

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

11. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick."
12. "Have mercy on us, thou son of David."
13. "And Jesus went about . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom . . ."

SPECIAL STUDY: MIRACLES

The fundamental conflict in which Christianity is engaged today, in the intellectual sphere, is between *Naturalism* and *Supernaturalism*. Beneath all the attacks of scientists and philosophers, scholars and theologians upon Christianity lies an undercurrent of naturalism, more or less concealed, according as the opponent of supernaturalism is within the ranks of professing Christians or not.¹

Miracles, as phenomena in historic Christianity, have posed no small problem to every age of the church's existence. Any search into the early years of the Christian religion will reveal the intense, tenacious conviction that the supernatural intervention into human history which we call "miracle" really occurred. The word itself might be defined:

A miracle is an event occurring in the natural world, observed by the senses, produced by divine power, without and adequate human or natural cause, the purpose of which is to reveal the will of God and do good to man.²

The question of miracle revolves around one central historic figure: Jesus Christ. Did Jesus really work miracles? This is a far greater question than just a decision as to whether Jesus worked miracles or not. It is more than simply deciding whether He fed the 5000, healed the blind, cast out demons, and raised people from the dead. It is deciding whether there be a Christ at all. There is no Christ but the Christ of miracle! It is deciding whether there is a God or not. He is morally perverse or intellectually blind who concludes that a religion can be ethically true and historically false. An ethic predicated upon a lie, by the very nature of its case, warns the world against its own truth.

Further, there is no Christ but a supernatural Christ, if any credence be allowed the claims of those writers who furnish the only

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reliable history of His life. There is no supernatural Christ if there is no resurrected Christ. Truly,

"if the resurrection of Jesus was not a reality, all the other miracles would be valueless even if real, and all effort to establish their reality would be abandoned."³

Miracles have a way of smashing our neatly-arranged systems of thought. The miraculous commands our attention and threatens to undo our uniformities not only in nature but in religion. If there is no miracle, no trumpet-call from beyond the natural or the earthly, we can settle down into our comfortable self-pleasure and drink long draughts from the cool glass of self-satisfaction, rousing only to change the record on our philosophic stereo to the soothing, mellow voice suggesting, "Enjoy yourself while you're still in the pink." Suddenly, into our picture of peaceful self-complacency storms a miracle, a fact—stubborn and real—that can not be dismissed. The out-of-the-ordinary has just startled our ordinary and we must react. It is this very feature of the miraculous that leads us to see

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Just what occurred back there in that age of "unenlightenment"? Indubitable is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was reputed to have super-human abilities which He manifested through His short but meteoric rise to the limited public prominence of His country. To appreciate rightly the nature of His supernatural activities we must not view miracles as isolated facts, but in their actual relations to the life of the Man who accomplished them. Any exception is so rare that it is a safe observation that Jesus did not perform the miraculous needlessly. The need for the supernatural acts grew out of the situation and must not be considered independent of that situation. His miracles might be classified thus:

A. POWER OVER NATURE:

At a wedding feast Jesus turned water into wine.

Seeing His disciples distressed in rowing against a stormy lake, Jesus walked across the lake to them, defying gravity. On another occasion Jesus spoke the word and the sea immediately became calm.

One morning at breakfast time He cursed a fig tree and it withered.

By supernatural knowledge He informed Peter that in the mouth of the first fish Peter hauled in would be tribute money.

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B. POWER OVER DISEASE AND DEMONS:

Paralytics, impotent men, women with hemorrhages, sight to blind men, hearing to deaf and speech to dumb, lepers, withered limbs restored to normalcy, wounded ears replaced—all these and many more Jesus did! No weeks or day of anxious waiting, no returns, no incurable cases when Jesus healed a body!

C. POWER OVER DEATH:

Death in others was no problem to this Jesus of Nazareth. He stopped a funeral procession to raise the widow's son; He broke up the funeral to raise Jairus' daughter. He walked nearly 40 miles to raise Lazarus from the grave.

Death in Himself was nothing to fear for He calmly predicted His own death and resurrection with frightening regularity:

Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:17, 18)

Many passages could be cited in which Jesus foretold in detail the various features of His passion. Here again we could marvel at the supreme fact—His own resurrection itself.⁴

At this point, our attention has been arrested by the extraordinary nature of Jesus' deeds but for what? Like Moses, the flame of the unusual has attracted our attention and we have turned aside to see why.

