

## Chapter Nine

### The Miracles Related To His Preaching

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The miracles have received new emphasis in theological thought. It was once the fashion in certain circles to question the credibility of miracles, but the pendulum is returning. The Gospels would be utterly destroyed from the literary viewpoint if the miraculous should be cut out from their records. The present purpose does not call for a discussion of the possibility of miracles. The Gospels profess to give the deeds of Jesus that transcend human powers. The Gospel writers, the beneficiaries, and the Preacher believed that these deeds were miracles. We know no reason that would invalidate their belief as sufficient testimony to us. Our aim here is to discover the relation of the miracles to the preaching of Jesus.

#### I. Related to Homiletical Method

1. Word study of the miracles.—The Gospels do not profess to give a complete list of the miracles of Jesus, but rather the typical ones. The apostolic recognition of the extent of his miracle ministry is thus given: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book." Our list of miracles for this homiletical study includes only those during his ministry, not those after the resurrection.

Various classifications of the miracles have been made, but we prefer the simple division of miracles of healing, numbering 26, and nature miracles, numbering 8, a total of 34 recorded miracles. Nine passages refer to the general custom of Jesus to heal all sorts of diseases and 25 passages mention his general working of miracles.

Various words enlarge our information from the specific examples. Ten times *dunamis*, *δύναμις*, "power," is used, and means inherent or transferred power; *semeion*, *σημεῖον*, "sign," also occurs, being coupled once with *terata*, *τέρατα*, "wonders"; the Gospel of John has the plural *erga*, *ἔργα*, "works," in five passages with nine verses.

The entire record of general mention, of specific examples, and of descriptive words amounts to 74 references to the miracle ministry of Jesus. The material will justify inductions as to his miracles related to the preaching.

2. Not spectacular.—The request for spectacular display of his power to work miracles was persistently refused by Jesus. He could not deflect this power from the plane of God's natural outflow to that of the showman. He had an exalted homiletical place for them. Five times he declined to give a miracle upon the demand for a sign from heaven in proof of his claims. To those who criticized his act of the first cleansing of the Temple he replied with the prophecy of the Temple's destruction and rebuilding after three days, an illustration that even the disciples did not fully understand until after his resurrection. One day in the

Galilean ministry he had been charged with being in league with Beelzebub, and "certain of the scribes and Pharisees" demanded a sign; Jesus recalled to them the sign of Jonah and the queen of Sheba. The crowd sought Jesus and found him in the synagogue in Capernaum; Jesus assured them that he knew that they had come only because they had recently been fed; their demand for a sign was answered by the discourse upon spiritual food.

It was at another time in Galilee that the Pharisees combined with their enemies, the Sadducees, to tempt Jesus with the request for a sign; he rebuked them with the suggestion that they understand the sign of Jonah and those of the weather. Even King Herod was disappointed in his hopes that he might induce Jesus to work some miracle for show. Jesus would not satisfy the desire for amusement and the satisfaction of an unholy curiosity. Faith could not be evoked through a miracle that might be wrought at the carping request of an impenitent critic.

3. Not to create an audience.—The miracles of Jesus were not primarily intended to create audiences for his preaching. This fact was accomplished, since the beneficiaries and their friends would joyfully tell of the great benefits received. Fame came incidentally to Jesus through his miracles. According to the Gospels, Jesus only at one time gave direction that the miracle should be widely recounted. The restored Gadarene demoniac was sent home upon a commission of publicity: "Return to your house, and declare how great things God has done for you." Jesus escaped from any possible benefit from such publicity by his immediate withdrawal from that country. The ten lepers were instructed to follow the Mosaic custom in securing the sanction and the declaration of the priest.

The general custom of Jesus regarding instructions to the beneficiaries may be gathered from several cases. Five times he forbade the publishing of the news of the miracles, the woman with the issue of blood, the blind man of Bethsaida, the leper of Capernaum, the two blind men of Capernaum, the deaf and dumb man of Decapolis; only the first two in the list obeying him. Jesus gave secondary place to miracles, even in his method of securing an audience. The temptation thus to draw the crowds might have been too strong for one less confident in the power of his truth, less concentrated to his sacrificial mission, and less acquainted with the vacillation of crowds.

4. Their physical accompaniments.—Three miracles of healing and one nature miracle were performed upon persons and objects not in the immediate presence of Jesus: the Nobleman's Son, the Centurion's Servant, the Syrophœnician Daughter, the Coin in the Mouth of the Fish. In the others the persons and objects were present. The limits of space did not hinder the power of Jesus. His confidence of success in his direction for miracles was as supreme in speaking at Cana for the distant patient at Capernaum as when he stood in the presence of the paralytic.

