflects that trend.¹⁰ The six large stone jars are crucial for the miracle, but also require explanation. Smaller stone containers were common, being found across a variety of socio-economic groups in Jerusalem, Judea, Qumran, and Galilee.¹¹ Stoneware is a sure sign of Jewish residents in settlements of the Early Roman era.¹² A stone vessel manufacturing site has been excavated in Reina, which lies between Nazareth and Cana.¹³ While small stone vessels are ubiquitous, containers of the size mentioned by John are rarely unearthed. They are exclusively found in wealthy homes.¹⁴

In addition to indicating wealth, the size of the jars raises the question of specific use. John connected them with Jewish purification. Strict observers of purity laws would use a *mikvah* with access to "living water," *i.e.* running water, for ritual baths. Jews used small stone containers for holding or serving liquids. They came in a variety of forms.¹⁵ The large jars might be evidence that the hosts were less strict in purity observance than Pharisees.¹⁶ Others suggest the purification is connected to the wedding.¹⁷

10. Brown asserts that "Jewish literature offers us no exact parallel for the functionary envisaged in John" R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Doubleday 1966) 1.100. Sirach 32.1–2 addresses wise behavior for the master of the feast (Grk *symposiarch*).

11. J. Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit* (Eerdmans 2011) 70.

12. Fiensy and Strange, *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods* 1.93.

13. J. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Trinity 2000) 50.

14. E. Meyers and M. Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible Vol 1* (Yale 2012) 78–79.

15. Fiensy and Strange, *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods* 1.188.

16. Keener, *The Gospel of John*. 1.509f. Magness quotes Gibson, "The widespread distribution of these vessels[...]supports the notion that they were not actually used by any one particular socio-economic or religious group within Judaism." (Magness, *Stone and Dung* 70).

17. Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1* (Concordia 2015) 300.

With these details we can draw the following conclusions: (1) This was most likely a wealthy family by Galilean standards. As such, they could procure wine by caterers.¹⁸ Thus, the miracle is not necessarily about saving a friend or relative from lifelong shame.¹⁹ (2) They probably were relatives of Jesus, though some other close connection is possible. (3) The family participated in ritual purity practices, but how strictly, or how closely aligned with the Pharisees or other groups, is impossible to say.

John notes that this was the beginning of Jesus' signs, but the fame of the miracle has little to do with its primacy. The miracle at Cana is a flash point in the debate about drinking alcoholic beverages. Regrettably, the actual significance of Jesus' action is usually eclipsed by the attempt to prove or disprove a certain position. While we emphasize that John did not record this story to settle debates about drinking, understanding the place of wine in ancient culture can help us appreciate the true significance of the miracle.

Wine was a basic commodity of the ancient world. Wine, bread, and fish were used as sacred food, and depictions of them appear regularly in religious contexts.²⁰ These numinous foods were viewed as gifts from the gods and could impart life.²¹ Everett Ferguson, drawing on many primary sources, presents thorough evidence for wine drinking in the Mediterranean world during the Greek and Roman eras.²² First, the wine was almost certainly fermented as that was the typical table drink. Fermentation began as soon as the grapes were crushed and continued through the storage process.²³ The wedding took place in Spring, so the wine served

18. B. Witherington, *John's Wisdom* (Westminster John Knox Press 1995) 78. Consider the example of the foolish virgins who purchase oil at midnight (Matt 25.9f).

19. Keener, *The Gospel of John* 1.502f. There has been considerable interest in the last few decades in the honor/shame aspect of ancient culture. While it is appropriate to consider, Keener goes too far in emphasizing this as a possible motivation for Jesus' action.

20. M. Smith. "Review of Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period" *Anglican Theological Review* 39 (1957) 261–62.

21. D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* 167.

22. E. Ferguson. "Wine as Table-Drink in the Ancient World" *Restoration Quarterly* 13 (1970) 141–53.

23. R. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* (Brill 1965) 3.73, 80, 117. Most wine was drunk within a year. Maximum shelf-life was 3–4 years.

first came from a previous harvest. Furthermore, refraining from drinking was viewed as an ascetic practice.²⁴ We have the comparison between John the Baptist, who drank no wine, to Jesus, who was called a glutton and a drunkard (Matt 11.18f). Clearly His opponents exaggerated, but the slur had credence because Jesus did not refrain from drinking common beverages.

Secondly, wine was always mixed with water. The usual proportion was two to four parts water to one-part wine.²⁵ Even though the resultant drink is mostly water, it was still called wine. If the wine was not mixed, Ferguson notes, “it was necessary to add the adjective ‘unmixed.’”²⁶ In banqueting practices, a person would be selected to oversee the mixing of the wine to achieve the appropriate drink for the occasion. The headwaiter’s responsibility for the wine may reflect this custom, although the headwaiter might be a servant rather than a friend or relative chosen for the task. Commentators speculate whether Jesus created the wine pre-mixed or supplied wine for the headwaiter to mix. In either case, the tremendous quantity would amaze the original audience. Jesus made enough wine for the entire town of Cana.

Connections Within John

We should read each episode in John with the themes of the prologue in mind (1.1–18). In this story *belief* and *glory* are mentioned. Our interpretation should consider the ultimate purpose of the only begotten God revealing the Father (1.18), particularly since this is the first sign.

The involvement of Jesus’ mother attracts our attention. Most of the references to Mary in the Gospels occur in the birth narratives. We have limited material to use in establishing the relationship of Jesus and His mother in His adulthood. The wedding in Cana came at a transition point in their relationship. Before, He was the carpenter and Mary’s son (Mark 6.3); now His actions focus solely on accomplishing His unique mission.

24. *Ibid.* 146.

25. *Ibid.* 142f. Ferguson provides numerous quotes about the mixing of water with wine. Forbes writes, “Only ‘boozers’ drank pure wine.” R. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technologies* 3.80.

26. *Ibid.* 145.

Mary appears twice in John's gospel: at the wedding and the Crucifixion. Her presence bookends the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry. A striking feature in both scenes is that Jesus calls her "woman," and John does not identify her by name. At Cana, Jesus' terse address and idiomatic question seems harsh (2.4). It is highly unusual for a son to address his mother as "woman."²⁷ This need not imply animosity, but it would catch the attention of John's first readers. Inherent in Jesus' statement is a distancing between Himself and His mother.²⁸ This is significant in the context of a relative's or close friend's wedding. The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) use Jesus' changed relationship with His family to address the nature of discipleship, but John keeps the focus on the person of Jesus. He will not compromise His mission and His duty to the Father.

The opening line, "On the third day," demands that we keep this story connected with that which preceded it. Most likely this is the third day, or two days after, Jesus purposed to go to Galilee (1.43). Surely the disciples had the exciting events from the preceding days fresh on their minds (1.19–51). Two things stand out: Jesus' identity as the Lamb of God (1.29, 36) and Jesus' interaction with Nathanael (1.45–51).

In John's gospel, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. Did the first disciples focus on the possibility of Jesus being the Messiah to the exclusion of considering the meaning of Him being God's Lamb? John knew that his readers would know that Jesus' ministry resulted in a sacrificial death. This tension between what we know and what the characters inside the story know is crucial to John's style.

When Nathanael first heard of Jesus, he wryly stated, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip wisely responded, "Come and see." Jesus impressed Nathanael by knowing him when it seemed He could not have known him. After Nathanael's confession, Jesus promised him he would see greater things. Ultimately, the greater

27. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 1.99. According to Brown there are no other examples in literature from that era.

28. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* (Crossroad 1982) 1.327f. Schnackenburg has a helpful discussion including listing in footnote 15 the OT, NT and extra-Biblical occurrences of this idiom.

things referred to Jesus' resurrection, but it is not a coincidence that following this conversation the first sign occurred: the abundance of *good* wine in Nathanael's hometown. The miracle is the first sign confirming the identity that Nathanael initially doubted.

By designating this as the beginning of signs, John established the structure of the first half of his book, often called the Book of Signs (chs 2–11). The seven signs recorded contribute to John's purpose, stated in John 20.30f. The Book of Signs divides into two major sections: the Cana Cycle and the Feast Cycle. John marked the first unit by drawing attention to Cana (2.1; 4.46).

As we read John's carefully composed narrative, we find numerous connections within the stories.²⁹ The first and final signs correspond strongly (2.1–11; 11.1–46). The first occurs at a wedding while the seventh is at a funeral. Both signs are in reaction to the request of women close to Jesus. Jesus' initial delay seems to be a rejection of or ignoring the request. His mother and Martha both believe in Him although they are not sure what He will do. While most at the wedding are not aware of the miracle, the resurrection of Lazarus rocks Jerusalem. Though the miracle at Cana was largely unseen, John concludes that Jesus manifested His glory. The glory of the Father and the Son is central to the resurrection of Lazarus. Beginning with a wedding and ending with a funeral gives the sense of Jesus participating in every aspect of life. A resurrection miracle makes sense as the final sign, but what is significant about the provision of wine at a wedding?

Key Concepts

A fuller treatment of signs can be found in this lecture book, but it is important to cover briefly the salient points since John

29. Water plays a key role in many of the miracles and other stories. Some type of delay often occurs between the initial problem and Jesus' action. Jesus regularly involves others in the performance of the miracle. Ashton notes that "in the symbolic structure of the fourth gospel[...]the concept of life occupies a central place[...]Wine, in the context of the fruitfulness hoped and prayed for at a wedding feast, fits easily in the same broad symbolic field as does the suggestion of rebirth attendant upon baptism. In fact all Jesus' great healing miracles carry with them something of the same idea." J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford UP 1991) 219. Note the emphasis in the second sign that the son lives (4.46–54).

first mentioned signs in this story. Whereas the Synoptics prefer the term miracle (*dunamis*), John uses signs (*semeion*) and works (*ergon*).³⁰ *Dunamis* emphasizes the breaking in of God's power to defeat Satan and establish His reign.³¹ Exorcisms are prominent in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are no exorcisms in John.

John's use of signs, as indicated in the purpose statement (20.30f), reminds us of God's action through Moses during the Exodus.³² Moses performed signs in the sight of the people, so they would believe God was acting through him and know that the Lord is God (Exod 4.5, 30f; 10.2). Like Jesus' opponents, Pharaoh's heart was hardened when he rejected the signs (Exod 7.8–22). Just as Moses wrote God's saving deeds and commandments in a book so that the Israelites would have life (Deut 30.10, 15f), John wrote Jesus' signs in a book so that believers may have eternal life.

A sign points beyond itself to a greater or hidden meaning. Simply noticing that a sign has occurred does not take faith. Jesus' enemies acknowledged His miraculous deeds, but they did not accept the sign (John 11.47). Faith is accepting the meaning, that to which the sign points.

Usually in John's gospel the sign sparks a larger discourse by Jesus. John uses these speeches or dialogues to expound the crucial concepts important for belief. For example, the meaning of the healing of the blind man or the raising of Lazarus is beyond doubt. No discussion follows the turning of the water into wine. John quickly moves to the next story. He calls it a sign, but to what is it pointing?

Another key concept, introduced during Jesus' conversation with His mother, is His hour. The narrative contains three scenes. Each scene contains a brief dialogue. Jesus and His mother speak in the first one. The most significant statement in their conversation is the last phrase, "My hour has not yet come" (2.4).

John is the only gospel with the thematic element of Jesus' impending hour. In the Synoptics, Matthew especially, several refer-

30. As the narrator, John calls miracles *signs*. Jesus refers to His miracles as *works*.

31. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 1.525.

32. Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1* 10–12.

ences to “an hour” pertain to the coming of Jesus in judgment. The focus is on the unpredictable timing of His coming. John incorporates the theme of judgment with the “hour” sayings of John 5, but the focus is on the person of Christ. It is through Christ—by His actions and by His authority—that this hour comes. If the hour “now is,” it is present because Jesus—the Word made Flesh—is present. Whatever remains to come cannot arrive until Jesus’ own hour comes first. As Augustine wrote, “But when He had done as much as He judged to be sufficient, then His hour came, not of necessity, but of will,—not of condition, but of power.”³³ Thus, the hour motif in John clearly serves a Christological function, focusing attention on the person and identity of Christ.

In John 12.23 and 17.1, Jesus connects His hour with His glorification (another verbal connection with our passage, 2.11). Being glorified is the ultimate result achieved in His hour, but it comes through the horrific suffering of the cross. In His final week, shortly after acknowledging the arrival of His hour (12.23), Jesus confesses His anxiety and states His resolve: “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour” (12.27). These passages emphasize that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the means to His glorification. The Glorified Son will be seen once the Lamb of God has been sacrificed.

Since His hour focuses on His death and resurrection, why would Mary’s request seem to annoy Jesus? His involvement did not cause controversy. It did not result in death threats. Maybe we can connect His proleptic statement to another saying about time: “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world” (John 11.9). Time is limited. Jesus knew that once His mission started the clock began ticking. The result was not immediate, but His destiny was certain.

John highlights the significance of the sign by saying, “Jesus

33. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (8.12) Trans. J. Gibb. In P. Schaff, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 7. (Christian Literature Publishing Co 1888) Rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701009.htm>>.

manifested His glory” (2.11). While much of what we have said about His hour closely connects to the revealing of His glory, there are some further points to clarify. First, Jesus *manifested* His glory. It did not happen apart from His action or will. It was not incidental or accidental. With the authority given to Him by the Father, He chose the time and place. Secondly, His glory references His identity as the Only Begotten from the Father (1.14). His words and deeds bore witness to the reality hidden by the flesh. While he dwelt (literally tented) among His disciples (1.14), His miracles displayed the same creative, sustaining power of YHWH, who guided the Israelites through the wilderness. Finally, the revealing of His glory is the determining factor in belief. At Cana He manifested His glory, and His disciples believed on Him. Verbs of seeing are prominent in John’s gospel. By way of contrast, John explained the reason many rejected Jesus by quoting Isaiah and adding his own commentary (John 12.37–43). While Isaiah saw Christ’s glory and spoke of Him, many who saw Jesus in the flesh refused to confess what they knew to be true. Their love for the approval of men blinded them to the glory manifested before them.

You Have Kept the Good Wine Until Now

Having considered several important components of the story, we are prepared for the *good wine*, the meaning to which the first sign points. Through Mary we learn “they have no wine.” The statement is a fact, but in John’s gospel few things are mere facts. The Jewish wedding, the quintessential moment of divine favor, had exhausted its resources. The six large jars could hold plenty of water for Jewish purification, but that water could not keep the celebration going. Ignorant of Jesus’ actions, the headwaiter declares to the bridegroom, “You have kept the good wine until now” (2.10). The elements in the story, including the repeated reference to wine, lead the reader to consider the various truths contained in the headwaiter’s statement.

The miracle contains two main concepts: transformation (or newness) and superiority. When we consider that God’s plan of redemption involved a change in dispensation, accompanied by

a new covenant with different rituals, that expanded beyond one ethnic people to include all nations, all of which came to pass through one person, we can begin to appreciate the phenomenal ability of the headwaiter's comment to convey layers of meaning.³⁴

First, we have the clear implication of Christ's superiority to Jewish rituals, and therefore, the Law of Moses and Moses himself. In the prologue, John states, "For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1.17). The miracle at Cana is the first of many examples of Jesus' superiority to Moses and his Law. Jesus not only surpasses the Law in excellence, but He is the key to understanding its true meaning. His action does not represent a radical change in God's plan. He is the fulfillment of it, kept until the proper time. Whatever is lacking, He completes in a way that brings God's purposes to their ultimate design. Augustine wrote, "When, however, He turns the water itself into wine, He shows us that the Old Scripture also is from Himself, for at His own command were the water-pots filled. It is from the Lord, indeed, that the Old Scripture also is; but it has no taste unless Christ is understood therein."³⁵ Correctly understanding Christ from the Old Testament is the heart of the gospel message. Augustine can also say, "For the good wine—namely, the gospel—Christ has kept until now."³⁶

If the gospel is good wine, so is the response to it. For Christians, nothing could be more superior than Christian baptism to previous purification rituals, including John the Baptist's.³⁷ The baptism Christ offers is empowered by His blood. As Ignatius wrote, "He was born and baptized that by His passion He might purify the water."³⁸

34. Space does not permit us to pursue the observation that the headwaiter did not know where the good wine came from (John 2.9). The topic of origins/knowing origins is another important theme in John's gospel.

35. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 9.2.

36. *Ibid.* 9.2.

37. John's baptism is repeatedly mentioned culminating in Jesus surpassing John in 4.1–2. Jesus' talk with Nicodemus is a baptismal passage. Jesus' initial conversation with the Samaritan woman centers upon water. See Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1* 318–21, including fn 131 for a thorough discussion.

38. Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* (18). *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol 1*. Trans. A. Roberts

The incredible changes wrought by Christ have their effect on people individually. Chrysostom wrote:

At that time, then, Jesus made of water wine, and both then and now He ceases not to change our weak and unstable wills. For there are[...] men who in nothing differ from water, so cold, and weak, and unsettled. But let us bring those of such disposition to the Lord, that He may change their will to the quality of wine, so that they be no longer washy, but have body, and be the cause of gladness in themselves and others.³⁹

The themes of transformation and superiority continue in succeeding stories. To the shock of Jewish authorities, Jesus proclaimed He could rebuild a destroyed temple in three days. Theirs took 46 years to build and still was not complete (2.19–22). To Nicodemus He offered a new birth, one far superior to physical birth from privileged ancestry (3.3–5). To the Samaritan woman He offered water far greater to that found by the Jewish Patriarch Jacob (4.10–13); He promised new worship that transcended physical places and ethnic identities (4.21–24).

The Messianic Banquet

The emphasis on wine in the context of a wedding frequently leads to the suggestion that this miracle relates to the Messianic Banquet.⁴⁰ The wedding account is so brief that modern readers may initially doubt that John expected his audience to read so much into this episode. We should remember John wrote to people well-versed in the Old Testament and the primary Christian tradition.⁴¹ The following survey will demonstrate the clear connection

and J. Donaldson <www.newadvent.org/fathers/0104.htm>.

39. J. Chrysostom, *Homily 22 on the Gospel of John* (3), in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 14*. Trans. C. Marriott (Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1889.) Rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240122.htm>>.

40. For an excellent summary online see, P. Long, “Messianic Banquet Imagery in the Second Temple Period” <http://www.academia.edu/3683166/Messianic_Banquet_Imagery_in_the_Second_Temple_Period>.

41. John expected his audience to know the Old Testament. Consider in the opening chapters - Jacob's ladder (1.51); the bronze serpent (3.14); Jacob's well (4.5); Jesus conversation with the Samaritan woman reflect events and places in the life of Joshua

in the Old Testament between wine and the Messianic era.

The overall concept is that the eschaton is a time of blessing for God's faithful people. Usually the blessing comes after God delivers the righteous from ungodly enemies. This theme has its origin early in Scripture. As Jacob blessed his sons, he said to Judah:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies...
He ties *his* foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk. (Gen 49.8a, 11–12)

Wine and milk are symbols of the success and prosperity of Judah's future. Jews quoted this passage frequently as a key Messianic text.⁴² When Moses restated the covenant with its blessings and curses, he mentioned wine several times; both as a sign of blessing (Deut 7.13; 11.14; 33.28) and the lack of wine as a curse for disobedience (Deut 28.39, 51).

The prophets, probably based on the wording in Deut, symbolically communicated the threat of punishment and the joy of restoration through God taking away or supplying wine. For example, Hosea prophesied against the Northern Kingdom when it had turned to Baal, a Canaanite god connected with agricultural fertility. He often described God's judgment in agricultural terms, as in 2.8–9a:

including his statement in Joshua 24.14 of worshiping in sincerity and truth (4.19–26).

Regarding Christian tradition, John refers to Jesus of Nazareth without any explanation of Jesus' connection to that small village. He identifies Mary as the one who anointed Jesus before he recounts the story (11.2; 12.1–8). Probably John does not include the Lord's Supper because he knows his audience has rehearsed it many times. In John 14–15 Jesus emphasizes keeping His word/commandments, but essentially there are no commandments in John beyond "believe" or "love." Informed Christians knew the kingdom parables and sayings found in the Synoptics that featured the wedding/banqueting motif.

42. For some examples of its use in Intertestamental Literature see J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (Doubleday 1995).

For she does not know
 that it was I who gave her the grain,
 the new wine and the oil,
And lavished on her silver and gold,
 Which they used for Baal.
Therefore, I will take back
 My grain at harvest time
 And My new wine in its season.

Though God supplied the grain and wine, the people worshiped Baal. Consequently, God will take away these staples as a fitting punishment. Later, God pictured Israel as grapes found by Him, but not bearing fruit for Him. Therefore, He will cast Israel away (Hos 9.10–17). Having described their imminent destruction with this metaphor, the final chapter beautifully describes the future restoration:

I will heal their apostasy,
 I will love them freely,
Those who live in his shadow
 Will again raise grain,
And they will blossom like the vine.
 His renown *will be* like the wine of Lebanon. (Hos 14.4, 7)

Joel also contains the contrast of the dearth of wine as punishment versus the future blessing pictured as an abundance of it (1.5, 10; 2.19, 24).⁴³ At the end of his book, Joel describes the future of God's people:

And in that day
The mountains will drip with sweet wine,
 And the hills will flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah
 will flow with water;
And a spring will go out from the house of the LORD
 To water the valley of Shittim. (Joel 3.18)

43. For more passages see: Judgment - Isa 5.10; 16.10; 24.6–8; Jer 48.33; Lam 2.12; Amos 5.11; Mic 6.15; Zeph 1.13; Hag 1.11; 2.16; Blessing - Psa 4.7; Isa 27.1–3; 55.1; 62.8f; Jer 31.12; Amos 9.13f; Zech 9.17.

Joel echoes the blessing to Judah (Gen 49.12) with his reference to wine and milk. Amos uses the same phrase as Joel, “the mountains will drip with sweet wine,” to describe the days in which the Messianic promise to David is fulfilled (Amos 9.11, 13).

While numerous OT passages use plentiful harvests to depict the blessing of the Messianic era, Isa 25.6–9 describes a banquet hosted by God:

The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on
this mountain;
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.
And on this mountain He will swallow up
the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.
He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.
And it will be said in that day,
“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might
save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

Located within the Isaiah Apocalypse (chs 24–27), the declaration of God’s judgment surrounds this passage, including the opening and closing verses of the chapter. After He defeats those oppressing the righteous, the Lord provides a lavish banquet featuring wine and meat. While the people enjoy the feast provided by the Lord, He too is eating, swallowing up death. The divinely hosted victory banquet exemplifies the expectation of abundance in the Last Days. John alluded twice to this passage in Rev indicating its significance to Christians (Rev 7.17; 21.4).

Extra-Biblical Jewish writings also contain the wine/banquet-ing motif, including two uninspired works contemporaneous with John’s gospel. In 2 Baruch 29.3–8 the author describes what will happen after a series of calamities on Earth. The wording and imagery come from Isa 27.1–6. Those living in the land will be pro-

tected from judgment and live to enjoy a new age of supernatural abundance. They experience a continual feast including a miraculous harvest of grapes and wine production. Significantly, the author connects the new era with the appearance of the Messiah:

And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed[...]The earth also shall yield its fruit ten-thousandfold and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor of wine. (2 Baruch 29.3, 5)⁴⁴

Several passages in 1 Enoch refer to a time of blessing following judgment. 1 Enoch 62 focuses on the exaltation of the Elect One, the Son of Man. In language reminiscent of Dan 7, God exalts the Son of Man and executes vengeance on the wicked through him. All must recognize his glory as he establishes a kingdom in righteousness. In this context we find a brief reference to the faithful sharing a meal with the Messianic figure, “And the Lord of Spirits will abide over them, And with that Son of Man shall they eat, And lie down and rise up for ever and ever” (1 Enoch 62.14).