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Bible miracles are supernatural phenomena in the realm of human experience WITH A MESSAGE. Why bring up miracles if the one doing them does not have something to say for himself? Such questions are most appropriate. The Jews of Jesus' day could have asked these questions: "Immediately we become interested when we learn that a man can supply a sumptuous meal to 5000 men on ridiculously insignificant rations. We want to know if He will provide battle rations for our national army we are raising. One who is reputed to be able to heal all manner of disease could be very useful to our purposes as we strike out against Rome. Do you suppose He would consent to being our king? What is He saying for Himself? Where is He going? What is He trying to accomplish by these miracles?" So the message is all-important.

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Probably the most significant utterance of Jesus ever recorded was His claim to unique knowledge of God:

All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no one knoweth who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22)

Or another claim:

For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that be- holdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:38-40)

My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself. (John 7:16, 17)

I speak the things which I have seen with my Father . . . (John 8:38)

But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God . . . If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me . . . But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God. (John 8:40-47)

Obviously, throughout His teaching Jesus is claiming to be a very revelation of God. He comes not as a supreme teacher of an exalted ethical system or a propounder of new moral philosophy but as one who comes from God to reveal God's mind to man. In other messages Jesus asserted that He entered the world to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and "to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28) It is clear that Jesus intended to reveal God and ransom man but how do we know He is God's emissary? His "mighty works" hold our attention and most of His doctrine we cannot verify. What is the connection between miracle and message?

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It is perfectly plain that such a revelation would need to be tested and accredited, for unless it were, men would never believe that the revelation was from God Himself . . . man would have a right to demand of anyone claiming to have a revelation from God, that he show his credentials . . . showing that there is no question but that he is the authorized representative of God. Man has a right to demand these credentials, and by the very nature of the case, they must be of a kind that could not possibly be duplicated by man, for if they could be, they would lose all value as accrediting the message from God.⁵

Thus, not only the possibility of miracle is justified but also the probability. How else would God remind people down through the ages saying, "Lo, I am here"? It is the miracle, the departure from the observed uniformity of nature, that arrests the attention of man and makes him realize that a higher person and a higher power is at work. The miracle is the majestic seal that God has affixed to the revelation which He gives us. The Bible is God's Word. An integral part of the Bible record is *miracle*, for the specific purpose of showing it to be God's Word. Except for miracles, how could we know it to be a revelation of God? With no miracle, there is no evidence of deity. Miracles, then, authenticate the Christian message: (1) Jesus Christ appeals to His miracles as His divine authentication.

I told you, and ye believe not: the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me . . . If I do not the works of my father, believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father. (John 10:25, 37, 38)

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:10, 11)

(2) Thus, miracles are an integral part of the record which would become meaningless without the miracle. Remove, if possible, the account of miracle from the book of John and observe how much wasted breath is left in the controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning miracles, which, according to the naturalists, He did not do. Most of Jesus' "Sabbath Controversies" had to do with

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miracles done on the Sabbath. Most of Jesus' most magnificent claims were made in agreement with and in company with some of His most astounding wonder-works. A clear case in point is given in Mark 2 (Matt. 9 and Luke 5) where a paralytic is lowered through the roof into the presence of Jesus and a "congressional investigating committee." Jesus said simply, "My son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes and Pharisees who were in the crowded house immediately considered this statement as blasphemy. Jesus answered their thoughts, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say unto you, Rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he did! We can conclude that (3) The miracles and the words of Christ are wonderful and perfect counterparts. Miracles do not make the claims of Jesus or His doctrines true, but they are the attestation of God that His claims are well-founded and His teaching God's. The power of the miracle taken by itself does not assure me of the truthfulness of the claims set forth, or of the doctrines taught, alone, but of Him through whose instrumentality they are performed. May we conclude then that the primary purpose of the miraculous deeds recorded in scripture is to attest the revelation given as from God? This great salvation which is thus taught

having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will. (Hebrews 2:3, 4)

What was true of the Lord in those days was true in regard to His servants the apostles. The miracles also attested their message as from God. It was the miracles that made the disciples believe in Jesus, and they, in turn, made the world believe in Christ.

A secondary purpose of miracles (and it is clearly secondary) was to demonstrate the mercifulness of God in the case of individual men. The miracles illustrate and explain the teaching of Jesus on the love and mercy of God. It is one thing to hear Jesus talk; it is another thing to see Him in action. In the miracles, we see Christ dealing tenderly and yet majestically with our human lives and their sins and burdens and sorrows and fears. The apostles were no less spectacular in calling attention to God's revelation.⁶

A tertiary object of miraculous deeds was to wreak vengeance

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upon objects unworthy of God's continued grace.⁷ To the mind comes immediately Jesus' cursing the fig tree (Mt. 21:18, 19), the blinding of Elymas (Acts 13:11), the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5, 10). Bible miracles taught not only God's love and goodness but also His power and authority, and sometimes His righteous and fearful judgments.