Of the 23 miracles of healing in his immediate presence 11 had no other physical accompaniment than the words of Jesus; 9 had actual contact or touch between Jesus and the patient; once he anointed the blind eyes with saliva and dirt, and twice he used the saliva upon the blind man and the deaf-and-dumb man. In all of

these physical accompaniments there did not exist any medical agency; he could have healed without them. Clay, saliva, or a touch could not increase or retard the dynamics of Jesus.

5. Miracle processes.—The ordinary method of Jesus omitted from miracles the processes of time and convalescence. Exceptions accent his custom, as in the cases of four miracles of healing and the one nature miracle of Cursing the Fig Tree. At least a short period of convalescence may be recognized in the case of the daughter of Jairus, since his direction for nourishment would indicate a weakened body; his ability to pass over this period is by no means here questioned, his real procedure being under notice. The blind man of Bethsaida was led to the outskirts of the village; Jesus put saliva upon the darkened eyes and placed his hands on him; the people seemed to the man as trees walking; again Jesus placed his hands on the eyes, and sight was fully restored. Having anointed the eyes with saliva and dirt, Jesus sent the blind man to bathe in the Pool of Siloam; sight came with the bath. The ten lepers discovered their recovery while on the way to the priest. The blight of his words was not observed on the fig tree until the disciples took the same road the following day. The versatility and adaptability of Jesus thus appear. Jesus preferred to give these processes to his miracles; he could just as easily have dispensed with them.

6. Scope of the miracles.—The miracles of Jesus had a wide scope, when viewed homiletically. The indefinite mention of all sorts of diseases may be taken with the specific examples, the result being an immense miracle ministry.

The particular miracles may be grouped according to the nature of the ailments: (1) physical disorders—blindness, 4; leprosy, 2; fever, 2; lameness, 1; deafness and dumbness, 1; dropsy, 1; issue of blood, 1; wound, 1; (2) nervous disorders—demoniacal possession, 6; paralysis, 3; spirit of infirmity, 1; (3) death, 3.

The nature miracles show the realm affected: (1) the organic world—draught of fishes, multiplying loaves and fishes twice, water turned to wine, cursing the fig tree; (2) inorganic world—walking upon the water, stilling the tempest. Many classes of people entered into his beneficence, the beggar and the heathen sharing the benefits with the rich and the sons of the kingdom. All sections of Palestine received the blessings of his miracles; "his own country" might have received a larger share if its people had not hindered by their unbelief.

7. Jesus' secret.—The secret of Jesus in his power to work miracles was his absolute dependence upon God's omnipotence. His reliance upon the Spirit of God was without flaw or wavering. Occasionally he prefaced his miracle with prayer, in order specially to convince the beholders that he was in constant and immediate touch with God.

The method of Jesus in communicating the power for healing to the patient and the power to nature must yet remain unknown to men. Scholars have sought and have seemed to find similitudes between the cures of Jesus and those accomplished by the modern practice of psychotherapeutics. But Jesus was infinitely more than a

hypnotist or agent of suggestion for healing. He was the direct channel of omnipotence.

The study of the mutual interaction of the mind and body in physical disorders and their relief has not yet led to definite results except in very simple ways, but, whatever may be the future discoveries in this field, the fact will abide that the greatness of Jesus will not be dimmed. His secret was not disclosed to his disciples, even though a certain authority to work miracles was granted them. He knew not only the when of miracles but also the why and the how.

## II. Related To Homiletical Purpose

1. Response to need.—The cry of personal need brought forth Jesus' power for miracles. His attitude toward the selfish, bigoted Pharisee was far removed from his tenderness toward the poor and suffering. The Gospels present his unfailing readiness to help the afflicted, no record being given of his failure to respond to real need. His reluctance to grant the request of the Syrophenician mother was in order to elicit her expression of great faith. A *captious* (fault finding, with petty objections) censure from a critic led him to justify his fellowship with the publicans and sinners with the illustration of the physician and his company. Jesus was often wearied from much preaching and teaching and from the long journeys, but he was never too tired to heal the sick and to cast out demons. (Editor's note: it is never reported in Scripture that he, himself, was ill; tired and weary, yes, but not as being subject to sickness.) His hours of retirement for rest were often broken by the crowds, but there was no rebuke for the intrusion nor fretful words. While he refused to parade his powers of miracles, he never turned aside from the call of need.