Other passages in I Enoch are more extensive in their use of new creation or restoration of Eden motifs. The abundance of wine is explicitly stated in 10.18f:

And then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness and shall all be planted with trees and be full of blessing. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure (of it) shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil.

Another example comes from the Qumran community, founded *ca.* 130 B.C. The residents had strict rules for participating in their communal meals. They expected God’s cataclysmic judgment on the wicked and were determined to maintain their elect sta-

44. From *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* Trans. R. H. Charles (Oxford UP 1913) Ed. G. Lyons for Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University <<http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/pseudepigrapha/2Baruch.html>>.

tus. It is possible that their leaders arranged the communal meals in anticipation of banqueting in the future age.⁴⁵ *The Messianic Rule* contains a reference to eating with the Messiah.⁴⁶ The brief description of the meal highlights the drinking of wine.

These Biblical and extra-Biblical passages reflect the basic concept of God interacting with His covenant people. Once He destroys their enemies and purges sin from them, they can experience incredible blessing. The presence or abundance of wine helps communicate the glorious future God will provide for His people. Additionally, some of the passages demonstrate the expectation of people eating and drinking with a Messianic figure. Underscoring this connection between abundant food and Messianic expectations, it was after Jesus miraculously fed the 5000 that they tried to make Him king (John 6.15). In Jesus, the crowds saw the hope for a new David whose coronation was accompanied with great feasting including wine (1 Chr 12.39f).

Ample evidence exists to connect the abundance of wine and feasting with the Messianic era, but does the wedding scene contribute any symbolic meaning? The concept of “sacred marriage” was prevalent in the ancient world, including depictions of God and Israel (Isa 54.1–8; Jer 3.1; Ezek 16.8; Hos 2.19f).⁴⁷ Probably because YHWH is married to Israel, there is no evidence that Jews viewed the Messiah as Israel’s bridegroom.⁴⁸ Jesus’ audience would understand comparing the future kingdom to a joyous wedding, but the bridegroom motif seems to be a Christian development beginning with John the Baptist (Matt 9.14f; John 3.29f).

45. D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* 156–57, 170–71.

46. “...in order of his dignity. And [when] they shall gather at the common [tab]le, to eat and [to drink] new wine, when the common table shall be set for eating and the new wine [poured] for drinking, let no man extend his hand over the first-fruits of bread and wine before the Priest; for [it is he] who shall bless the first-fruits of bread and wine, and shall be the first [to extend] his hand over the bread. Thereafter, the Messiah of Israel shall extend his hand over the bread, [and] all the congregation of the Community [shall utter] a blessing, [each man in the order] of his dignity. It is according to this statute that they shall proceed at every me[al at which] at least ten men are gathered.” *The Messianic Rule* (II.17–22). In G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English 4th Edition* (Penguin 1995) 121–22.

47. D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* 169.

48. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* 1.416.

In several parables, Jesus uses a wedding to explain different aspects of the kingdom. Significantly, He is the king's son who is to be married and the bridegroom for whom the people wait (Matt 22.2; 25.1). The surprising element of these parables is the sudden reversal from joy and feasting to condemnation for some characters in the story. The rejection of the invitation, the refusal to wear wedding garments, and the failure to be ready for the groom's arrival bring judgment (Matt 22.1–14; 25.1–13). As with the prophetic passages, sin must be dealt with for the celebration to commence or continue. The lack of wine at the wedding may be symbolic of judgment, something Jesus makes explicit when He cleanses the Temple in the following story.

Paul's writings further demonstrate the extent of the wedding/bridegroom motif. His brief discourse on marriage in Ephesians reveals the mystery of Christ and the church (Eph 5.22–33). He told the Christians in Corinth that he betrothed them to Christ (2 Cor 11.1f). Both passages suggest that Christ's return is the wedding day (Eph 5.27; 2 Cor 11.2).

Thus, Jesus' miracle at Cana connects to a rich history of biblical thought and fervent expectation. Combining this with His intention to establish Himself as the bridegroom of God's people, we can understand why Jesus chose this as His first miracle. His action signaled the inauguration of the new era. It pointed to celebration, blessing, and the abundant life promised by God. At the same time, the proximity of this sign to John revealing Jesus as the Lamb of God, along with Jesus' statement about His hour, emphasizes that the blessings of the Messianic era would come through Christ's death.

John confirms this understanding in Revelation. With great rejoicing, we hear the announcement of the wedding of God's Son, the Lamb who was slain, to the victorious saints:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage

supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Rev 19.7–9)

Indeed, these are true words. An unending celebration awaits God’s faithful people. That is a wedding I do not want to miss!

The Tree Has Withered

The Judge of the Nation

Brent Forsyth

I am guessing that for most of us figs were not a big part of our diet growing up. In fact, figs need a certain climate in order to thrive. In our country, figs are found mostly in California, Texas, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. Even then, there is not much demand for them. This was not the case for God's people in the Bible. Figs were a major part of ancient life and a stable food source. Figs and fig trees are mentioned some sixty times in the Bible. According to Everett Ferguson, "The olive, the vine, grain, and sheep were the basis of the agricultural economy of the Mediterranean world."¹ Figs must have come in as a close second. They were one of the most important plants for the Israelites, being grown throughout Palestine, especially in the mountainous regions.²

Perhaps figs and their appearance in the Bible have not caught your attention. Well, I hope to bring their importance to light using one of Jesus' least talked-about miracles: the withering of the fig tree (Matt 21.18–22; Mark 11.12–14, 20–26).

The Story of the Fig Tree

Whereas Matthew records this as one event, Mark splits the miracle into two occasions. I will be using Mark's chronology predominantly, but will make reference to Matthew when necessary.

1. E. Ferguson. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans 1987) 60.

2. R. Harrison. "Fig; Fig Tree" in G. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans 1979) 2.301–02.

On the second day of Jesus' last week, Jesus finds a fruitless fig tree and curses it to death. This agrees with Matthew's placement. Jesus had spent the night in Bethany and is on His way back to Jerusalem. Becoming hungry, He searches to find fruit. In the distance, Jesus can see a fig tree which has already started to sprout leaves. When Jesus arrives, He finds it without fruit. Jesus then curses the fig tree in the hearing of all His apostles, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!"

Mark places this event between the triumphant entry (Sunday) and the cleansing of the Temple (Monday). This fig tree was located somewhere between Bethany and Jerusalem. It seems to have been standing by itself and not part of a grove. Jesus then completes His journey to Jerusalem where Mark records the cleansing of the Temple. This enraged the Jewish leadership, but the crowds were astonished at His teaching (Mark 11.18). These two events are the only incidents Mark accounts Jesus accomplishing on this day (Monday).

The next day, as Jesus made His way back to Jerusalem, He came across the same fig tree with the disciples (Tuesday). Peter, not surprisingly, was the first to react to the new status of the tree: withered. Matthew records that the tree dried up and died immediately from Jesus' curse. Mark's account implies that it withered overnight or soon after they left it. Nevertheless, Peter, in utter shock, calls Jesus' attention to the withered tree, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered" (11.21). Both Matthew and Mark have Jesus bringing out lessons about faith and prayer before moving on to Jerusalem.

Nothing more is said of the fig tree. Many Bible students never come back to discuss this unique miracle. What is its meaning? What was Jesus trying to teach His disciples? Was this simply a lesson about faith and prayer or is there more to it? These are all questions we will study as we review Jesus' miracle of the fig tree.

The Misaligned Timelines

As good Bible students, we notice that the story itself brings out a few questions that we want to look into. First, one might wonder

why Matthew's timeline is askew from Mark's. As noted before, Matthew records this miracle as taking place on one occasion: the cursing and withering. Mark records the cursing happening a day before the withering (or the discovery of the withered tree). This question comes from a common fault many make with the gospels. Today we like things to be in perfect agreement, in order, nicely packaged together. However, neither Matthew nor Mark were writing to match one another. In fact, both were writing to distinct audiences with different goals of what to emphasize about Jesus. It is wrong for us to place our desire for conformity upon the biblical writers. We need to respect their writing style and purpose and not place some arbitrary modern condition on them. In making that case, it should be noted that both writers are in agreement. Even the lessons Jesus brings forth are the same in both gospels. The one thing that is different is the timeline.

This is easily answered by recognizing that Matthew is not placing a high priority on time, but focusing on the details of the story itself. In other words, his desire is to talk about the miracle as one event. Mark, on the other hand, wants to emphasize the fact that this miracle spans over two days. Nothing is lost by Matthew placing them together, neither is there any contradiction when these facts are realized. I am sure many witnesses of accidents have given factual testimony, but with different timelines or emphasis. One might combine something that happened at the beginning of the accident with something that happened at the end. This does not mean the middle never happened or that this particular witness missed some of the accident. Rather, they wanted to emphasize certain events together rather than give a strict timeline of the accident. If we can understand this in our world, where accidents happen every day, we should be able to accept and respect it in the Bible.

“It was not the Season for Figs”

Another area of difficulty of the story for some Bible students is that Jesus appears to be upset that the tree has no figs, for that is its purpose. A fig tree has no other reason for being alive. Producing figs is its function. In fact, Jesus curses the fig tree never to produce

fruit again. However, Mark tells us that “it was not the season for figs.” So why did Jesus think He could find figs? Why was He upset when it was not time for figs?

Some might conclude that Jesus was forcing the lesson from the fig tree. Others might surmise that Jesus, the humble carpenter, shows his inexperience with the knowledge of fig trees. Neither one of these is the case. In fact, I would imagine the common man did not need to be a fig tree farmer to understand how and when figs grew; it was common knowledge. L.A. Stauffer helps our understanding, “The fruit starts to develop at this time, from late March to early April. It forms at the same time or, even at times, before the leaves begin to sprout.” However, though it would not be unusual to find fruit at this time, Stauffer indicated that it would be green and undesirable for food. Figs would not be ripe until around June.³ Chumbley adds that this green inedible fruit is referred to as “*taksh* or undeveloped fruit.”⁴

It is also common for the figs to blossom before or simultaneously with the leaves. This appears to be what Jesus was expecting, but obviously it was not the case. Was Jesus really upset at a fruitless fig tree? Or does the motive of His displeasure go beyond the tree? Beyond His hunger? Robertson helps us to understand Jesus’ true displeasure, “This fig tree had promise without performance.”⁵ Jesus saw an opportunity to relate the tree to Israel. It makes a perfect picture of how God viewed the events that would take place at the end of this week. In other words, there was more to this miracle than not finding fruit. Israel was a nation with promise, but without performance.⁶

Figs and Fig Trees in the Old Testament

Why use a fig tree? If Jesus is drawing some lesson from this miracle, is not that a little vague? Who would pick up such a subtle message? What we need to understand is Jesus is not pulling this

3. L. Stauffer, *Mark*. Truth Commentaries (Guardian of Truth Foundation 1999) 264.

4. K. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*. 2nd ed. (Prairie Papers 2017) 370.

5. A. Robertson, *Studies in Mark’s Gospel* (Broadman Press 1958) 359.

6. *Ibid.*

out of thin air. Jesus is actually using a common language and metaphor from the Old Testament prophets. In fact, it was a metaphor the prophets often used when they wanted to speak of God's coming judgment. Figs also appear outside the prophets. Adam and Eve actually covered themselves with fig leaves after eating from the forbidden fruit (Gen 3.7). This is the first reference in the Bible to figs. The twelve spies of Israel carried back a cluster of figs from the Promised Land (Num 13.23). In Deut 8.8, one of the descriptions used of Canaan being a blessed land is that it was a land of fig trees. Hezekiah recovered from his deadly sickness by eating a cake of figs (2 Kng 20.7; Isa 38.21). Who could forget Amos' humble statement, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs" (Amos 7.14)?

