

Magazine

Introduction to the Miracles of the Bible

Part 2: The Evidential Value of Miracles

Daniel H. King

At no time in modern history have we dealt with a more skeptical public regarding every aspect of the biblical revelation than we are at the present time. The general attitude toward biblical claims of the miraculous, especially among the better educated of our population, is that, "People today know that the world is governed by the laws of nature, therefore miracles, or variations of those laws, simply do not, and cannot happen." Those who view the matter in these terms, fancy that they have worked it all out intellectually. Their thinking is as follows: "Since we do not see miracles happening nowadays, the miracles of the Bible must have arisen from the superstitious imagination of a pre-scientific age. Perhaps people at that time thought a miracle had taken place or hoped it had, but really they were mistaken." Unfortunate as it may seem to those of us who place our faith in the biblical revelation regarding such matters, this is the thinking of the majority of those with whom we come in contact in our day.

OLD TESTAMENT MIRACLES

The story of Moses and the burning bush is one of the most prominent miracles of the Old Testament (Exod. 3-4:17). In its context, it has the special role of being a sign confirming the divine mission of the prophet. Yehezkel Kaufmann points out that, "This idea has no pagan parallel. Since the pagan magician works by his skill (which may

have been bestowed upon him by a god), the wonder he performs betokens only his own power, the power of his magic. The wondrous sign of the prophet, attesting that the Lord has sent him, is a motif peculiar to Israelite religion. It became one of the fundamental motifs of Israelite prophecy" (*The Religion of Israel* 82).

All of the wonders performed by Moses and Aaron attest both the might of God and their divinely-appointed mission. When Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh claiming to be agents of the Hebrew God and working wonders in his name, the Egyptian wizards duplicate their feats as if to disprove the claim, as if to show that nothing more than ordinary magic was involved. The opening of the sea is a sign of the Lord's saving power and of Moses' "servanthood" as well (see Exod. 14:31). It is the same with the miracles of the manna, Miriam's leprosy, the punishment of Korah, the flowering of Aaron's rod, etc. The concept was so basic to the nature of the prophetic office that it was incorporated into the law: a prophet must adduce signs and wonders to validate his calling (Deut. 13:2). Joshua's dividing of the Jordan confirmed his mission; Gideon tests the truth of his vision by asking for two signs (Judg. 6:17ff., 36ff.). Elijah's trial on Mount Carmel constituted a decisive sign that the Lord was the only true God and Elijah was his servant and messenger (1 Kings 18:36). The miracles of

Special Issue — The Miracles of Jesus — Concluded



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Healing the Syro-phoenician Woman's Daughter

Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

Mark Mayberry

TYRE AND SIDON

Tyre was an ancient seaport city of Phoenicia, situated on the Mediterranean coast thirty-five miles north of Mt. Carmel. Sidon, oldest of the Phoenician cities, dominated the coastal plain in the area of the Lebanon Mountains, lying twenty-five miles north of Tyre. Objects of divine prophecy (Jer. 47:4; Zech. 9:2-4) and patience (Matt. 11:20-22; Luke 10:13-14), Tyre and Sidon are often mentioned together.

Through the Messiah's ministry, light came into "Galilee of the Gentiles" and regions beyond (Isa. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:12-17). Many from the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon followed Jesus (Mark 3:7-8; Luke 6:17-18).

JEW AND GENTILE

Withdrawing into this district, Jesus encountered a Canaanite woman, a Gentile of the Syro-Phoenician race, who cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." No response was forthcoming. When she persisted in her pleading, Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Bowing down before him, she said, "Lord, help me!" Christ answered, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Deep prejudice befouled the relationship of Jew and Gentile. Hostility flowed in both directions, from Jews toward Gentiles (John 7:33-35; Acts 22:19-24; 1 Thess. 2:14-16) and from Gentiles toward Jews (Ezra 4:8-16; Esth. 3:8-9; Acts 18:1-2). Bias may be evidenced in the disciples' impatient response to the Canaanite woman, "Send her away because she keeps shouting at us" (Matt. 15:23) and elsewhere, in their merciless reaction to the Samaritan's rebuff of Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). Based upon a superficial reading of this text, one might think that Jesus shared this bigotry. Such was not the case; instead, he was testing both the woman and the disciples.

Consider the statement, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Sending out the Twelve, Jesus gave similar instructions: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). This prohibition

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The Healing of the Demoniac Boy

Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-43

Greg Litmer

The healing of the demoniac boy was the first miracle of the Lord following his transfiguration. As the event unfolded there were several groups and individuals who played a significant role in what happened. These would include the nine apostles who did not accompany Jesus up the Mount of Transfiguration, a group of scribes, the distressed father, the boy himself, the demon, and Jesus.

The marvelous healing of the demoniac boy took place the day after the Transfiguration of the Lord, apparently near the base of the mountain upon which Moses and Elijah had appeared with Jesus. We know that Peter, James, and John had gone with Jesus and ascended the mountain. Mark provides us with evidence of the scribes taking advantage of the absence of the Lord to discomfort the remaining apostles. An individual had appealed to them for help, requesting that they cast a demon from his son who was severely tormenting the boy. The apostles had tried, but had failed in their efforts. The scribes were using their failure as a basis for their questioning.