A fourth purpose of God in the giving supernatural demonstrations of His presence among men is negative in nature: Miracles are not universal in nature. If they ever were or should ever become so, they would lose their value as deeds of a supernatural character for if universal, they would cease calling attention to God's message and become the norm. Bible miracles were never either (1) universal in extent for they have always been limited to few and special cases. Never have they been used to relieve suffering or prolong this life for all of God's people impartially. Some received no miraculous deliverance here, but a better resurrection for the life hereafter (Heb. 11:35-40). John the Immerser, greatest of the prophets, worked no miracles, nor was he miraculously delivered from prison and death (Matt. 11:7-11; John 10:41). Jesus could have healed all the sick or raised all the dead. But He did not and would not. Many were healed by Paul, but Trophimus and Timothy were not (II Tim. 4:20; I Tim. 5:23). A multitude of sick and afflicted lay by the pool at Jerusalem, but Jesus healed only one man (who did not know Him or ask Him to) and then hid Himself from the others. But later He sought the healed man again to teach him and to meet the debate which the Sabbath miracle had aroused with the Pharisees. Nor were the miracles (2) universal in their result: All who were delivered from sickness or affliction had other times to suffer and to die. All who were raised from the dead had to die again. Once and again Peter was delivered from prison and from persecutors but another time he was left to die, when God was no less compassionate and Peter was no less believing. So it was with Paul.⁸

THE REALITY OF MIRACLES

We are standing on the battleground here where naturalism and supernaturalism meet and the war is not over. The question facing this age (and all ages, for that matter) which demands historical certitude, is the decision of the factuality of miracles. Indeed, the establishing of Christianity as a coherent system without historic foundation in supernatural fact can be the employment of some shadow-boxing theologians who make their living striving after wind but this cannot assuage grief, forgive sin, enable men to live in peace with

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each other, or prepare them for eternity. Let not him that girds on his armor boast himself as he that puts it off. The barrage begins: "Intervention of a supernatural character within the universe is impossible because of

A. "THE UNIFORMITY OF THE ORDERLY GOVERNMENT OF NATURE."

Miracles are antecedently possible. There can be no doubt that such a thing as a miracle is a reasonable possibility, whether we ever saw one, or believed that other men had seen one, or not. We cannot be dogmatic about what may have happened, or what can happen beyond our field of observation.

It is objected that a miracle is a violation of law, or God, as He reveals Himself in nature. God, it is said, would contradict Himself if He did anything in another way. But this implies that we know all about God and His ways. Instead of that being so, how small a portion we have seen! The general uniformity of nature to which deniers of the miracles appeal is a blessing to man. It would be a terrible world in which to live if we could not count on the operation of gravity, of heat and cold, of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest. But this uniformity is consistent with voluntary control, and therefore, for good and sufficient reasons, as the Bible tells us it has been, could be "interrupted." When we speak of the uniform type of nature all we mean is that an effect is something produced by a cause, and that all the effects we see are produced by natural causes. But we have no right to conclude that therefore a miracle is impossible, for belief in miracles does not imply that an effect took place with no adequate cause, but that an effect was produced by the immediate act or will of God who ordinarily works through second causes, but sometimes, if the Bible be true, through an immediate act. Instead of being a denial of the law of cause and effect, a miracle is its highest illustration.

A God who made a world and then shut Himself out of it so that He could never enter it again, never arrest, regulate, add to its laws of working, would be no God at all. He would be like a man who made a machine with whose law of operation he could never interfere. What we call "interference, arresting or changing of laws" may not really be such at all, but part of the great plan of God. To man it is a miracle, but not to God.

True enough, nature seems to be working under a system of natural laws, which as far as scientific observation can tell, seem to be invariable in their application. But what are natural laws?