In the New Testament, Jesus was able to convince Nathaniel that He was the Messiah by seeing him as he sat under a fig tree (John 1.48). James uses a fig tree that produces olives to discuss the problem of a tongue that both blesses and curses (3.12). In Rev 6.13, John witnessed a fig tree casting unripe figs as it was shaken by a great wind. These are just a few of the references to figs in the Bible. However, a closer connection to Jesus' miracle is found in investigating how the prophets used figs as part of their message.

Figs of Judgment

These seers, especially Jeremiah, make use of figs and fig trees in their messages to God's people. In fact, fig trees and grape vines go hand and hand in the Old Testament. In most cases, you will not find one without the other. It is much like the New Testament combination of praying and singing (Acts 16.25; 1 Cor 14.15; Jam 5.13; Matt 26.30). In Isa 34.4, Isaiah describes the judgment of God against the Gentile nations. One of his descriptions is the day of God's judgment will be like "a leaf withers from the fig tree, or as one withers from the fig tree." Notice how Isaiah makes a connection to judgment and the withering of the fig tree. Isaiah was speaking against the pagan nations, but Jesus uses this same metaphor against Israel.

Looking at Jer 5.17, we see that this chapter is a true declara-

tion of God's coming judgment. The reason being, "there is no one who does justice, who seeks truth." God's judgment would come by a foreign nation devouring Judah's vines and fig trees. The next line states that they will demolish with the sword Judah's fortified cities in which Judah has placed all her trust. This nation is, of course, Babylon. In the New Testament, Babylon becomes a symbol for Rome, especially in Revelation. There is a definite parallel to this prophecy of Babylon and Rome's role in judgment against Jerusalem.

Staying with Jeremiah, we turn our attention to Jer 8.13. The fig tree is involved in God's judgment against His people. This time the figs are "snatched" from the fig tree and "the leaf withers." Again, the withering of the fig tree is connected with judgment. Of note, this judgment comes because Judah's own leaders are corrupt, from king to priest to false prophet. It had become so bad among Judah's elite that Jeremiah declares they did not even know how to blush in their disobedience (v 12). It is the same in the days of Jesus.

One of the key visions of Jeremiah is found in Jer 24.1ff. This vision came at the time of the second deportation, which included the arrest and exodus of King Jeconiah. In this vision, Jeremiah sees two baskets of figs. Interestingly, they are set before the Temple. One of the baskets was filled with fresh ripe figs. The other contained rotten and inedible figs. The bad figs stood for God's future judgment against Judah and King Zedekiah. Such would be brought with "sword, famine, and pestilence." The good figs symbolized God's promise to restore Judah after judgment had been carried out. A similar picture appears in 29.17.

Even though Jeremiah used the metaphor of the fig tree and judgment more than the other prophets, we also see it used by Joel and Habakkuk. In Joel 1.7, 12, Joel describes God's coming judgment as a locust invasion. One of the destructions brought by their invasion is the "stripping bare" of the fig tree and its branches (v 7). In v 12, God declares the fig tree "fails." This is the reason for Jesus cursing His fig tree. In Hab 3.17, the prophet includes "blossomless fig trees" and "fruitless vines" as results of God's judgment against His people.

Of note, there is no mention of figs or fig trees in the captivity prophets (Ezekiel and Daniel). Their absence is almost as if God was saying the results of judgment upon Judah continued throughout their captivity. Perhaps, there was a lack of ripe figs all through the seventy years of captivity, even after the destruction of the Temple. If this is true, this adds to the intensity of those passages that declares one of the things God would restore would be fruitful fig trees. Thus, the restoring of ripe, edible figs was a sign of God bringing blessing and hope back to His people.

Figs of Hope

So when Jesus decided to bring a message to His disciples using a fig tree, it would have played on their ears louder than on our own. It would have brought the very words of the passages listed above to their minds. However, figs are also used by the prophets to speak of hopeful future blessings as mentioned above.

In Joel 2.22, Joel describes God blessing His people once again. Among the blessings is the “fig tree and vine yielding fruit once again.” In Mic 4.4, a parallel to Isa 2.2–4, Micah prophesies about the future church as a kingdom of peace. He states, “And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid.” Finally, Zechariah declares, “In the days when God’s Branch comes forth, the day when He will remove iniquity from the land.” Zechariah describes it as a time when “every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree” (3.8, 10).

This might have also been part of Jesus’ purpose for causing the tree to wither. Jesus’ words were only to His apostles on this occasion. Though it would be good for them to hear about the coming judgment, the message for His faithful and true disciples had to go beyond condemnation. It had to also be a message of safety, hope, and blessing in His Kingdom, something they would be transferred to even before Christ’s judgment comes (Col 1.13).

Though the language of the fig may not stand out to us brightly, it was much more noticeable to the first century Jew. In other words, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He cursed the

fig tree. Everything He did had purpose and a lesson(s). But what was Jesus' rationale for destroying this particular tree? Chumbley helps us be reminded that none of Jesus' miracles are done just to do a miracle. Jesus' words, actions, and miracles always had a purpose. He states, "Those who are shocked by what seems a pique of anger miss the symbolism. Miracles always point beyond themselves, and this incident with a barren fig tree previewed the judgment coming to Israel when God would pour out His wrath on those who killed His Son."⁷

The Reason for the Cursing

To understand the meaning and reason behind Jesus' miracle of death (compared to His miracles of resurrection and life), we need to notice the timing of it. First, Jesus curses the fig tree during the events of His last week. One of the main things on Jesus' mind this final week was the future judgment of Israel, a judgment that was coming because of their rejection and killing of the Son of God. It is clear by what Jesus says and does that this was on His mind, even beyond the cursing of the fig tree. This judgment would be most visual in the future destruction of Jerusalem. It is clear that Jesus was occupied with thoughts of this event. He took opportunities throughout the week to speak about it, to warn the people of it, and to prepare His disciples for it. For example, as Jesus approached Jerusalem in His triumphant entry, He looked over the city and wept:

If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:42–44)

In Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees, He declared:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together,

7. Chumbley, *Matthew* 370.

the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.' (Matt 23.37–39)

Jesus warned His apostles later in the week that He was coming back in judgment to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. The damage would be so severe that one stone would not be left upon another (Matt 24.2; Mark 13.2; Luke 19.44; 21.6). As Jesus described the devastation to come in Matt 24, He uses the language from Daniel's "Abomination of Desolation" (Dan 11.31; 12.11; Matt 24.15). Luke has Jesus describing the actual event, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand" (Luke 21.20).

Intriguing. Even in these words about Jerusalem's destruction, Jesus uses the fig tree. "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Matt 24.32f).

This dialogue on the Mount of Olives and the miracle of the fig tree were both spoken to only His disciples. However, on the way to the cross Jesus spoke to a group of women lamenting as they followed Him:

Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry? (Luke 23.28–31)

The language clearly connects these words to Jerusalem's future demolition. Notice Jesus' final words about trees in the passage above, "For if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?" (Luke 23.31). Jesus uses a proverb that is similar to what He performed on the fig tree days earlier. Jesus came to the fig tree when it was green and alive. However, on the next day

His disciples found it dry and dead. Is there a connection to Jesus' words here in Luke 23 and the fig tree?

What Jesus was basically saying was, "If an innocent man should so suffer (the green tree), what would be the fate of the wicked (the dry tree)? The green tree is representative of one which bears fruit, while the dry tree represents the one that does not bear fruit."⁸ Coffman makes a clearer connection to the fig tree,

The green tree represents the innocent and holy Saviour in the spirituality and vigor of his life; the dry tree represents the morally dead and sapless people, typified by the fig tree, blasted by his word, four days earlier. Thus, by this prophecy, as Jesus left the city for the last time, he prophesied its doom no less than he did upon entering it (Luke 19.41f). Not even the prospect of immediate death took the Saviour's mind away from the awful penalties that would fall upon Jerusalem for his rejection. The fires of suffering consuming Jesus (the green tree) would be nothing to compare with the fires of destruction that would burn up the dead tree (Jerusalem, judicially and morally dead).⁹

In addition, Jesus, in Luke 13.6–9, gives a parable about a man who owns a fig tree that does not bear any fruit. He commands the vineyard keeper to cut it down for it has not born fruit for three years. The vineyard keeper calls for more time so that he can put fertilizer around it. He tells the owner that if this does not change things, then he will cut it down. This cursing of the fig tree appears to be the answer to that parable; the fertilizer did not help the fig tree (Israel). Soon it will be time for the vineyard keeper to hold to his word and cut it down (the destruction of Jerusalem).

The Cleansing of the Temple

Jesus curses the tree on His way to cleanse the Temple. The disciples take notice of the miracle moments before Jesus is asked about the authority for doing such actions. Is there a connection to this miracle and the cleansing of the Temple? The driving out of the money changers highlights once again how fruitless Israel, espe-

8. H. L. Boles, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* New Testament Commentaries (Gospel Advocate 1940) 448.

9 J. Coffman's *Bible Commentary* (ACU Press 1971–1993).

cially their leaders, had become. They had no respect for the Son of God because they had no reverence for God Himself or His house. It is a sign-act, just like the cursing of the fig tree, which reveals the reason for God's coming wrath. In fact, some see this not as a cleansing, but as a cursing of the Temple. In other words, Jesus was not coming to put it back into proper function, but giving a visual that it was too late. It would only be a short time before the Temple would be destroyed because it had been made into a robber's den. In relation to this view, Coffman states,

This second cleansing, coming in the last week of the Lord's ministry, contained no such order, because it was too late, the day of grace already having expired. This cleansing, here recorded totally within the narrative of cursing the fig tree, appears as a primary basis of the divine judgment against Israel.¹⁰

Putting all this evidence together (the use of figs to describe coming judgment, the fact that Jesus always has a purpose for His actions, and the detail that the Destruction of Jerusalem was on His mind), it is clear this event is used by Jesus to teach and warn His disciples (and others) about that coming judgment. However, I do appreciate Stauffer's point concerning the cursing of the fig tree, "The cursed tree symbolically and prophetically portrays the fruitlessness of Israel as a nation whom God rejects and curses, according to most scholars and commentators, a point that Jesus teaches in his final days at Jerusalem. *That idea, it should be stated, is nowhere explicitly taught*"¹¹ (emphasis mine). Though not explicitly taught in the text, I have highlighted a great amount of evidence to show that such a conclusion is warranted, even necessary.