The multitude which had gathered was amazed and joyful at the return of Jesus at just the moment when the defeat and humiliation of the other apostles at the hands of the scribes seemed complete. The Lord walked up to his harassed apostles and facing the scribes, demanded to know about what they had been questioning them. The failure of the scribes to respond helps us to understand the nature of their questioning. However, the Lord's question was not left unanswered. The father of the boy stepped forward and revealed what had happened. He had brought his son to Jesus, but since Jesus was not there, he had asked the apostles for help. They had been unable to help, and their failure is obviously what the scribes had focused upon.

Let's notice this father. He approached the Lord with humility and reverence. Matthew tells us that he "came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him." As a father myself, the heartache that this man felt is very real. How awful it would be to watch your son so grievously tormented, and to have watched him in this state since birth. All of us would do whatever we could to bring about the healing of our child.

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This man described to Jesus the pitiful condition of his son. The boy would have fits, throwing himself into fire or water, he would foam at the mouth and grind his teeth. He would scream and wail. In Matthew's account we are told that the boy was a "lunatic," while Mark informs us that he had a "dumb spirit." Most say that the boy was an epileptic, for epilepsy was viewed as a form of insanity. The word that is translated as "lunatic" literally means "moonstruck," and in the time of Christ it was believed that the moon had an affect upon those who were deranged. The gospels do not affirm that all diseases were caused by demons. In fact, Matthew 4:24 makes a clear distinction between those who were demon possessed and those who suffered from epilepsy. In this particular case, however, the affliction that boy suffered was caused by a demon.

The Lord's response is very interesting. It seems to have involved all those who were present. The day before Jesus had been transfigured he had appeared "in glory" with Moses and Elijah and had talked with those two great Old Testament figures. From out of the cloud that overshadowed them came the voice of the Father, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him." Now He once again faces disbelief, animosity, suffering, and the anguish brought about by a father's love. Jesus said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" This was to the baffled apostles, to the relentless and vicious scribes, to the father of the boy, and to the multitude. We can feel the frustration of Jesus in his words. When would they learn? When would they come to understand? So many years removed from the event it is difficult for us to appreciate the emotionally charged atmosphere that must have existed. Jesus then requested that the boy be brought to him. When the lad was brought into the sight of Jesus, the demon further demonstrated just how malicious it was by tormenting the child yet again in a violent fashion. Mark tells us, "Immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth."

Jesus asked the father a few more questions concerning the boy's condition, but surely the questions were not for his own information, but for the information of those who were gathered about. In the midst of his hope we detect a note of despairing doubt when the father said to Jesus, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" I am struck by the Lord's response, and it is certainly emphasized by Mark, "If you can." Of course Jesus could help. Perhaps the man was questioning Jesus' ability because of the failure of his apostles. The only possible lack was not in Jesus but in the man's faith. Jesus could and would heal his son. The question was, "Did the father believe that he could?" Jesus said, "All things are possible to him who believes."

In verse 24 of Mark's account we find, "Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, I do believe; help

my unbelief." Concerning this statement, R.C. Foster wrote, "His confession and appeal furnish a model for all prayers. He frankly confessed the common experience of humanity struggling for righteousness and faith and yet sinking in a measure into wickedness and doubt. 'Lord I am struggling to believe with all my might, but if I do not believe as much as I should, forgive me and help me to a stronger faith.' He claims to possess faith, but does not rest his case on his own merit: he pleads for the mercy of Jesus. He unconsciously reveals a genuine trust in Jesus by this last appeal. The person who does not feel the need of a larger faith, does not possess much faith" (*Gospel Studies*, Vol. 2, 170).

As the crowd continued to grow, we are told that Jesus "rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." Once again the maliciousness of this demon is shown in its departure. It cried out and threw the boy into terrible convulsion as it left him. The Lord's command that the demon was not to enter into this boy again reminds me of what we find in Matthew 12:43-45 when Jesus spoke the following parable. "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this wicked generation."

After the demon departed, the appearance of the lad was as though he were dead. Indeed, most of the multitude said, "He is dead!" However, that was not the case. Jesus took the boy by the hand and raised him up and all the people were astonished at the majesty of God. What a contrast between the Lord and all others. Consider the scene that had taken place. There had been the failure of the apostles to bring about the healing of the boy. The scribes had sought to take advantage of their failure. Into that intense confrontation Jesus had come, effectively silencing the scribes. There had been the heart-rending appeal of the father for help coupled with the pitiful plight of the boy, and finally, there had been the majesty of Jesus in casting this vicious demon out. Herbert Lockyer wrote, "Is it not wonderful and assuring to know that there is no impotence in Christ, that every woe of the human heart yields to His control? Demons and men recognize His sway" (*All the Miracles of the Bible* 217).