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From scientific point of view, are they anything more than the way the phenomena of nature have been observed to happen within the time range of experience? The natural laws are not the forces themselves which they describe, but only the scientific formulation of the way in which the forces act. Natural laws are not to be confounded with the forces of nature which they describe. They have no control whatever over the forces themselves. Are these forces of nature eternal? They are only the power of God *in action*. If this is the cause, they are governed and controlled by God Himself . . . God is under no compulsory necessity to keep them uniform in their action . . . Now suppose it is part of God's eternal plan that for some great purpose of His own He will intervene in these forces and cause a break in their uniformity and in variability. What is to prevent such an interruption from occurring? Nothing! . . . The only question that may arise is whether God desires the changes to occur. The question that becomes one merely of fact, . . . whether there is any evidence to show that He has intervened. . . . The fact of present uniformity of nature is no barrier whatever to the intervention of God in the past.⁹

David Hume argues that miracles, as such, cannot occur:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the case, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined, and if so, it is an undeniable consequence that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever from testimony.¹⁰

Our question to him would be this: How do we get to know what the general experience of men in respect to the course of nature is? Our own personal experience, indeed, comes from personal observation, but, as we have just seen, our individual experience has little bearing on the case and for our knowledge of experience of men in general we have to depend on human testimony. So the whole force of the argument amounts to this: we must investigate the testimony of those who bear witness to the genuineness of the miracles of Jesus as having been performed before their own observation. The proof of miracles is based on testimony and when coming right down to the question at hand, it simply puts testimony against testimony: the

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testimony of those who were present and observed and affirmed what they saw—these miracles; and that of those who were not present and who declare that in all their experience they never saw such wonders wrought by anyone. David Hume's notorious argument attempts to show that no amount of evidence can establish the truth of a miracle:

When the experience of millions of people can be said to contain nothing miraculous, that is, a raising of the dead, or the sudden stilling of a storm on the lake, then the testimony of one or three people to some such miraculous event must be considered definitely of no historical value, because the testimony of millions of other people has a greater power than the testimony of, say, two or three men, for convincing us of the actuality or nonactuality of some miracle.¹¹

The fallacy of this argument is again exposed by the questions, "Whose experience? Whose testimony?" He starts by stating as fact something he cannot prove—"It is a miracle that a dead man should come to life: because that has never been observed in any age or country."¹² In support of this he would have to prove the gospels historically untrustworthy and he does not attempt to do so. He admits that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish. If the testimony of the gospel writers concerning Jesus' miracles is false—then their falsehood is indeed a greater miracle than the miracles which they describe. But this is mere logomachy.

He also argues that miracles are seen mostly among ignorant and barbarous nations. The people of Jesus' day can hardly be described in so sweeping and so hasty a generalization. It is based on too few samples of the class under investigation!

He argues that if the event harmonizes with what men normally experience, it can be believed if the evidence is sufficient; but if contrary to man's ordinary experience, it cannot be believed. If this is true, can there be such a thing as reporting advances in scientific research and discovery? I wonder if Hume would be so smug as to deny the unique experience of the American astronaut, his view, his reaction, his gathering of real though previously unknown facts.

"Ah yes," says the ghost of Hume, "but millions of people the world around shared vicariously in the experience of the astronaut being informed of his actions every minute by radio and television."

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Tugging the coat-tail of the speculating spectre, we urge, "Mr. Hume, this 'vicarious experience,' as you call it, was shared by the millions because of the reliable, competent, sincere, honest testimony, but since nothing contrary to the general experience of millions of people can be admitted as having historical value on the basis of the testimony of a few, then the testimony of such a small segment of humanity cannot be admitted. Turn back over in your grave and we apologize for the intrusion."

Concluding then, it is said that since natural laws have been determined by God, then He can never exercise His power in any way as to contradict these natural laws. But God is so omnipotent and omniscient that He has the right at any time to do anything He pleases, according to His will, whether it be exactly within the limits of WHAT WE CALL "natural law" or not. In our ignorance of many uncertainties involved in our universe we cannot dogmatize that God cannot work a miracle "contrary to natural law without violating His own character."

B. IGNORANT AUTHORITARIANISM.

One reason why many educated men take a negative attitude toward the Bible miracles is because of pure ignorance of the actual content of the Bible itself, and especially of the evidence in support of its historicity. We should not be surprised at the ignorance when we remember the great lack of Bible study in the early training of university graduates. True enough, the study of all the evidence in support of the historicity of the Bible is a science in itself and requires diligent preparation as such.

But what is both surprising and reprehensible is to find an educated man who is an authority in some other line, setting himself up as an authority on Biblical criticism without having ever given more than the most cursory study to the subject beyond swallowing whole what some destructive critic, whose own opinions are based on naturalistic premises, says about the Bible . . . The saddest part of it all is that such men, because of the respect and reputation which they have rightly gained in their own line of study, received a welcome hearing on the part of hundreds, to which hearing they are in no ways entitled, and lead many astray because their hearers think that they are speaking with equal authority about the Bible as when they speak on subjects in their own line of study.¹³

It may well be that some brilliant minds have read nothing but the distorted religious views of other ignorant religionists whose very

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teaching, not being founded in truth, become the very cause of all religion's overthrow through the brilliant but mistaken writing of the mentally acute specialists in some other field.