The "Sign-Act" or "Acting Parable"

The cursing of the fig tree has yet another important element to it. This component also correlates back to the Old Testament prophets. Jesus' miracle can be seen as a "sign-act." Some like to refer to it as a parable acted out. Elmer Martens, in his commentary

10. Coffman, *Mark*.

11. Stauffer, *Mark* 269.

on Jeremiah, called them “symbolic actions.”¹² I prefer the term “sign-act.” Cranfield quotes from one of the earliest extant commentaries on Mark, that of Victor of Antioch, who declared this was not about Jesus being hungry, but it was all about Jesus using this fig tree to “act out a parable in which Jesus used the fig tree to set forth the judgment which was about to fall on Jerusalem.”¹³ Using sign-acts in their preaching was a common practice of the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

A sign-act is when the speaker performs the message visually. Such acts gave life to the speaker’s message, often grabbing the attention of the audience as they waited to see what would happen next. Martens states, “A reason for symbolic action was to reinforce visibly the oral word which people refused. Sign-acts arrested people’s attention; they riveted the prophet’s message in the memory.”¹⁴ For example, Jeremiah was told to take a waistband (girdle) and place it around his loins. Then he was instructed to hide it in a rock at the Euphrates River. When he returned later to retrieve the waistband it was ruined. The prophet showed off the waistband to Judah as a visual demonstration of God’s message that Judah, herself, was ruined and worthless just like the waistband (Jer 13.1–11). Likewise, Ezekiel was told to perform a sign-act to those in captivity in Ezek 4.1–17. God commanded him to lie on his left side for 390 days and then turn over to his right side for another 40 days. A brick, where the prophet drew a picture of the besieging of Jerusalem, also accompanied the message. Ezekiel would take these “naps” in the view of all captives. No doubt, curious as to what the prophet was doing, a door was opened to deliver God’s judgment lesson. Notice that these sign-acts most often were about God’s coming judgment. Jesus’ sign-act was the same.

In the case of Jesus and the fig tree, Israel represents the fig tree (as often it did with the prophets). Jesus expected to find fruit on the tree. This represents Israel’s boastful claims to be the true righ-

12. E. Martens, *Jeremiah*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Herald Press 1986) 311.

13. C. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge University Press 1966) 356.

14. Martens, *Jeremiah* 311.

teous ones of God, something Jesus dispels during His teaching in His last week (Matt 23). Instead, in the eyes of God, Israel was fruitless: blaspheming God's Messiah, rejecting His Christ, and killing the Son of God. Jehovah, in turn, would wither His nation, destroying not only the Temple, but the religious system of Judaism. It was time to usher in a new era, one where Gentiles would be given opportunity to bear fruit for God. Jesus' sign-act was to bring out this message to His apostles (as well as all the other words and acts of Jesus this final week).

Jesus the King, the Judge, and the Fig Tree

As I have stated earlier, the cursing and withering of the fig tree is connected to all the other events and teachings done by Jesus this week. As we take an overview of these, we not only see the Son of God warning of coming judgment, but we get a clear view of Jesus standing forth as the King of Kings.

What does a king do? A beloved king is one who cares, leads, and protects his people. He is cherished by them because he leads his citizens in truth and guides them in honesty. Sometimes these messages are not easy to hear, yet he still speaks the awesome truth that they may be ready. A king is called to judge matters and disputes much like Solomon did with the two women claiming motherhood to the same child (1 Kng 3.16ff). A righteous king is fair, giving justice to the innocent, but strong punishment to the guilty. This is exactly what Jesus does this last week.

His Triumphant Entry

As Jesus was cheered entering into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, Matthew clearly confirms this is the fulfillment of Zech 9.9, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Thus, Jesus enters the city as a king. However, this king came to sacrifice Himself for His people.

The Cleansing of the Temple

The King comes to set things right, driving out the corruption contained in the walls of the Temple. Both Jesus' actions and teaching become strong, direct, and poignant; aimed at the sinful leadership, Jesus is hoping the common people will heed His warnings. The King is opening His kingdom, but His own people are not ready to enter in or to accept Him as their ruler. The cleansing of the Temple thus becomes a sign-act of the teaching Jesus will deliver this last week, teaching that no doubt will raise the level of animosity against Him, but a teaching, He hopes, that will reach the heart of some.

His Teaching

Both inside the Temple and out, the King has come to declare judgment is coming; the crooked will be made straight. The King is challenged by His opponents as they ask Him about paying taxes, marriage in heaven, and what is the greatest commandment. Jesus, in turn, asks them about Psa 110.1 and how David can call the Messiah Lord if He is his son. There are parables spoken about what will happen at the end of the week, yet parables of judgment as well. The King speaks clearly condemning the Pharisees and scribes in Matt 23. Sandwiched among all these events, the King acts out His warning of judgment to His apostles, those who will listen, by cursing the fig tree. Preparation of life and heart for the coming judgment is the King's plea. Fierce anger and jealousy are what He receives.

His Crucifixion

The official Jewish crime that leads Jesus to death is blasphemy. He is put to death for who He truly was: God. However, the charge that was placed above His head on the cross was that He made Himself out to be a king. Jesus died for being the King of Kings. The ultimate betrayal by His own people comes in the words that finally breaks the will of Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19.15). Truer words have never been spoken.

Thus, Jesus showed Himself to be the righteous King of the

world, presenting Himself as the Judge of the nation. It was a nation that God bore, raised, nurtured, and blessed, yet, a nation that rejected Him and killed His Son. As a result, the King would come back as the Judge of Israel, bringing the wrath of the rejected One.

Lessons from the Fig Tree

Some see Jesus' pronouncement of Jerusalem's future judgment as simply a prophecy of fact. In other words, Jesus wants the people to know that it is going to happen. Not only that, He wants them to connect His death with the reason behind the judgment. Others see Jesus' words as merciful warnings not only for the people to know it is coming, but to be ready for it when it does. I believe both of these to be true. Keep in mind that some of Jesus' words were spoken to the people at large. For example, His pronouncement to the "daughters of Jerusalem" and His condemnation of the Pharisees were assertions that the day was going to come (Luke 23.28–31; Matt 23.37–39). Yet, Jesus also announced the day only in the hearing of His disciples. For example, the actual miracle we are discussing, the fig tree withering, is an example of His merciful warnings. Jesus' telling of the signs that would precede the day of Jerusalem's destruction is probably the clearest example that His intentions were to warn His apostles (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The same language used to speak of Jerusalem's coming abomination is used to warn Christians of final judgment. In fact, many have a difficult time distinguishing whether it is Jerusalem or final judgment under discussion (context becomes vital in these cases).

Scripture warns us that the day "will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thes 5.2; 2 Pet 3.10). There are no signs that usher in the beginning of the end, just a "trumpet blast" and a "shout" from the angels (1 Cor 15.52; 1 Thes 4.16). Jesus will come in the cloud and judgment will be made (1 Thes 4.16f; Rev 20.11–15; 1 Thes 3.13). The righteous then will be with God and His Lamb forever (1 Thes 4.17; Rev 21.2–7). Those whose did not follow Jesus, whose names are not written in the Book of Life, spend eternity in the lake of fire which Jesus called Hell (Rev 20.10, 14f; Matt 10.28; 25.41).

For now, God is “patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3.9). Therefore, we must be careful “how we walk...walking as wise men...learning the will of God” (Eph 5.15–17). Peter tells us that we are to be in a state of readiness at all times, “to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3.11f).

God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1.3). We are without excuse to be found unprepared (Rom 1.20; Matt 25.10–13). The cursing of the fig tree was a warning from the Judge of the nation. The sign-act Jesus performed on the fig tree, in fact all of Jesus’ words concerning Jerusalem and Israel, can serve us well to prepare for the one day when the Judge comes again.

A New Opportunity: The Grafting in of the Gentiles

Did this judgment against Israel have anything to do with opening the kingdom to the Gentiles? One might conclude that these are separate events. However, the gospel writers indicate the Jews’ rejection of Jesus and His Gospel is the very reason the Gentiles were welcomed in. Jesus talked about the Kingdom being taken away from the fruitless Jews and given to the Gentiles, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt 21.43). Paul explains, “I say then, they (the Jews) did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous” (Rom 11.11). Earlier, Paul talked about the welcoming of the Gentiles as taking place to make the Jews jealous, “But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, By a nation without understanding will I anger you’” (Rom 10.19). Paul hoped that the jealousy would bring some Jews to salvation, “If somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them” (Rom 11.14).

Interestingly, beginning in Rom 11.17, Paul uses the agricultural analogy of grafting in branches to exhort both the Jews and Gentiles. He begins with the Gentiles, “But if some of the branches (the

Jews) were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them... do not be arrogant toward the branches...Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you" (11.17–21). Of the Jews Paul writes, "If they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again" (Rom 11.23). All was not lost for the Jews. However, they needed to humble themselves and seek Christ in order to be grafted back into the kingdom of salvation.

For us the lesson is not about the Gentiles being given entry into Christ's kingdom; we already understand that point. Instead, the application for us today is for us not to take for granted our entrance into the kingdom. As Paul warned the Gentiles, we must be careful of becoming arrogant and conceited about our honored position. We must not turn our noses up at the lost like the Pharisees did, rejoicing in the loss of others, but let our spirits be provoked within us as Paul's was in Athens. We must possess a spirit that will lead us to help others be grafted into the wonderful vine which is Jesus Christ (John 15.1).

We also are reminded that if the branches, whether natural or unnatural, can be cut off from the tree, then it is possible to fall away from the living God. Let us be thankful of God's grace that called us into His wonderful tree of salvation. Let us not become sluggish or lukewarm in the faith, but be about the business of being true branches of Jesus Christ who bear the fruit of righteousness.

Fruit Bearing

In building upon the previous lesson, as we look at the withered fig tree, we are reminded that we are called for one purpose: to bear fruit. God wants true fruit bearing (not empty vain profession to Christ). Israel boasted about their righteous fruit much like the Pharisee praying at the Temple of Jesus' parable in Luke 18.11f. However, Jesus did not see it the same way. He saw Israel as a fruitless nation. Borrowing from John the Baptizer's words, Jesus warned all that the "Axe is already laid at the root of the trees" (Matt 3.10).

We definitely do not want to become complacent in our faith and stop bearing fruit for the Lord. John continued his teaching in Matt 3.10, “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Jesus taught the same in Matt 7.19. In our turning away from sin, we must bring fruit “in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3.8). Jesus taught that our fruitful deeds need to be consistent, “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Matt 7.18; 12.33). James said a similar thing with, of all things, fig trees, “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh” (Jam 3.11f). The good soil, in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, is the soul that bears fruit, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty. The other souls have the seed snatched, scorched, or choked out of them so they did not bear any fruit (Matt 13.23).

The exhortation of fruit bearing is found through the New Testament. For example, Paul talked about Christians being joined to Christ to “bear fruit for God” (Rom 7.4). Sin produces “fruit for death,” but Christ and His gospel bear fruit unto eternal life (Rom 7.5; John 4.36). Who has not memorized the fruit born of the Spirit (Gal 5.22f)? Paul added that the fruit of the life consists of “goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Eph 5.9). He encouraged the Colossians to keep “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1.10). James spoke of the fruit of righteousness producing peace (Jam 3.18). However, Jude describes evil men as “autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted” (Jude 12). Even the Hebrew author talks about discipline being profitable because it produces “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” and the sacrifice of praise that is made with the “fruit of our lips” (Heb 12.11; 13.15).

These exhortations to be fruit-bearing Christians may not hit us as strongly as it did those in the first century. Let’s face it, many of us might have several trees around our house that do not produce fruit. Since we do not use them as a major source of food we do not think much of them. In fact, we have never thought of cutting

them down and throwing them in a fire. However, when they become one of your main sources of nutrients, you understand that if a tree does not perform the one function it has, it is useless and taking up space. It needs to be cut down so that another tree can take its place. Just as the Gentiles replaced the fruitless Jews in the Kingdom, we can easily be removed and/or replaced if we are not bearing fruit for the true Vine.