But what of the apostles that had failed in their attempt to cast out this demon? Later, privately in the house of some disciple, they asked Jesus "Why could we not cast it out?" The Lord's response was, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

The Coin in the Fish's Mouth

Steve Locklair

Have you ever found yourself to be floundering, flustered, and frustrated due to your lack of faith and failure to do what is right in a difficult circumstance? Have you ever put the “proverbial foot in your mouth” when you spoke rashly before knowing all the facts and had to be rebuked by God’s word? If so, you can put yourself in the apostle Peter’s shoes as he faced this specific predicament in our text, as we continue to learn from the miracles of Jesus.

When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?” He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?” When Peter said, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are exempt.” However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me” (Matt. 17:24-27, NAS95).

SETTING

There was a chain of events that had occurred within the last three months that had left the disciples discouraged and depressed. They had seen Jesus in all his glory on the

mountain and now they were sinking in the valley of doubt. The apostle Peter had boldly proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but eight days later, in misguided zeal, he desired to make three tabernacles—one for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The apostles had just experienced their only recorded failure to do a miracle, when they could not cast out a demon. Jesus told them they could not do it because of their lack of faith. Before this question came up about the two-drachma tax, Jesus had told them the second time that he was going to be killed and be raised from the dead which left them grieved.

THE TWO-DRACHMA OR TEMPLE TAX.

Matthew, the inspired writer, was the only one to record the incident of this miracle. He had been a tax collector for the Roman government before he left his job to follow Jesus. However, this was not a civil, but rather a religious tax. The Law of Moses required that every male Israelite over twenty years of age was to give one-half a shekel annually to make atonement for himself and support the tabernacle (Exod. 30:11-17). Later on, the proceeds were used to support the temple services and repair the house of the Lord (2 Chron. 24:9). This contribution was in addition to the tithes that God required. In the first century, the Pharisees and Sadducees debated whether it was voluntary or mandatory.

Lack of faith had been the cause of their failure. God did not lack the power to affect the cure through the apostles, but they had been found short in their complete trust and confidence in God. Jesus emphasized the power of faith.

Then, with reference to this particular demon, Jesus said, “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” This seems to be a reference to the vicious character of this demon—a viciousness that is emphasized throughout the entire account. The statement concerning prayer indicates an even deeper commitment and dedication being called for by the Lord. Prayer speaks to an individual’s faith and complete and utter dependence upon God. It strengthens

and encourages, and while none of us today has the power to perform miracles, prayer still serves to increase our spiritual strength and emboldens us to greater service. R.C. Foster had these comments to make concerning the reference to fasting. “The ASV omits the *and fasting* which is found in the AV. The better manuscripts omit it. The growth of asceticism and monasticism in the churches evidently led to the insertion. Jesus taught that fasting was not an exercise to be commanded by external authority, but an experience to rise out of internal need” (*Studies in the Life of Christ* 747).

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THE TEXT

When the temple tax collectors asked Peter whether or not his teacher, Jesus, paid the tax, Peter impulsively replied, “yes.” With the possible desire to vindicate his Lord, Peter ended up compromising him. Jesus, knowing all things, knew the conversation Peter had just had outside and asks Peter a question to help him judge righteously about from whom the kings of the earth collect taxes from. He answered correctly that the kings collect from strangers. Jesus makes the application that “the sons are exempt.” What is the necessary implication? “Since the sons of the king do not have to pay the tax, I am exempt also, because this tax is for my Father’s house, and I am the Son of the King.” Jesus had the right as the Son of God not to pay this tax. Also, Jesus did not have to atone for his sins every year as the rest of Israelites did.

Is Peter going to have to go back and apologize to the collectors and tell them that Jesus doesn’t have to pay the tax? No, Jesus waived his right because he was concerned about not causing the collectors to stumble. (This is the only time in Scripture that Jesus uses this word *skandilizo* for that reason.)

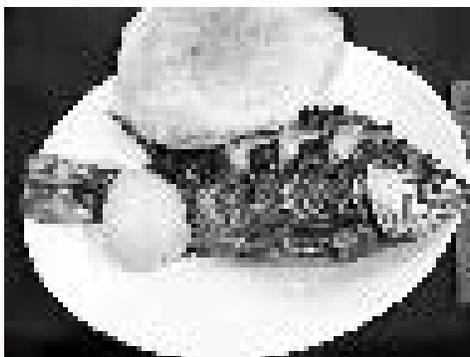
Many in our society have the mistaken belief that Jesus never offended anyone. Therefore, we should avoid controversy and make sure that we get along with everyone so that no one will be offended by the gospel. But did Jesus ever offend anyone with what he taught? When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for transgressing the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition, he called them hypocrites, and told them their worship was vain which offended them (Matt. 15:1-9, 12). They refused to repent. Jesus offended many others also (cf. Matt. 13:57; Luke 11:45; John 6:61-66).

Why was Jesus concerned about not offending the collectors in our text but not concerned about offending the Pharisees? Is there a contradiction? No. He didn’t want others to think that he despised the temple and its service and thus be a stumbling block to them. Jesus was always careful to obey the law of God but did not hesitate to violate the man-made traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus didn’t apologize to them because, by their teaching and example, they were going to cause others to be lost who followed them (Matt. 15:13-14). Even though Jesus had a right to forego the tax, he paid it.