Some would say, "Supernatural intervention is very improbable because of

C. "THE PROBABILITY OF FRAUD."

This philosophy makes the claim that Jesus got caught up in playing the part of Messiah and to keep this popularity maintained He hired people to play blind, lame, dumb, insane, or dead so He could appear to people to heal or raise them. They even claim that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a fixed job! Again we have the impossible dilemma of a supreme ethical teacher violating His own ethic (practicing deliberate fraud) in which case He is nothing but a bold, bare-faced liar; or we impugn the witnesses who testify to the veracity of His miracles which they did not, in fact, ever see.

At this point we have to take a choice! We find it impossible to admire as "divine" a Christ about whom there is only falsified, or at best, deluded testimony. We cannot have our Christ and deny some of the history from which we originally learned about Him! Either we accept the witnesses as reliable and believe their testimony or else deny all of Christ and go write our own religion, for God has not spoken in human history clearly enough for all to hear.

Still others would object to miracles on the basis of

D. THE PREVALENCE OF MYTH IN ANCIENT RECORDS.

This theory would suggest that many, many years after the original witnesses were passed off the scene, mythical accounts began to arise, clothing the "historical Jesus" with a garb of miraculous deeds about which He knew nothing. These myths became part of the later oral traditions which were collected and recorded in the late second and third centuries in essentially the form evolved in our current New Testaments. Thus, according to these theologians, it is our responsibility to extract these mythical elements from the ethics of the "historical Jesus" and in this way be able to accept Jesus without these "hindrances" to rational minds. The attempt to reduce the supernatural acts of Jesus to myth cannot command much attention because (1) If during His life Jesus worked no miracles, the insoluble problem arises how He came to be known as the Messiah by those who looked for a miracle-working Messiah. (2) On what grounds can it be successfully denied that Jesus claimed to work

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miracles? (3) Formation of myths takes time not historically available from Jesus' death to the earliest accounts of His earthly ministry. Recent critical research demands the writing of the original manuscripts of the witnesses well within the first century and not during the late second or early third centuries, as this theory demands.

Other opponents of the supernatural miracles dismiss them as

E. THE DELUSION OF THE WITNESSES.

This is the idea that the apostles thought certain acts of Christ were miracles because they could not account for them by the natural causes which were hidden from them. Proponents of this theory claim that the miracles were made to appear as such by the influence of spiritual power on the nervous system or by medicine or secret remedies. The major fault of this theory lies in the failure to explain the acceptance of Jesus' enemies of the concrete and objective fact of the miracles. True enough, they did not accept the implications of the facts, but there was no denying the facts! Where is the "medicine, magic, or influence of spiritual power" which convinces centurions, high priests, Sadducees and those critical analysts, the Pharisees? These had everything to gain by denying the miracles; the apostles had nothing to gain by affirming them in face of death, privations, maltreatment of all varieties, and social stigmatization. And yet these enemies of Jesus, when they speak, are just as agreed that the miracles of Jesus are fact, as are those witnesses favorable to Him.

Some suggest that miracles of healing were due to some practice of

F. AUTO-SUGGESTION.

The theory would explain healing miracles by the power of Christ's mind acting upon the mind and then the body of the patient through a psycho-therapeutic idea. However,

It is the clear verdict of medical science that suggestion is incapable of removing any medical malady whatever and that its curative effects are restricted to functional disorders. Only what has come into existence through an idea can be removed by an idea.¹⁴

Jesus' healings were instant, not the result of extensive long-process treatment. Can men today instantly make a man walk who has been lame from his mother's womb and open the eyes of one congenitally blind? Can medical science create new arms or legs precisely like the originals instantly for the maimed? This Jesus did. Jesus was unique in this ability.

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G. EXTREME CREDULITY.

has been employed as a charge levelled against the age in which Christ worked, a time when all men looked for and believed in supernatural manifestations. Jesus' age was not any more an age of credulity than the age of our fathers. It was an age of genuine skepticism. True, they were deceived, worshipping gods that were non-existent, but what age has not done that? Study current news events and decide how rational creatures can be so gullible as to swallow the torrent of lies told by world communism. We cannot label any one age as a time of great credulity. The whole of the New Testament itself manifests an age of skepticism. Thomas doubted the resurrection and demanded an empirical basis for his faith. See Matthew 11:21-23 and John 8:46. Is it reasonable to say that the men who wrote the four gospels, that have amazed men down through the ages, were easy dupes whose minds were so childish and under-developed as not to be able to discern between astonishing feats and supernatural miracles? The charge reduced to its simplest form is this: the miracles, having been wrought or supposed to have been wrought in an age fond of believing such events, were received as real without the application of the tests by which their reality could be demonstrated. In other words, it is claimed that they were not worked under scientific conditions.