Faith that Moves Mountains

The one lesson Jesus directly draws from this miracle is an exhortation that the fig tree teaches them to have faith. Jesus states that their faith can be to such an extent that they could actually cast a mountain into the sea. This requires both true faith and diligent prayer. Remarkably, that is the next subject Jesus brings up: prayer. He instructs them that their prayers will be answered when they are accompanied with such faith. James told his audience that they should not expect to receive anything if they prayed with doubt. In addition, Jesus added that, as they prayed with great faith, they were to be willing to forgive those who transgressed against them. One has to wonder if Jesus is contrasting these qualities with Israel. Is He showing where Israel fell short or why they faltered before God? Perhaps, Jesus is simply building up the apostles so that they will be prepared when the true act of the fig tree is carried out. Matthew's account brings out the same points, but in shorter form. Ken Chumbley states, "In the coming days, the disciples' faith would be tested beyond anything that had happened up till then, and strong faith was needed."¹⁵ Thus, Chumbley sees this as not only something needed during the struggle still ahead, but applicable in the immediate future.

Bible students often question Jesus' words about moving mountains through prayer. Jesus is using hyperbole, much like He did in discussing a camel going through the eye of a needle. Something challenging, difficult, even appearing as impossible was coming. Jesus knew He was soon to depart and leave them (John 7.34; 8.21). He understood that demanding times were coming. In fact,

15. Chumbley, *Matthew* 371.

He told them to take a sword (Luke 22.36). He wanted them to know they have an incredible tool at their disposal: prayer. It makes sense, doesn't it? Impossible situations demand a God that can do the impossible (Luke 1.37). Jesus Himself said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19.26). On the other side, James warned, "One who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord" (Jam 1.6f). It is prayer where we move mountains, not by our power, but God's. Therefore, whether the Goliath challenge is in our distant future or just moments away, let us remember we are never alone. Let our faith go beyond minimalistic requests or prayers of minutia; instead, ask God to do the impossible. Let us pray for God to move the world.

Final Words

The miracle of the fig tree is often not seen as a miracle at all. Perhaps, that is because through human eyes it fails in comparison to walking on water or raising the dead. Perhaps, it is because something is made to die rather than brought back to life; something is killed rather than healed. The miracle of the fig tree needs to be explored in the context of Jesus' other actions and words in this His last week. When we do that, we see a Messiah who is both King and Judge, both full of wrath against sin and overflowing with love for His followers.

A simple sign-act done to a tree may not grab our attention as much as other stories in the Bible. However, a miracle does not have to be grandiose to paint a powerful picture of how sin brings judgment and humble righteousness brings eternal life. Let us be dressed in readiness for when our King and Judge returns lest Jesus say to us, "May you never bear fruit again."

Who Is This Man?

The God of the Storm

Will Dilbeck

Of all the possible reactions to a severe and potentially life-threatening storm, sleeping is not one that comes to mind. Perhaps the reaction can be explained by assuming the person failed to realize the severity of the storm. Alternatively, maybe the action of sleep in the face of a violent storm is inexplicable as in the case of a certain prophet who slept on his journey to Tarshish. However, in the case of Mark 4.35–41, Jesus' slumber has nothing to do with his failure to realize the fierceness of the storm nor are his actions inexplicable.¹ Jesus' unexpected act of sleeping during the storm is not an insignificant detail, but in fact, as I will argue, an important aspect when trying to understand the entire pericope of Jesus stilling the storm.

The Classification of the Miracle

Before examining Mark's narrative of Jesus stilling the sea in more detail, it is perhaps best to consider how one should classify this particular miracle.² For several decades, scholars have seen similarities among certain stories in the gospels and attempted to classify them. The results of such studies have proven immensely helpful, if not always convincing. One of the more influential

1. In this paper, I will mostly only refer to the Marcan version of Jesus stilling of the storm.

2. For much of what follows in this section, I have benefitted from the work of A. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Fortress 2007) 258.

scholars in this regard is Martin Dibellius. He considered the narrative of Jesus stilling the storm as a “Tale.”³ While this characterization is not necessarily helpful, Dibellius’ clarifying remark with regard to Mark 4.35–41 is:

“The great miracle ‘impossible’ among men is the real subject of the Tale. Its part is not...to show what the will of God is, which came to expression in the words and works of Jesus, even in the miraculous healing acts. Rather, the miracle is told as an epiphany of the divine on earth, and this epiphany in the miracle is for its own sake.”⁴

Dibellius helps to make clear the irony of the disciples’ query at the end of the pericope—“Who is this man?” Jesus is no mere man, and his action of stilling the storm is one of a divine being, the God of Israel.

Rudolf Bultmann’s classification of Jesus stilling the storm as a “nature miracle” has also been influential.⁵ However, as Theissen has pointed out, the classification of this miracle—or any miracle—as a nature miracle is problematic.⁶ Instead, Theissen situates the miracle of Jesus stilling the storm as a “rescue miracle.” Thus, if we accept the classifications of both Dibellius and Thiessen, Jesus’ act of stilling the storm is a miracle revealing God, but also one in which he rescues the disciples from imminent danger.

Jesus Stills the Storm

With these classifications in mind, it is now time to closely examine Mark 4.35–41. Previously in Mark 4, Jesus has spoken to the crowds in parables, but in v 36, Jesus and his disciples leave the crowd.⁷ As Jesus and his band of followers were out at sea, a great

3. In B. Woolf, trans., *From Tradition to Gospel* (James Clark & Co. 1982) 70–103. Dibellius recognizes some 15 different narratives as “Tales.”

4. *Ibid.* 94.

5. In J. Marsh, trans., *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Harper and Row 1963) 215–16.

6. G. Theissen, *The Miracles of the Early Christian Tradition* (Fortress 1983) 99–100. It is problematic because in some sense, all miracles are nature miracles. That is, all manipulate the laws of nature.

7. However, as the latter part of the verse makes plain, other boats were with Jesus and his disciples. Nothing else is said about these other boats and various explanations have been given, but none are wholly convincing.

windstorm arose and the waves were filling the boat. Where was Jesus during this? “He” was in the stern asleep on a pillow.⁸ The disciples awaken Jesus and ask him a question, which in retrospect, is patently absurd: “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus calms the storm by merely his words: “Peace. Be still.” Jesus further uses his words to rebuke his disciples for their lack of faith, and this prompts a reaction of fear and awe with respect to Jesus. The reaction is strikingly revealed in the question that concludes the narrative: “Who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

The Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Background

As so often the case when reading the New Testament, knowledge of Old Testament themes and passages helps elucidate the text. I will discuss three Old Testament motifs that occur in the narrative of Jesus stilling the sea. First, and perhaps most directly, there are several verbal and thematic parallels with Jonah 1.4–6.⁹ Both Jonah and Jesus were asleep during the storm, and both were awakened by the others on the boat. Jesus, however, provides a strong contrast with the Old Testament prophet in that the former calmed the sea by his own power whereas the latter calmed the sea by jumping overboard. Furthermore, the motivations for Jonah’s sleep and that of Jesus seem to be quite different. Jesus’ sleep is due to his absolute trust in God’s protection during the storm, while

8. It is striking that Mark does not name Jesus in this entire narrative. In v 38, the evangelist simply refers to Jesus as “he” (*autos*).

9. For discussion, see R. Aus, *The Stilling of the Storm: Studies in Early Palestinian Judaic Traditions* (Global 2000) 3–55. While some of Aus’ conclusions are intriguing, his methodology and overall conclusions are dubious. Aus posits a “Palestinian Jewish Christian” as the author of the narrative of Jesus stilling the sea. Aus claims that this author was not only familiar with the canonical Hebrew book of Jonah, but also with extra-biblical traditions about Jonah 1. Aus lists no less than 16 similarities between Mark 4.35–41 and Jewish exegetical traditions about Jonah. However, most of the sources Aus cites are far too late and even if these sources attribute an exegetical Jonah tradition to an early Palestinian rabbi, this too is problematic. These attributions cannot, and even in some case, are not supposed to be taken as historically accurate. For discussion, see L. Jacobs, “How Much of the Babylonian Talmud is Pseudepigraphic?” *JJS* 28 (1977) 46–59; J. Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do Not Know* (Wipf and Stock 2004).

Jonah's slumber is perhaps ironic.¹⁰ In the narrative, it is a demonstration of Jesus' sovereignty.¹¹ In the final analysis, Jonah becomes an intertextual foil for Mark 4.35–41.

Another theme which emerges from the Old Testament is the notion of Yahweh's victory over the sea. This motif is found in several places in the Old Testament, and a few will be discussed in detail. Perhaps the closest text to Mark 4.35–41 is Psa 107.23–32:

Some went down to the sea in ships,
 Those who do deeds on the great waters.
 They saw the deeds of Yahweh,
 His wondrous works in the deep.
 For he spoke, and roused the stormy wind,
 And the waves were lifted.
 They went up to the heavens; they went down to the deep.
 Their souls melted in their distress.
 They reeled and staggered like drunkards,
 And all their wisdom was confused.
 But they cried to Yahweh in their trouble,
 And he delivered them from their plight.
 They were glad that the waters were quiet,
 And he brought them to their desired harbor.
 Let them thank Yahweh for his lovingkindness,
 And for his wonderful works for the sons of men.
 Let them exalt him in the congregation of people,
 Let them praise him in the assembly of elders.¹²

Psa 107 contains several episodes which demonstrate Yahweh's ability to rescue humans from their plight. The context of vv 23–32 is Yahweh's deliverance from shipwreck, and this Psalm is reminiscent of Jonah.¹³

10. Or as Jerome, *Comm. Jon.* 1.5, states concerning Jonah's sleep, that it was, "not from security, but from sadness (*Quod autem dormit, non securitatis est, sed moeroris*)."

11. As J. Gnlika, *Das Evangelium nach Markus (Mk 1–8,26)* (Benziger Verlag 1978) 195, explains concerning the question of why Jesus is asleep, "It is not as a consequence of his strenuous preaching activity, nor is it because night time is beginning, but it is rather a manifestation of his sovereignty and certitude."

12. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

13. For a helpful discussion of all the biblical accounts of sea-storms, see P. Thimmes, *Studies in the Biblical Sea-Storm Type Scene: Convention and Invention* (Mellen Research University Press 1992).

There are several parallels between Psa 107 and Mark 4.35–41 that confront even the casual reader.¹⁴ In Psa 107, Yahweh is responsible for deliverance from the storm, whereas in Mark 4, Jesus rescues those in danger. Thus, if indeed Mark is drawing upon Psa 107.23–32, then Jesus is identified with Yahweh. Such a move would have been scandalous within first-century Jewish circles, and can perhaps be part of the reason for persecution of early Christians.

Another important text to be considered is Isa 51.9f. Unlike Psa 107, Isa 51.9f alludes to several Ancient Near Eastern mythological themes such as the divine battle between the dragon and the sea.¹⁵ Earlier scholars, such as H. Gunkel, saw certain biblical texts like Isaiah 51.9f as reflecting the influence of the Babylonian “creation story” the *Enuma Elish*, but after the discoveries of Ugaritic texts at Ras Shamra, scholars have argued instead that the influence is Canaanite.¹⁶ This important background material should be kept in mind when turning to texts like Isa 51.9f which reads:

Awake! Awake! Put on strength,
 O hand of Yahweh!
 Awake as in days of old,
 The generations of ancient times.
 Are you not the One who cut Rahab in pieces,
 Who pierced the dragon?
 Are you not the One who dried up the sea,
 The waters of the great deep;
 Who made the deep waters of the sea a way
 for the redeemed to pass over?

In this text, we see the motifs of creation and the exodus conflated. The parallels between this passage and Mark 4.35–41 are striking. The author implores Yahweh to awaken and refers back

14. R. Meye, “Psalm 107 as ‘Horizon’ for Interpreting the Miracle Stories of Mark 4:35–8:26, in R. Guelich, ed., *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology* (Eerdmans 1978) 1–13. Meye argues that the miracles of Jesus in Mark 4.35–8:26 closely match the structure of Psa 107.

15. For discussion of these themes and their presence in the Old Testament, see J. Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge UP 1985).