THE MIRACLE OF JESUS (COIN IN THE FISH’S MOUTH)

The purpose of this miracle was to pay the temple tax so

as to not cause others to stumble. Why would Jesus have the apostle Peter miraculously catch this fish with a shekel in order to pay a minor tax? It would be another opportunity for Peter to realize that he is the Son of God (John 20:30-31) and that he needed to put his complete trust and confidence in him, rather than in his own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). What does this miracle demonstrate to us about Jesus?



Peter’s fish

JESUS IS OMNISCIENT

What did Jesus have to know beforehand in order for this to be miraculous? First, that someone would drop a coin in the water where the fish could see it. Second, that a fish would take it in its mouth and not swallow it. Third, that the same fish would take a bite from Peter’s hook and retain the coin. Fourth, that it would be the first fish that he would catch. Fifth, that the coin would be a shekel, which would

be the exact amount needed to pay his and Peter’s tax. How did Jesus know where that fish would be? It was not because he was a superb and experienced fisherman, but rather because he is the Son of God and knows all things. Jesus knows the thoughts of men (cf. Matt. 9:5), and what is in man (John 2:25).

But some might mock and say, “That is some fish story. No fish would swallow a coin.” But many fish are known to bite eagerly at something bright. Someone else might argue, “Peter must have caught the fish and sold it to someone to get the shekel to pay the tax. The Bible never told us that this really happened, so it must not have.” Let’s let the eyewitness tell us know what happened. The apostle Peter testified and wrote by inspiration that Jesus did not sin (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22) and that he knew all things (cf. John 21:17). If Jesus had failed even one time in any miracle or in anything that he said would happen (especially the death, burial, and resurrection), Peter or any of the other apostles could have exposed him as a liar on the Day of Pentecost since they were eyewitnesses. Instead, Peter knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and worthy of our trust and worship.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS TEXT

1. Just as Jesus knew Peter’s thoughts, he knows ours. We must realize that God’s word is able to judge our thoughts and intentions and we can hide nothing from him (Heb. 4:12-13).

2. Don’t place too much confidence in yourself (Prov. 3:5-7; Jer. 10:23). When we do that, we will more than likely fail (1 Cor. 10:12). As a result, the apostle Peter boasted, speaking rashly many times and even denied the Lord (Matt. 16:22; 17:4; 26:33-35; 69-75). He needed to

trust in the Lord with all of his heart and not in his own understanding (Prov. 3:5-7). “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10).

3. When you don’t know the answer to a Bible question, do not commit yourself with a yes or no answer. Peter did, and had to be rebuked by the Lord for his wrong answer. It seemed so obvious that Jesus would pay the temple tax. He should have gone and asked him first. Later on, the apostle Peter wrote, “If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). How can we speak as the oracles of God when we are asked a question? We must first sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts so that we will be prepared to give that answer (1 Pet. 3:15). We must study his word so that we will give an accurate response (2 Tim. 2:15). When you are asked a difficult or controversial Bible question, do not be afraid to tell the person that you don’t know the answer but will examine it by the Scriptures (1 Thess. 5:21-22). You can also ask questions for clarification. If you are asked a question trying to entrap you, you could respond with a question putting them in the same predicament (Matt. 21:24-27).