First, we remark that, whatever may have been the habit of the age in which Jesus and the Apostles lived with respect to miracles in general, and those of these men in particular, there was certainly a large class of persons, including the most acute and intelligent of the Jews, who most persistently refused to credit them; and these men were sufficient in number and in influence to check any disposition on the part of the masses to receive them without question. Second, we have a detailed account of the way in which the miracles were tested by this class of men, and by a comparison of that with which would be applied by scientific men of our own day, we can determine how much credence we should give to the assertion in question.¹⁵

The notable case in point is the healing of the man born blind by Jesus (John 9). The process of investigation, reduced to the simplest statement, was this: they first ascertained that the man could see; they next inquired what Jesus had done to him; and seeing that what He had done was only to put moistened clay on his eyes and require him to wash it off, they next inquired as to the certainty of his

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having been born blind, and they close this inquiry with the testimony of his parents.

Let us now suppose that, instead of the Pharisees who tested this miracle, it had been done by a "commission composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists and persons experienced in historical criticism" as is demanded by M. Renan. What advantage would they have had over the Pharisees in determining whether the man, when first brought before them, could see? It is clear that no knowledge of physiology, or chemistry, or medicine, or historical criticism, could help them in this. The most stupid . . . could settle the question at once by striking with his hand toward the man's face and seeing whether he winked. When it was settled that the man could see and the question was raised, What had Jesus done to give his sight?, the commission would have an advantage over the Pharisees, in that they would know more certainly, on account of their scientific attainments, that merely putting clay on a blind man's eyes and washing it off could not give him sight. Uneducated and superstitious men might imagine that the clay had some mystic power; but scientific man would know better. On this point of inquiry, then, the advantage would be with the commission, but the advantage would be in favor of the miracle. As to the next question, whether the man said to have thus received sight was born blind, what more conclusive testimony could the commission obtain, or what more could they wish, than, first, that of the neighbors who had known the man as a blind beggar; and, secondly, that of his own father and mother? Who, indeed, could be so good witnesses that a child was born blind as the father and mother for they always exhaust every possible means of testing the question before they yield to the sad conviction that their child is blind?¹⁶

Obviously, in testing such a miracle there could be no use made of scientific knowledge; and the same is true of Jesus' miracles in general. The most unscientific men of common sense can know when a man is dead; when he is alive and active; when he has a high fever; is a cripple; is paralyzed, as well as the greatest scientist. The cry, then, that the miracles of the New Testament were not done under "scientific conditions", is totally irrelevant, and can mislead only those who do not pause to think.

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Some moderns who have too much reverence (or too little, depending on your point of view) for the gospels to allow themselves to deny the miracles claim that those events in Jesus' life are not to be used for

H. TEACHING "SPIRITUAL" TRUTHS.

Rather, it is said, these narratives are to be given a "spiritual" interpretation. If these miracles did not take place, what did? The writers gave the impression that it was a distinct and remarkable miracle and they knew that they were giving this impression.¹⁷

RULES OF WAR

No matter how strong the evidence may be that the supernatural *has* occurred, since these scholars start with the premise that the supernatural can't occur, all evidence for its occurrence is ruled out of court without examination. Now I submit that even from a scientific point of view such a procedure is unwarranted. Questions of fact are not to be decided by any *a priori* principle laid down by any scientists, however erudite they may be! If facts and principles are at odds, so much the worse for the principles! The only thing we must be sure of is our facts. Facts are decided by *evidence*, and by *evidence alone*.¹⁸

The only way we can decide whether or not God has given a revelation of Himself in human history, is by an examination of the evidence tending to show that such revelation has been given. Since the matter is one purely of fact and of fact alone, it can be decided by the evidence. If God *has* given a revelation, no amount of theorizing to the contrary can change the fact.

The force of human testimony depends on three things: first, the honesty of the witnesses; second, their competency; and third, their number.¹⁹

That these qualities obtain in the witnesses of the miracles who record them for posterity is, in my opinion, demonstrated.²⁰ The writers of the gospels that record the miracles of Jesus did not consciously deceive or lie. These men were hard-headed, practical men who, even when Jesus was resurrected, had to be rebuked for their unwillingness to believe that He had, in point of fact, risen from the dead. Neither were the miraculous events that they record the kind that men readily imagine to have taken place. The writers of the gospels that picture Jesus as the miracle-working teacher were with Him

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day in and day out while Jesus walked the dusty trails of Palestine. There was nothing secret about His working of miracles. These men were competent to pronounce judgment upon the miracles. If they knew they were false, why should they declare them to be true fact, not merely supposed fact? What did they have to gain?