16. *Ibid.* 4.

to “the days of old.” Specifically, the prophet mentions the time when Yahweh defeated Rahab, the dragon (*tannin*), and the sea.¹⁷ In several biblical passages, this triad of figures is mentioned, and frequently, Yahweh is said to be victorious over them.¹⁸ The use of Ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs in the Old Testament has been discussed for several decades now, but it seems to me, that, at the very least, some of those who received Isaiah’s prophecy would have been quite familiar with these themes. The major difference of course is that the victor over these mythological beings is not Baal, or Marduk, but rather, it is Yahweh.

How then does all of this relate to Jesus’ deed of stilling the sea in Mark 4.35–41? Yahweh’s victory over the power of the sea is most obvious in the Old Testament stories referenced in Isa 51.9f: creation and exodus. In Mark, however, it is Jesus who is victorious over the sea and thus, is to be identified with the One who also conquered the forces of the sea in creation and the exodus. Jesus is therefore in Mark now creator, but also the savior. Similarly, the sea becomes the foe in Mark as it was also in creation and the exodus. When coupled with the aforementioned mythological figures from Ancient Near Eastern texts, the sea can be interpreted as symbolic for evil as well. Perhaps this is why Jesus is said to rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea in Mark 4.39.¹⁹

At this point, it is worth pointing out that, it seems to me, the gospel narratives should be viewed on at least three levels. First, one needs to be cognizant of how Jesus’ disciples would have understand the miracle as they witnessed it. We must also remember that the text of Mark’s gospel was not written to those same disciples, but instead was written to a group of Christians living perhaps decades after the time of Jesus.²⁰ Thus, it is entirely within

17. Rahab is often associated with Egypt and the word *tannin* almost always means sea-monster, sea-creature, dragon or the like. For discussion, see HALOT 1764–65.

18. For discussion, see K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (Fortress 2001) 356–57.

19. Some scholars have argued that when Jesus speaks to the wind and the sea, he is reflecting the belief that evil entities were present in inanimate objects. While this is certainly characteristic of early Roman religion generally speaking, this interpretation is unnecessary in the case of Mark 4.35–41. There is no hint that Jesus or his disciples believed he was actually speaking to a demonic entity as in the case of exorcisms.

20. The provenance and intended audience of Mark’s gospel has been discussed at

reason to assume that the eyewitnesses to Jesus' miracle of stilling the sea could have linked his action to several Old Testament passages like those mentioned above, but the earliest readers of Mark's gospel did not, and vice versa. The third level in which we ought to consider the text of Mark is from our own perspective as modern readers. We are fortunate to have easy access not only to the biblical texts mentioned above, but even to Ancient Near Eastern texts often translated into a number of modern languages. Jesus' disciples and the earliest readers of Mark had no such luxury.

Greco-Roman Traditions of Rescue at Sea

While the disciples and the first readers of the gospel might have recognized some of the Old Testament allusions evoked in Mark's narrative, it is quite unlikely that they would have known about the Ancient Near Eastern background. It is, therefore, worth asking if Jesus' disciples who witnessed the miracle, and the original audience of Mark's text would have drawn parallels between the account of Jesus stilling the sea, and other non-biblical narratives of similar fashion. The motifs of a sudden storm threatening passengers in a boat, crying out to a god or gods, and final deliverance are quite common in non-biblical narratives. The most well-known accounts are those found in the famous poems of Homer and Vergil.²¹ Scholars have noticed the parallels between these texts and Mark 4.35–41. Vincent Taylor, for example, argued that the parallels with Vergil's *Aeneid* were just as impressive as the similarities with the book of Jonah.²²

The text Taylor and others cite as being similar to the Marcan

length, but the consensus still seems to reflect the testimony of Irenaeus in that the gospel was written in Rome and was meant for Christians there. For discussion, see Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 7–10.

21. In book 10.1–69 of Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus is asleep in a boat and encounters a storm at sea which blows him and his crew back to the island of Aeolus. This has only very general parallels with the Marcan account of Jesus stilling the sea. D. MacDonald, *Homer and the Gospels: Imitation of Greek Epics in Mark and Luke-Acts* (Rowman and Littlefield 2015) 205–208, argues that Mark borrowed linguistic and thematic elements from *Odyssey* 10.1–69. Some of his arguments are interesting and even compelling. However, I find, on the whole, his arguments to be quite unconvincing.

22. *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Macmillan 1952) 273. Taylor asks—perhaps skeptically—“Had Mark read his Vergil?”

account is *Aeneid* 4.554–83. In these lines of Vergil’s poem, the hero Aeneas has fallen asleep on the high stern before leaving the port and has a vision in which Mercury appears to him warning him of the impending danger of a storm. Aeneas wakes himself, and urges his men to set sail. The formal similarities with the narrative of Jesus stilling the sea are obvious. The hero is asleep in the boat, there is imminent danger, and rescue comes about through the power of a deity. The difference of course is crucial. Jesus does not receive divine revelation about the storm like Aeneas, nor does he call upon a god for help, but solves the problem himself, which, as already repeated several times in this study, makes clear that Jesus is much more than a man.²³ Since Vergil enjoyed an immense readership because of his status as a school text, it seems likely that at least some of Mark’s readers would have been familiar with Vergil’s story mentioned above.²⁴ The difference between Mark’s depiction of Jesus and Vergil’s portrayal of Aeneas would have been striking and potentially faith-building.

As previously mentioned, stories of storms at sea and eventual rescue were common during the time of Jesus and earliest Christianity. Another such account has also been connected with Mark 5.35–41, Lucan’s *Pharsalia* or *De Bello Civili* (Civil War).²⁵ As R. Strelan has pointed out, there are some interesting parallels between Lucan’s poetic depiction of Caesar’s encounter with a sea storm, and Jesus in Mark 4.35–41.²⁶ Strelan does not argue that one text borrowed the other, but rightly points out how some early Christians who were familiar with the aforementioned storm sto-

23. It is worth mentioning that in *Aeneid* 4.559, Mercury addresses Aeneas as “*Nate, dea*,” or “son of the goddess.” Aeneas was depicted as the son of the goddess Aphrodite. However, as the commentator Servius, *ad loc.*, points out, this address is not meant to praise Aeneas, but rather it is to rebuke him for not leaving before the storm arrives. In other words, he should have known better.

24. For a discussion of the overwhelming influence of both Homer and Vergil because of their use as school texts in antiquity, see H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (U of Wisconsin P 1956).

25. Lucan was born in Spain in 39 AD, but came to Rome as a young man. He became a poet of great esteem, but was put to death by Nero in 65 AD for conspiracy. For discussion, see M. von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature II* (Brill 1997) 913–32.

26. “A Greater than Caesar: Storm Stories in Lucan and Mark,” *ZNTW* 91 (2000) 166–79.

ries of Homer and Vergil, but also the narrative involving Caesar, would have read Mark's account of Jesus.²⁷ In Lucan's poem, Caesar is depicted in supra-human terms. Thus, when encountering the storm, he, unlike other central characters in Greek and Latin storm stories, meets the challenge differently. Consider Caesar's speech to his companion on the boat, who is convinced that they need to turn back because of the violence of the storm:

If you refuse the authority of heaven, seek (Italy) for me. The only just reason for your fear, is that you do not know your passenger, whom the gods have never forsaken. Whom Fortune deems worthy of ill-treatment, when she comes after his prayers. Break through the midst of the tempest, securely by my protection. This toil is for the sky and sea, but not for our ship. Being pressed down by Caesar, the weight will deflect the surge... By the tumult of the sea and sky, Fortune shows its favor toward me.²⁸

Caesar's hubris only provokes the storm further until he considers his own fate as being death. Yet the storm eventually leads him to safety and Caesar, in spite of his arrogance, recognizes that he is safe only because of Fate.²⁹

As elsewhere in Lucan's poem, Caesar is presented as one who is quite beyond human limitations.³⁰ Indeed, as stated above, his reaction differs from other central characters in Greek and Latin sea storm narratives. Crucially, however, Caesar does not still the storm himself. He is in complete subjection to the power of the storm, and more importantly, to Fate. In other words, "Caesar ultimately is not the master of his destiny—he must submit to Fate."³¹

In Mark's narrative, Fate has nothing to say about the outcome of the sea storm which threatened the disciples. The disciples were rescued only by the power of Jesus. There were no sacrifices made on behalf of gods, or visions which revealed to Jesus what to do, and no hubris that ultimately had to bend its will to fate. All that was

27. *Ibid.* 170.

28. *Phar.* 5.579–86, 592–93.

29. Lucan's emphasis on the power of Fate shows his predilection for Stoicism.

30. In *Phar.* 9.20, he is referred to as the *dominus mundi*, or "Master of the world."

31. Strelan, "A Greater than Caesar," 173.

needed, was for the true *Dominus mundi* to awaken and rebuke the wind and the sea. It is a tantalizing possibility that this is precisely how Mark's earliest readers would have read Mark 4.35–41.

Conclusion

It is now time to reflect upon the disciples question, which closes Mark's narrative about Jesus calming the storm: "Who is this man?" With the above background material, one cannot read Mark 4.35–41 and the concluding question without an awareness of the irony of the apostle's query. More importantly, it is difficult to read Mark's account without being impressed by the superiority of Jesus compared to the aforementioned heroes of Greek and Roman narratives about sea escape, but also Caesar himself. At the same time, however, knowledge of the Old Testament inter-texts reveal something just as striking and impressive. Jesus is, in a sense, fulfilling the aforementioned Old Testament texts, and is thus, to be identified with Yahweh. Yahweh is responsible for creation, for the Exodus, but also, for the rescue of the disciples at sea in Mark 4.35–41.

Jesus' sleep subtly reflects the main point of the narrative and in a sense, answers the disciples' question before they ask it. Jesus is in utter and complete control of this situation, and thus, by implication, all others. The practical significance of this point is, like Jesus' own power reflected in the miracle, overwhelming.

It did not take interpreters long to see the metaphorical and theological significance of Jesus' act of stilling the sea. As Augustine, *Serm.* 63.1–3, eloquently states:

When you have to listen to abuse, it means that you are being beaten by the wind. When your anger is being roused, you are being tossed by the sea. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled, your heart is taking a beating. On hearing yourself insulted, you want to retaliate; but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune- shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean that you have forgotten his presence. Rouse him, then, remember him. Let him keep watch within you. Pay heed to him...A temptation arises. It is the wind. It disturbs you. It is the surging of the sea. This is the

time to awaken Christ and let him remind you of those words: 'Who can this be? Even the winds and the waves obey him.'

If Jesus is a being who can actually calm storms—thus showing his superiority over anything our imaginations can construct—then is there anything he cannot do for us in our own lives? The answer is unequivocally and reassuringly, “no.” Who, then, is this man? No less than Yahweh himself who is concerned about the storms his followers encounter.

Contributors

Will Dilbeck is married to Joanie (Davidson, of Athens GA). They have two children, Jack (age 11) and Mattie Grace (age 10), and live in Tampa, FL. Will holds the Ph.D. degree from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, an M.Phil. from that same institution, an M.A. from Heritage Christian University, and a B.A. from the University of North Alabama. He preached in Haleyville, AL from 2008-2011 and was an adjunct professor at Wright State University, Xavier, Northern Kentucky University, and Hebrew Union College from 2012-2017. He currently serves as a professor in the Department of Biblical Studies at Florida College. His doctoral dissertation, *Non Longe a Veritate: The Speech of Anchises in Aeneid 6 and the Growth of Latin Christian Theology* is under review with Brill Publishers. He has also authored a book chapter, “*Spiritus non spiritus Dei? Conflicting Interpretations of Genesis 1 in Tertullian,*” which is scheduled to appear in a volume on the history of interpretation of Genesis 1 published by the Society of Biblical Literature. Will is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the North American Patristics Society.