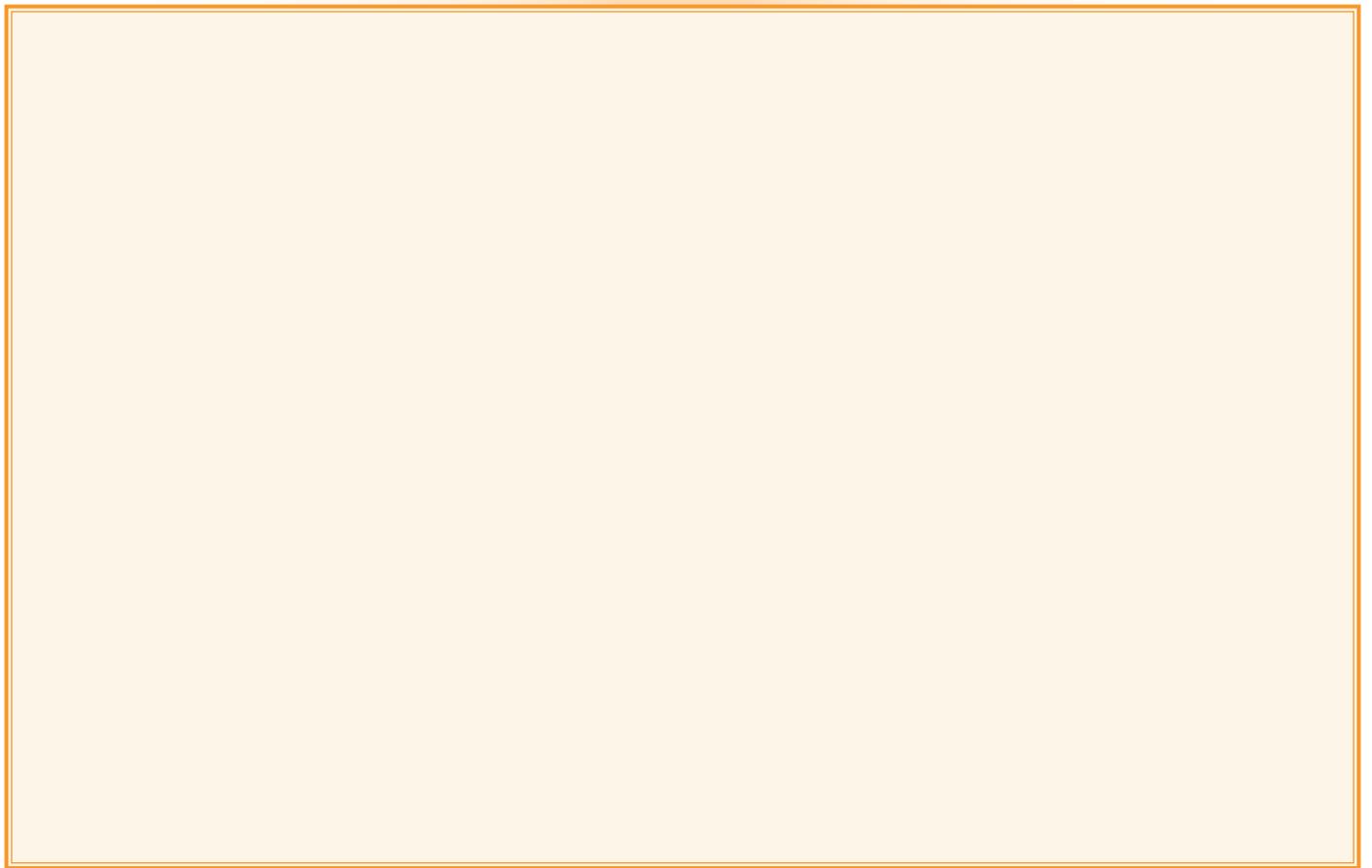
4. Our faith can only grow towards perfection when our faith has been tested (Jas. 1:2-4). Jesus rebuked Peter many times for his lack of faith, but he patiently

endured and learned to rejoice while suffering persecution for the cause of Christ (Acts 5:40-42). Is your faith getting stronger or weaker from the trials that you face as a Christian?

5. Sometimes, we must be willing to give up our rights so that we aren’t a stumbling block to others. Our Lord was willing to do that for a minor tax. The apostle Paul followed his example. He was willing to give up his personal right to eat meat so that he wouldn’t cause his brother to stumble into sin by violating his weak conscience (1 Cor. 8:7-13). He was also willing to give up his right to have a wife and receive support from Corinth. Why did he do this? “So that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:12). After our main text, Jesus warned that drowning in the ocean was better than causing a believer to stumble (Matt. 18:5-6).

6. Jesus cared about Peter and he cares for you also. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

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The Healing of the Blind Man

John 9:1-41

Stan Adams

May none of us be blind to who Jesus is and behave as the Pharisees. May we never compromise when it comes to taking a stand for our Savior. The blind man lost status as a Jew among his people in not being able to come to the synagogue. It was a small price to pay in view of who had healed him. It will cost us something also to follow the Lord. We must be willing to give up everything for him.

John records seven miracles of Jesus (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:1-15; 6:6-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-57). He tells us later in chapter 20:30, 32, “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written here, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God.” Therefore, a Bible miracle is an extraordinary event that is unexplainable in terms of normal, natural forces. These events caused the observer to think on the supernatural force behind the event and consider the wider implications not only of the event but also of the one who performed it and his message. Miracles were performed to confirm that the words spoken were true and of divine origin. Jesus’ miracles confirmed his word that he was the Messiah (see Matt. 11:3-5; Isa. 24:18, 19; 35:5-6; 61:1; 9:6; John 10:25). Let’s consider this great miracle of Jesus and let it instill in us faith that he is truly the Son of God and our Savior.

The events preceding the healing of the blind man had caused the Jews to become irate with Jesus for his claim to have been before Abraham (John 8:58). They tried to stone him but he hid and left the temple. He came upon a blind beggar as he was walking on the Sabbath day. The man had been blind from birth and had never seen the light of day. Jesus’ disciples asked him who sinned, the blind man

or his parents? They had heard of the common believe that if one suffered physical maladies, it was either because of his sins or those of his parents. Jesus set them straight and let them know that sometimes illness and affliction come to people, through no fault of their own. He told them that the man’s blindness gave him a great opportunity to work the works of God while he still has time in the flesh for the day is coming when he will not be with them.

Jesus then began to heal the man. He spat on the ground and made clay out of his spittle and dirt and anointed the eyes of the man. He then commanded the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man did not hesitate to obey (as Naaman did when the prophet told him to dip in Jordan seven times, 2 Kings 5:10). The man went and washed and came forth with his sight. Others heard of this and it begame the talk of the town. Some even doubted if the man was the same person, but he assured them he was the same man.