All evidence of Christ's miracles is contained in the New Testament. There can be no doubt as to the meaning of the evidence or the nature of the events witnessed to. The men who wrote about these miracles are either deceivers or deceived or else telling the sober truth. If they were conscienceless fabricators, how was it that such men produced that picture of moral excellence before which all the ages have fallen down in the reverent admiration? How could men who lied about the facts of Christ's life have produced so marvelous a character? Of this we can be sure, the men who relate the miracles of Jesus were not conscious deceivers and liars.

JESUS CLAIMED TO WORK MIRACLES

Jesus answered the disciples of John the Baptist:

Go and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. (Luke 19:22)

Earlier Jesus had said to the Jews:

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not. Ye search the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life: and these are they which bear witness of me. (John 5:36-38)

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:11)

How can we believe in Jesus if we do not accept His own testimony that He worked miracles? People say that Jesus was the greatest of moral teachers of all time and His ethical standard amounts to absolute perfection. Some will even claim for Him that He lived His own supreme ethic which He taught! Yet how can they think

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this and still say He did not work miracles when He claimed to have done so? It gets down to the foundational question: Is Jesus telling us the truth when He claims to work miracles? Did Jesus lie or falsify His credentials? If we say that Jesus was somehow the world's greatest teacher and yet was deluded into thinking He was working superhuman acts (when in fact He did no such thing) we have little more than a self-deceived imposter. There is no middle ground. Do we reject so easily Jesus' moral integrity, or His intellectual soundness?

PROBABILITY FACTORS

By examination of the gospels, the following reasons may be employed to prove to us that the miracles are the subject of adequate and reliable testimony:

A. THERE WERE MANY MIRACLES PERFORMED BEFORE THE PUBLIC EYE.

Jesus healed in the cities, at the busy corners, when surrounded by a mob, when speaking before multitudes in the open or in a house. They were for the most part not done in secret or seclusion or before a select few. Most of them were public property, as it were. There was every occasion and opportunity to investigate the miracle right there. Such clear, open, above-board activity is good evidence of the actual occurrence.

B. SOME MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED IN THE COMPANY OF UNBELIEVERS. Miracles are always popping up in cults that believe in miracles. But when the critics are present the miracle does not seem to want to occur. But the presence of opposition or of critics had no influence on Jesus' power to perform miracles. More than once, right before the very eyes of His severest critics Jesus performed miracles. Now certainly, to be able to do the miraculous when surrounded by critics is a substantial token of their actual occurrence.

C. JESUS PERFORMED HIS MIRACLES OVER A PERIOD OF TIME AND IN GREAT VARIETY.

The imposter always has a limited repertoire and his miracles are sporadic in occurrence. Not so with Jesus. His miracles were performed all the time of His public ministry from the turning of water into wine in Cana to the raising of Lazarus. Further, He was not limited to any special type of miracle. Sometimes He showed supernatural powers of knowledge, such as knowing that Nathanael was

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hid in a fig tree; or He showed power over a great host of physical diseases: blindness, leprosy, paralysis, fever, demons, and death itself; or He was able to quell the elements at a command as He did in stilling the waves and the wind; or He could perform acts of sheer creation as when He fed thousands of people from very meager resources.

Imposture on this scale is impossible. The more times He healed, the more impossible it would be if He were an imposter. Further, it is incredible to think that for three and one-half years He maintained one consistent imposture. The number of miracles, their great variety, and their occurrence during all His public ministry are excellent evidence that Jesus actually performed the miracles the gospel writers record.

D. WE HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF THE CURED.

Many times when Jesus healed, it is recorded that the healed person went broadcasting far and wide that he had been healed, even in those cases where Jesus cautioned the person or persons against it. Certainly the report of His miracles found their way all through the hamlets and villages of Palestine. Consider too, that two of the gospels were written by men who were not eye witnesses, so available was the data of the life of Christ. Thus, part of the reason for the sudden and energetic growth of the church in Acts was the memory of the marvelous life and miracles of Jesus Christ. The result of the personal testimony of the many who were healed, as they spoke to their loved ones, their relatives near and distant, and their townspeople, cannot be ignored in accounting for the great success of the preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts.