2. Gracious altruism.—A gracious *altruism* (unselfish concern for others) graced the homiletical purpose of his miracles. Jesus did not profit by his own miracles. Three partial exceptions to this rule may be noted. He shared the Temple-tax paid by the *stater* (?) from the mouth of the fish, and was strengthened and refreshed by the two cases of feeding the multitudes. He waited, weary and hungry, by the well of Jacob while his disciples went into the village to buy food; his creative power could give a superfluity to the thousands, but he would not exert it needlessly in his own behalf. His healing grace was always at the bestowal of the stranger in need, but he would not therefrom prevent his own exhaustion in service. Conscious that the hosts of heaven would gladly become marshaled legions under his command, he permitted himself to be led away as a captive of Roman soldiers.

Jesus lived for the benefit of others. In his cures only two persons, who were specially loved by those whom Jesus loved, were the participants; Lazarus, dear friend and the brother of friends, was called from the tomb, and the mother of the wife of the impulsive Peter was cured of fever. Five out of the eight nature miracles brought special and intended results to Jesus' disciples.

Miracles illustrated the mission of the Son of man. His was to be the life of service. Comfort, personal privations, hatred of enemies, and lack of appreciation by *kindred* (family, relations) did not deflect him from his purpose to benefit men by his gracious altruism. The burdens of the world lay upon his heart. Viewed as

expressions of altruism, the miracles become more than exhibitions of marvelous power. They should be regarded as the outflowings of the divine goodness and compassion, the personality of the Son serving as the proper channel to men. From arguments for his divinity they enlarge their credential value into spiritual illustrations of the natural method of service by the unique Son of God and Son of man. He did not greatly stress the proof from miracles; to him they were symbols of divine compassion. (Editor's note: do not forget that it is our faith mingled with divine power that procures this effect—the woman with the 12-year flow of blood gave him no warning she would touch him; however, the Father saw this faith that was hers and granted God's power to heal as it went out to her.)

3. Evidential value.—A secondary but real place was assigned to miracles by Jesus. He wished that men might look beyond the act to the actor, beyond the deed of wonder to the character of the worker; the spiritual idea should be the chief concern. Five times he turned aside from the demand that he perform some miracle as a heavenly sign to attest his authority and mission. Such hardness of heart upon the part of the Jews was *culpable* (deserving blame). "An evil and an adulterous generation seeks after a sign." "Except you see signs and wonders, you will in no wise believe." The Pharisees would not have believed the testimony of a special miracle in response to their demand.

A secondary value attaches to miracles as credentials. Some people were brought to belief and others were strengthened by them. After the first miracle at Cana "his disciples believed on him." "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did." Related to, and accompanied by, his personal grace, the miracles convinced people that Jesus was true in his supreme claims for himself.

His personal contact helped in the interpretation of his works. When the Pharisees murmured that Jesus should declare to the paralytic the forgiveness of sins, he proved to them his right by his power: "But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (he says to the sick of the palsy), I say unto you, Arise, and take up your bed, and go unto your house." The man obeyed. The miracles, however, were not always followed by examples of belief: "But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him."

4. Supreme personal appeal.—The credential of personality was greater than that of miracles. Jesus placed primary value upon the personal basis. This view is more agreeable to the modern temperament than appeal to the miracles as formal evidences of his divinity. Reversion of the process has come. Belief in Jesus conditions belief in his miracles. Personality is more persuasive than power. The spiritual consciousness of contact with Jesus prepares the way for the mental appreciation of his marvelous deeds. Obedient to the will of Jesus as Lord, impelled into humble service for men, the loving heart will not stumble over the credential value of miracles, even though all intellectual difficulties may not be resolved. The vision of Jesus as Lord and Master, crowned so through sacrificial love and service, will not be hopelessly clouded by intellectual doubts as to miracles. Jesus the Man of Galilee comes nearer than the Man of Miracles, if there should be doubts.

In his message to the imprisoned *Forerunner* (John the Baptist) Jesus used the ascending climax in describing the work of himself as Messiah: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them."

The news of Jesus' ministry to the poor and needy would assure John the Baptist that his short service as herald had not been in vain. At the Feast of Dedication Jesus declared, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do them, though you believe not me, believe the works: that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father." His contemporaries should have accepted his divinity without the need for the credential value of miracles. They should have credited his personality.