The first question everyone asked was: “How then were thy eyes opened?” (9:10). He clearly answers that the man called Jesus made clay and anointed his eyes and told him to go and wash in Siloam and when he did he received his sight. They then asked where Jesus was and he replied, “I do not know.”

Rather than leave the man alone, they brought him to the Pharisees. These leaders of the Jews then began their questions beginning with “how did you receive your sight?” He repeats to them what happened beginning with the clay being anointed on his eyes. He told them after the anointing of his eyes, he washed and then he saw. Some of the Pharisees then began their attack, saying Jesus was not of God, because he did not keep the Sabbath (one of their oral traditions stated that anyone who used medicine or made medicine on the Sabbath violated the Sabbath). Other Pharisees observed, “How can one who is a sinner do such signs?” This divided them.

They questioned the blind man about what he thought about Jesus. The man stated that he perceived him as a prophet (v. 17). The Jews then began to attack the man’s credibility. They did not believe the man had always been blind, so they called the man’s parents before them and questioned them. They asked them (1) Is he your son? (2) Was he born blind? (3) Can you tell us by what means he came to be able to see? The parents replied to the first two questions clearly, but they hedged on the third one, due to the known threat of the Pharisees that, if any confessed Jesus as Christ, he would be banished from the synagogue (a lifetime sentence reserved for those who would blaspheme). Rather than be courageous they sent them to their son for that question and did not say either way how they felt. They claimed neutral ground, even though their conviction had to be strong that Jesus was more than just a man.

The Pharisees called the man to them a second time and told him he should just give God glory, because they knew that Jesus was a sinner. The blind man then began a series of very logical arguments, which left the Pharisees looking foolish. He said that he does not know if Jesus is a sinner

or not, but “one thing I know, I was blind and now I see.” The Pharisees asked again how Jesus did this and the man said he had already replied to that question and they did not believe him. He goads them and asked if they wanted to become one of Jesus’ disciples? They became angry with the man and arrogantly said to him that they were disciples of Moses, who they knew God spoke to but they did



Pool of Siloam

not know where Jesus came from or by whose authority he did what he did. The man asked them how they can say they did not know where Jesus came from when his eyes were opened by this same Jesus?

He further argued that all know that God hears not sinners, but only those who worship him and serve him. He made the powerful argument that since the world began nothing had been done like unto him receiving his sight, if Jesus was not from God, he could do nothing. Instead of listening to this logic, the Pharisees, in arrogance asked who this man (a sinner) thought he was to question them? They cast him out of the synagogue, and he was basically a man without

a country or countrymen among the Jews that would fear the Pharisees.

Jesus heard of the plight of the man and went and found him and asked him if he believed on the Son of God? He answered and said, “Who is he sir, that I might believe on him?” Jesus told him he had both seen him and was now talking with him. The man replied, “Lord, I believe” and worshiped Jesus.

Jesus then taught his disciples about those who are really blind and refuse to see. He argued that for one to truly see, he has to become blind to his own invented beliefs. He told them that those who insist that they already see, must become blind. Some will submit and others will continue to be blind to who he is and how much he loves them. Some of the Pharisees heard what he said, and asked him, “Are we blind too?” He told them that if they were blind they would have no sin, but since they said “we see” they remained in sin.

What lessons can we learn from this wonderful miracle and events surrounding it?

1. For anyone to truly be a follower of Christ, he must become blind to the traditions of men and follow after the traditions of God revealed in his word (Rom. 1:16).

The path to being a Christian begins with humility and a servant spirit. Only then can one truly submit to God. Arrogance keeps us from seeing ourselves as we are in light of God’s word. It is very deceptive and can be the means by which we lose our souls.

2. The blind man did not know everything, but he knew enough to realize that what happened to him was remarkable and that as he rehearsed it over and over, he had to conclude that his sight being restored came from one who was the Son of God. As the pieces of the puzzle were put together in his mind,

The Raising of Lazarus

Jarrold Jacobs

The record of miracles such as the raising of Lazarus ought to establish and strengthen our faith (Rom. 10:17). This is because Bible miracles were performed for the purpose of confirming the message spoken by God's messengers, whether it was Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, etc. (Exod. 4:4, 8; John 2:11, 23, 10:38, 11:15; etc.). Therefore, in reading the eye-witness accounts of these real miracles, it ought to strengthen our faith. We are assured of the fact that this Jesus we worship, and his ambassadors the apostles, were speaking the truth, and we must follow this word in order to be saved. The miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead stands out for several reasons, not the least of which is the number of people, both friends and enemies of Christ, who affirmed in no uncertain terms that a man, namely Lazarus, was raised from the dead by Jesus Christ!