E. THE EVIDENCE FROM THE GOSPELS CANNOT BE UNDONE BY APPEALING TO THE PAGAN MIRACLES. Miracles are believed in non-Christian religions because the religion is already believed, but in Biblical religion, miracles are part of the means of establishing the true religion. This distinction is of immense importance. Israel was brought into existence by a series of miracles; the law was given surrounded by supernatural wonders; and many of the prophets were so indicated as God's spokesmen by their power to perform miracles; and the Apostles from time to time were able to work wonders. It was the miracle authenticating the religion at every point.

Pagan miracles lack the dignity of Biblical miracles. They are frequently grotesque and done for very selfish reasons. They are seldom ethical or redemptive and stand in marked contrast to the

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chaste, ethical, and redemptive nature of the miracles of Christ. Nor do they have the genuine attestation that Bible miracles have. Therefore, to examine some pagan miracles and show their great improbability, and then to reject all miracles on that ground is not fair to Biblical miracles or to the science of historical research.

THEREFORE?

Jesus from the commencement to the end of His public ministry wrought many miracles. Christianity claims to be a revelation from God confirmed and vindicated by mighty signs and wonders. The miracles are a strand woven into the fabric of the garment of Christ's personality, and you cannot tear them out without destroying the fabric itself. **THE ONLY CHRIST IS THE CHRIST WHO WALKED ON THE SEA, RAISED THE DISEASED TO HEALTH AND CALLED THE DEAD OUT OF THEIR DEATH CHAMBER!**

Miracles form part of the foundation of our faith, being divine demonstrations witnessing to the origin of the message we have believed. But they are not part of the faith or part of its practice in the lives of obedient believers. The miracles wrought by the messengers of God while the faith was "once for all delivered to the saints" are still effective evidences to establish the truth and authority of that faith.²¹

Finally, whether we believe that miracles happen or not depends on our attitude toward historic testimony to their reality.

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

1. Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith*, (3rd rev. ed.; New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1946); p. 87.

2. Clarence E. McCartney, *Twelve Great Questions About Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), p. 70.

3. J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1891), Part III, p. 116.

4. For a very clear discussion of the direct evidence for the resurrection of Jesus see J. W. McGarvey's, *Evidences of Christianity*, Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1891), Part III, Chpt. X. Also see Wilbur Smith's, *Therefore Stand*, (Natick, Mass.: W. A. Wilde Company, 1959), Chap. VIII.

5. Hamilton, p. 95, 96.

6. They had power to bless; healing sick (Acts 3:6-9); raising the dead (Acts 9:37-42; 20:9, 10); power to grant miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17); power to curse (Acts 13:11).

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7. For Old Testament examples, consider the death of Uzzah (II Sam. 6:6, 7); Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2); the leprosy of Gehazi (II Kings 5:27) and of Miriam (Num. 12:9-14); the blindness of the Syrian band (II Kings 6:18-20); the destruction of army (II Kings 19:35).

8. Seth Wilson, "*The Purpose of Miracles*", Christian Standard, Nov. 2, 1957.

9. Hamilton, pp. 89, 90.

10. Wilbur Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ*, (Boston: The W. A. Wilde Co., 1958), pp. 142-150, 158.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

13. Hamilton, pp. 90, 91.

14. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 133.

15. McGarvey; *Ibid.*, p. 112.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114.

17. See John 20:30, 31; 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:45, 54; 5:1-36.

18. Hamilton, *Ibid.*, p. 92

19. McGarvey, *op cit.*, p. 146.

20. See MacGarvey, *Evidences*, Part III, chapter XII, p. 146ff. Also Wilbur Smith, *Therefore Stand*, chapter VIII, especially p. 422ff.

21. Wilson, *Ibid.*

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER TEN

IS THIS SERMON OF WHOLE CLOTH, OR PATCHWORK?

On first reading this entire chapter it has the appearance of uniform wholeness. It requires only a glance at other Gospels, however, to cause the reader to realize at once that he has encountered some of this same material in quite different places and connections. A bit of first-hand familiarity with Matthew's neat organization of his materials according to topical, rather than strictly chronological, considerations, is almost sufficient to tip the balance in favor of the conclusion that the publican-Apostle is again organizing by collecting materials out of other discourses given on other occasions.

The modern Christian, hurried by immediate, practical concerns, is tempted to ask, almost with impatience: "Why bother to dig into this old question? After all, the chapter has come down to us all in one piece. What is there to gain by puzzling over the problem?" The seriousness of this problem lies in two directions: (1) Matthew's good judgment is placed in doubt, since he seems to ignore propriety by setting down in this place admonitions and predictions that not only were not given so early in the Apostle's training, but would have no connection with their immediate work, necessities or understanding.