This emphasis in modern thought has given to the method of Jesus the force of a new apologetic. The initial point of contact now in the doctrine of Christ's divinity is found in his personality rather than in his works. The transit of thought from power to love, from miracle to divinity, may be difficult, but the reverse process is easy. Power may be transient and evil, love is eternal and good; miracles are external and admit of doubt, love is spiritual and incontestable. *Jesus himself remains his best witness* (Editor's note: John 8:18—"I am a witness for myself." Berkeley Version).

5. Relation to sin and suffering.—Sin is the generic cause of suffering. Each particular case of suffering may not be referred to definite and known sins. *A race of sinners* (Editor's note: all people, everyone) would inherit frailties that bring pains. Jesus did not share the current belief that each particular example of suffering and disease could be traced to immediate causes of sin in the life of the sufferer or his parents. In the case of the blind man the disciples questioned Jesus as to the cause. He affirmed that special sin in neither had been the cause of the blindness. Certain modern advocates of this error would see even in the suffering saint a lack of faith and sanctity. Many choice spirits have dwelt in afflicted bodies. And yet Jesus knew that certain sins would have their effects upon the body. The sinner often reaps his harvest of tears and pains. To the restored lame man of Bethesda he said, "See now, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to you!" There is here possibly the implication that a previous sin had caused the disease; the warning would serve for the future.

### III. Related to Homiletical Material

1. Fragmentary sayings.—The fragmentary sayings, connected with the miracles more closely than simple directions for the miracles, present valuable discourse material. The method is fragmentary. In certain cases few words are spoken, since the writers did not intend to give a complete record of all Jesus' words. The method is interrogatory. In six out of the nine examples Jesus asked a question, sometimes expecting an answer but usually for rhetorical purposes. The method is conversational. In these sayings Jesus addressed individuals six times, two cases being the beneficiaries, three times the crowd, twice the scribes and Pharisees, and once the disciples. In three cases he spoke to individuals and the audience respectively. Once he was in the crowded synagogue. In all these remarks the

style is free, informal and conversational. These sayings were usually spoken before the miracle was wrought.

The commendation and the censure of Jesus were thus conveyed. He commended the faith of the centurion, who illustrated those heroes of faith who should *supplant* (replace, supersede) the sons of the kingdom in the membership and benefits in the kingdom. The gratitude of the one leper, and he the Samaritan, accented the ingratitude of the nine Jews, who took their recovery as the natural right of the children of Abraham. People and disciples were rebuked when Jesus descended from his transfiguration to the scene of failure, his disciples being unable to cure the demoniac boy at the foot of the mountain. Three times in these sayings Jesus sharply censured the scribes and Pharisees.

The subjects of these sayings were fundamental to Jesus' ministry. The cure of the paralytic in Capernaum made prominent Jesus' authority to forgive sins; the proper observance of the Sabbath was mentioned when he healed the withered hand; the universal application of the Gospel had singular demonstration through the faith of the centurion; the heathen woman's request called notice to the primary privilege of the Jewish people; the blind man heard the declaration of the divine Sonship of Jesus; Martha was assured that Jesus was in himself the resurrection and the life; Peter could almost hear the army of heaven, which would come with eager steps at the command of Jesus. Brief, incidental, and disjointed, these fragmentary sayings help to summarize the homiletical method of Jesus.

2. Discourses.—Jesus delivered five discourses in connection with his miracles. These discourses are apologetic in tone. Five times in these he answered the criticism of foes. He defended his right to work miracles and denied being in league with Beelzebub. Three times he showed the higher law of the Sabbath through his deeds of mercy. His critics sought to entrap him in speech. The contrast is wonderful between Jesus-the-benefactor and the synagogue ruler, the critic, when the poor woman was relieved of her bondage and suffering. The synagogue became a cathedral of praise. In other cases the unspoken criticism was answered by Jesus.

These discourses are argumentative. In his defense for the cure of the impotent man Jesus used close reasoning, seven times employing the argumentative *γάρ*, "for"; this discourse has only one illustration and four conditional clauses. He also knew the advantage of the argument *ad hominem*, as in the instance of the accusation of the league with the demons. These discourses contain comparisons and antitheses. The Father and the Son, the good and the evil fruit, the righteous and the wicked are brought into clear distinction. They are also interrogatory, and have *invectives* (strong, critical language) and parables. The Worker of Miracles was the Master Preacher.

( End of Chapter Nine – The Miracles Related to His Preaching )