THE ACCOUNT OF LAZARUS BEING RAISED FROM THE DEAD

John 11 records the event of Lazarus being raised from the dead. You are encouraged to read this account from

the inspired text, as the following is merely a summary of what happened to aid our study. In John 11, we learn that word comes to Jesus that Lazarus is very sick (vv. 1-3). Of course, we are aware of the close friendship Jesus had with Lazarus, as well as his sisters Martha and Mary (v. 5). Lazarus' illness caused Jesus concern, but Jesus understood that the illness would result in Jesus being glorified (v. 4). For this reason, he waited for two more days before finally leaving for Lazarus' home (v. 6). Even at this point, Jesus reveals to his disciples that Lazarus has already died (vv. 11-14). When they arrive, it is learned that in fact Lazarus had already been dead for four days (v. 17). Some have suggested from this statement that probably the messenger who was sent to tell Jesus that Lazarus was sick was already too late! Of course, only Jesus knew this.

Once Jesus arrived near Bethany, Martha met Jesus and stated that had he been there, Lazarus would not have died (v. 21). Some take her words as a rebuke of Jesus for being late. I doubt that it was a rebuke of Jesus. I believe that this is simply a statement of her sorrow. She wished Jesus had

he concluded properly that Jesus was the Messiah. His belief was open and honest.

3. What is our reaction to who Jesus is? Do we react like the Pharisee and deny the obvious? Do we react like the parents, and take the neutral ground of compromise? Do we react rightly, as the blind man who immediately obeyed the Lord? The boy's parents could not be counted on under the scrutiny of confrontation. The Pharisees refused to see the obvious through their own arrogance. The blind man opened his eyes and truly saw Jesus for the first time in two ways, as a man, physically, and as his Savior, spiritually.

May none of us be blind to who Jesus is and behave as the Pharisees. May we never compromise when it comes to taking a stand for our Savior. The blind man lost status as a Jew among his people in not being able to come to the synagogue. It was a small price to pay in view of who had healed him. It will cost us something

also to follow the Lord. We must be willing to give up everything for him.

Finally, we can all learn that we should never be intimidated by anyone who is "learned" in the word. This simple blind man was smarter than all his detractors. He could see who Jesus was and they refused to challenge the oral traditions of their ancestors and their own preconceived idea of the Messiah and his kingdom. These men were thoroughly whipped by this man's logical reasoning. It does not take a genius to know Jesus is the Son of God.

Do not be intimidated by any religious leader who discounts truth, because he arrogantly thinks his education alone makes him more qualified than you. God's ways often confound the learned, because they refuse to see the obvious.

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been there sooner (Mary said almost the same words, v. 32). Yet, Jesus assures her that Lazarus will arise (v. 23). Martha recognizes the fact that Lazarus will be raised one day in the future, but Jesus' point was that Lazarus would raise that very day! He is "the resurrection and the life" and can raise Lazarus just as he had raised the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus' daughter, and others! Soon, Mary is told of Jesus' arrival. She goes to meet him, and states that, if Jesus had been here, Lazarus would not have died, just like Martha had done (vv. 28-32). Jesus did not answer her as he did Martha, but groaned within his spirit, went to the gravesite, and wept (vv. 33-35).

Standing in front of the cave where Lazarus was laid, Jesus commands that the stone in front of the cave be removed (v. 39). Martha discourages such, for "by now he stinketh." Yet, Jesus reminds her of what he had said earlier, and as the stone is removed, he thanks God publicly for hearing him (vv. 41-42). After this, Jesus commanded Lazarus to "come forth" (v. 43). At this, Lazarus walked out of the grave and continued to live on for some time. The result of this miracle, as in all other miracles, was that folks believed on Christ (v. 45). Yes, there were several who rejected him as the Messiah, but they could not deny what Jesus did! In fear, they gathered with the Pharisees, and in the presence of the high priest, set into motion the plan to kill Jesus (vv. 47-53).

LESSONS FROM JESUS' MIRACLE

As we study the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead, we find many lessons that are applicable to us. First, we see Jesus' patience with his disciples when he spoke to them about Lazarus "sleeping," but later had to just tell them plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (v. 14). We see Jesus' patience with Martha and Mary as they grieve and express sorrow at the loss of Lazarus, but do not really understand what Jesus is saying when he promises that Lazarus will be raised that day. In like manner, there are people today who need our patience as we try to teach them the truth and lead them to Christ. Sometimes, we need to allow time for the "seed" to germinate in their hearts (Luke 8:11). We also need to be patient as we instruct new Christians in God's word. We cannot always expect folks to learn in five minutes what it took us five years to learn! In being a Christian, "patience" is a key element in our teaching as well as our own personal growth (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Pet. 1:6). We need to take special notice of the patience Jesus had with folks and apply that to our lives.

Second, we see great love expressed by Jesus for Lazarus, as well as for Mary and Martha. From Christ's example, we see how we need to love others today. No, we can't raise friends from the dead, but on this side of eternity we can, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). We can love folks enough to speak the truth to them (Eph. 4:15). We can also love our children enough to teach them the truth and to correct them when they are not acting as they should (Eph. 6:4). Of course, loving others is proportionate to our love of God (1 John 5:2). When we recognize the degree to which we love God, then we can know the degree to which we need to love our fellow man.