Jerry Falk was born in Baton Rouge, LA but has lived most of his life in New Jersey. Shortly after arriving at Florida College in the summer of 1982, Jerry was baptized and developed an interest in preaching the gospel, especially in the Spanish language. Jerry studied Spanish at Rutgers University (1981-1986) and received certification in Computer Programming from The Cittone Institute (1985). In June of 1987, he began working full-time with the church in Piscataway, NJ and several months later working with

the Spanish-speaking brethren in Perth Amboy, NJ. In July of 1989, Jerry moved to Barcelona, Spain to help begin a work in the town of El Prat de Llobregat and stayed there until August of 1992, when he decided to visit a new group of Christians meeting near Seville. While there, Jerry met his wife, Maria Letona, from Tarapoto, Peru, and their two children, Elisabeth Falk-Letona (Florida College class of 2019) and Jonathan Falk-Letona (Florida College, fall 2017) were born in Seville. Jerry also worked with the church in Dos Hermanas, south of Seville. He and his family returned to New Jersey in July 2005. They currently reside in Griggstown, and he is working with the Spanish-speaking church in Perth Amboy, NJ, as well helping the congregation in Piscataway, NJ. Jerry also works part-time as a Freelance Spanish Medical and Legal Interpreter for several agencies, and is a member of the International Medical Interpreters Association, the American Translators Association, and is a Certified ProFluent+ Spanish Speaker by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Since returning to the U.S. in 2005, Jerry occasionally travels to Spain, Ireland, Honduras, and Peru in order to encourage fellow Christians and speak for the different congregations. He travels almost yearly to Honduras with Ron Drumm to preach the gospel and serve as an interpreter.

Brent Forsyth is married to Tamara (Houchen) Forsyth of Cypress, CA (who attended Florida College 1989-1991), and they have three children: Kyle (who attended Florida College in 2016-2018), Travis (currently a student at Florida College), and Larissa. The family currently lives in Yorba Linda, CA. Brent has earned a B.A. in Communications from Cal State Fullerton (1992) and a Bible Certificate from Florida College (1993). He has worked as an evangelist in Romania (1994-1995), the Sierra Vista congregation in Fresno, CA (1995-1998), the Northside congregation in Tucson, AZ (1998-2011), and the Brea congregation in Brea, CA (2011-present). Brent has also made evangelistic trips to Romania over the last 25 years. His published works include *Jeremiah, Judah's Last Hope for Salvation: A Paradigm Study*, and *Ezekiel, God's Prophet to the Exiles: A Paradigm Study*. He is a member and former board member of the

SoCal Hutchinson Bell Chapter. In his spare time, Brent serves as a reserve firefighter for the Orange County Fire Authority.

Jimmy Haynes is married to Ellen (McKay) Haynes (from Ontario, CA), and they four children: Hayley, Jay, Emily, and Riley. The Haynes family currently lives in Orange Park, FL. After attending Florida College, Jimmy preached in Annandale, VA, Ontario, CA, Santa Barbara, CA, Denver, CO, and has been with the Lakeshore Church of Christ in Jacksonville, FL since 1992. He is a member of the United States Professional Tennis Association and is also the Director of Youth Development at Oakleaf Junior Tennis Academy in Orange Park, FL.

Brad Hopkins is married to Alyson (Streeter) Hopkins of Naperville, IL (A.A., Florida College, 1984), and they have six children: Abby Hopkins (Florida College graduate), Jay Hopkins (current Florida College student), Heidi (Hopkins) Eswine, Samantha Hopkins, Shane Hopkins, and Brad Hopkins. They currently live in Saint Charles, MO. Brad has a A.A. degree from Saint Leo University, a B.A. in Political Science and Public Administration from Lindenwood University, and attended Florida College from 1992-1993. He has preached for the following congregations: Brownsburg, IN (1993-1994), Glass Street Church of Christ, Sioux City, IA (1994-1999), Exton Church of Christ, Exton, PA (1999-2007), Downers Grove Church of Christ, Downers Grove, IL (2007-2008), and the Elm Street Church of Christ, Saint Charles, MO (2008 to present). He has also worked in the Missouri National Guard as an Engineer Officer (2010 to present), and is currently employed as a data scientist by Booz Allen Hamilton. Brad also participated in evangelistic efforts in Russia in the mid-1990s and since 2008 has been involved in evangelistic work in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands.

Shawn Jeffries, currently of Columbia, TN, grew up in Nacogdoches Texas and was raised by his grandparents. He was baptized at

age 19, and graduated from Central Heights High School (2001) and Stephen F. Austin State University (B.A., doubled major in Communications and Political Science, 2005). He has been married to Genesia McFarland of Lufkin, TX for nearly 16 years, and they have two children, Shawn Michael Jeffries (age 8) Faith Mariah Jeffries (age 2). Shawn has worked with the Dowlen Road Church of Christ in Beaumont, TX (2006-2008), the Beverly Shores Church of Christ in Leesburg, FL (2008-2012), and currently works with the Jackson Heights Church of Christ (2012-present). He has also done foreign evangelism in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mexico, and Dominica in addition to several gospel meetings throughout the country each year. Shawn enjoys reading, traveling and spending time with his family. His favorite places to have traveled include Africa, Israel, New York, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and the Grand Canyon. He reports that even though he is from Texas, he has been a huge fan of the Washington Redskins since he was five years old.

Leon Mauldin is married to Linda (Creel) Mauldin, and they reside in Hanceville, AL. Their children are Alysha Mauldin Montgomery, Micah Mauldin and Seth Mauldin (who attended Florida College 2004-2006). Leon holds a B.S. in Secondary Education and memberships in the Evangelical Theological Society and the Near East Archaeological Society. He has preached since 1972 in Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama and is now in his thirtieth year of working with the Hanceville Church of Christ. Additionally, he has served as editor for *Biblical Insights*, he has authored two volumes in the *Discovering God's Way* Bible class curriculum edited by Robert Harkrider, he has been a contributor for *Truth Magazine's* Archaeology department, and he has authored chapters in *Letters to our Grandchildren* (Doy Moyer, ed.) and *Elementary Teaching about the Christ* (edited by Heath Robertson). Leon has also made several preaching trips to foreign countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Norway, Russia, Ukraine, Belgium, and Canada. In addition, Leon has been doing visualized History and Geography of the Bible presentations since 1993 and has made

numerous trips to biblical and archaeological sites for research and photography, making use of the photos in teaching as well as in publications. You can see some of the photos and info at *Leon's Message Board* at <http://bleon1.wordpress.com>. Leon also directs annual tours with brethren to Israel and other Bible lands.

Bryan Moody married Stephanie (Nicks) Moody of Vestavia, AL (Florida College 1995) in 2001. They have three daughters, Annalise, Alaina, and Aimee, and the family currently lives in Maylene, AL. Bryan earned the B.A. in Biblical Studies from Florida College in 1999. After that he participated in a summer preaching program in Shelbyville, TN in 1998 under Frank Butler, and has preached at the Eastside congregation in Shelbyville, TN (May 1999 – Feb 2001) and the Helena Church of Christ in Helena, AL (Feb 2001 to present). From May 2006 – Sept 2007 the Helena congregation supported them in working with the church in Bergen, Norway.

Robert Ogden currently lives in Memphis, TN, where he is a student in the M.A. program in New Testament at the Harding School of Theology. Robert earned the A.A. degree from Florida College in 2002) and the B.A. degree in Biblical Literature from Florida College in 2004. He has preached in Kansas City, MO (2004-2005), Clovis, NM (2005-2008), Mobile, AL (2008-2015), and Memphis, TN (2016-2017).

Tommy Peeler attended Florida College in the early 1980's when he met and married Christi (Sellers). They have been married 34 years and have three sons, Josiah (wife Danielle), Nathan (wife Hailey), and Isaiah. Christi and Tommy also have two grandsons, Ezra (Josiah and Danielle) and Matthias (Nathan and Hailey). Tommy preaches at the Brandon Church and Christ and teaches in the Department of Biblical Studies at Florida College.

Brownie Reaves met his wife, Nancy Clendening (Florida College 1967-1969), at David Lipscomb College (now University) in 1969.

They married in 1970 and moved to Athens, Alabama. Brownie began preaching in 1975 in Louisville, KY. He has preached in Lilburn, Atlanta, and Cumming, GA, as well as London, England (on two separate occasions, for a total of six years). He currently works in Gainesville, GA alongside Ricky Shanks as an evangelist and elder. Brownie and Nancy have four sons, Jeb, Joshua, Jared, and Jake, all of whom attended Florida College. Jeb's son, Will, also attended Florida College, and Sarah Reaves is currently a student at Florida College. The Reaves also have ten grandchildren. In addition to his work, Brownie also enjoys tennis and golf.

Phil Robertson is married to Cheryl (Florida College 1986), and they have two children: Jill (Florida College 2018, currently working in the marketing department at Florida College), and Gray (currently a sophomore at Florida College). Their home is in Gainesville, FL. Phil attended Florida College (1988) and Troy State University (1992, degree in Speech Communications). He worked as a news reporter for twelve years including six years at WFTV in Orlando as the Brevard Bureau Chief covering NASA (1997-2003). He has been preaching for thirty years with stints in Dothan, AL, Albertville, AL, Melbourne, FL, Hueytown, AL, and is currently with the Glen Springs Road Church in Gainesville, FL (2010-Current). Phil speaks at numerous teen events each year, is the current Florida College Florida Camp Director, and a Level 1 CrossFit Coach.

Calvin R. Schlabach was born in Texas, raised in Kansas, and is currently living in Mishawaka, Indiana. He has been married (43 years) to Lana K. Schlabach (Littrell), is the father of three sons (Daniel, Charles, and Benjamin), and enjoys a multitude of grandchildren. Calvin studied at Florida College (1976-1979), Cincinnati Bible Seminary (Master's Degree in Biblical Studies, 1993), and at five other universities and colleges over the years. He has preached full-time for 40 years, working with churches in Illinois, Kansas, Ohio, and Indiana, currently serving with the Mishawaka church of Christ in Mishawaka, Indiana. He has also been heavily involved in the Lord's work in Colombia (and other

parts of South America) for the past 25 years, and has preached in at least nine other foreign nations.

Rusty Taylor is married to Catherine (Roberts) Taylor, of Ft. Wayne, IN (who earned her B.A. in Music from Florida College), and they have a son, Ezekiel Taylor, age 2. Rusty has earned the B.A. in Biblical Studies (Florida College) and the M.A. in Old Testament and Semitic Languages (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and has done additional graduate studies and research on the Dead Sea Scrolls with Martin Abegg at Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, Canada. In addition, Rusty holds memberships in the Society of Biblical Literature, the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, and the American Schools of Oriental Research. The Taylor family currently resides in Oak Lawn, IL and Rusty works as the evangelist for the Bridgeview congregation (since 2013). He has also worked for Accordance Bible Software as a contract researcher (2011–2013), and served as the evangelist for the Rochelle Church of Christ (Rochelle, IL) from 2007–2010.

Nathan Ward is married to Brooke (Rombach; Florida College 1999). They have two sons, Silas and Judah and live in Thonotosassa, FL. Nathan holds a B.A. degree in Mass Communications from the University of South Florida, a B.A. in Biblical Studies from Florida College, an M.A. in Religion from Liberty University, an M.A. in Christian Apologetics from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and a D.Min. in Theological Exegesis from Knox University. He is currently a professor of Biblical Studies and Apologetics at Florida College (2011–present) and does part-time preaching work with the 58th Street congregation in Temple Terrace, FL. Nathan is the author of *God Unseen: A Theological Introduction to Esther*, and *The Growth of the Seed: Notes on the Book of Genesis*. He has also held memberships in the Society of Biblical Literature and the Evangelical Theological Society.