Lazarus' tomb in Bethany

While Jesus was speaking with Martha, we read one of the "I am" statements made by Christ as recorded in the book of John. In this chapter, he tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). "I am" is a description used by God back in Exodus 3:14. In the book of John, we will see Jesus adopt this same title on several occasions, which angers the Pharisees and others, who accuse him of blasphemy (e.g. John 8:58, 59; 10:33; 14:6; etc.). In John 11, Jesus says he is the resurrection and the life. The point is that without Christ there is no resurrection, and there is no life! Though many people today deny that Jesus exists, and others say that Jesus is merely a "good man" or a "good prophet," the Bible shows by undeniable evidence that he is truly deity, the son of God, "the resurrection and the life." For this reason, we need to believe and obey his word so that we can have eternal life in heaven with him (Heb. 5:8-9).

Jesus teaches us a lesson on prayer in this chapter as well. Before calling Lazarus forth, we read that he prayed to God (John 11:41-42). Mr. Lenski says that the lifting of eyes is a natural gesture in prayer (*The Interpretation of John* 815). This prayer was offered between a Son and his Father, but Jesus spoke aloud his thanks so that folks present would understand and believe on him once they saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb. May we learn from Christ's example that we need to spend time in prayer to God. As Jesus' example shows, we can pray to God at any time, whether we do like he did and pray "a great while before day" (Mark 1:35), or pray as Jesus did before all, in thanksgiving to God in John 11. All Christians need to spend time in prayer to God. The apostle Paul told the saints to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). This message was similar to our Lord's teaching when he told folks to

pray and “not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Paul also said, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Let us remember how much we need God and remember to spend time in prayer to him. This is an invaluable mode of communication with the God of Heaven. He loves his children, and wants them to speak to him.

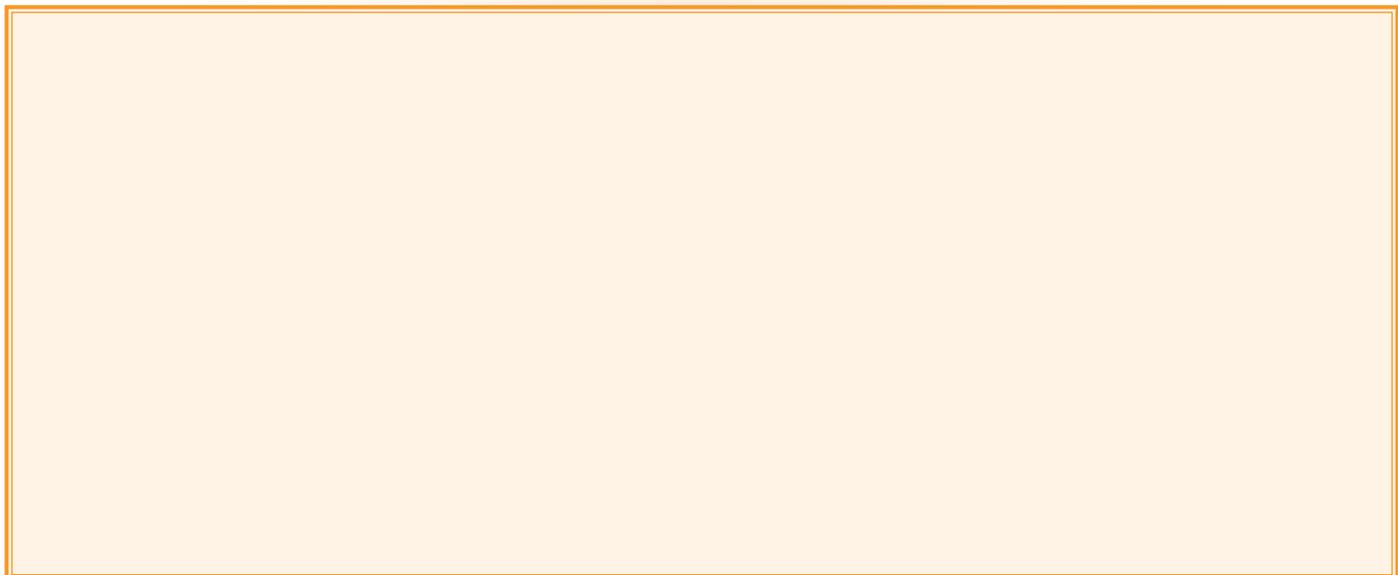
Another lesson we learn from this occasion is the power of deity. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead by his inherent power of deity by just telling him to “come forth” (John 11:43)! How amazing this event was, especially in light of the fact that this same Jesus will shortly give his life for us on the cross (John 18:37). Knowing that Christ can raise men from the dead by simply calling them forth from the grave, we ought to be all the more humbled and grateful as we realize that Jesus willingly gave his life for us (John 10:17-18; Matt. 20:28). Knowing Christ’s power over life and death, we ought also recognize that the taunts men spewed at Christ while on the cross were actually true (Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:30)! Jesus could have jumped off of the cross if he desired. Yet, he remained there to be our sacrifice. Someone has said, “Sin nailed Christ to the cross, but love kept him there.” I believe this is true. When we read the book of John and learn of Christ’s miracles, especially this miracle of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, we have to be amazed and impressed at the great love God and Christ have for us lowly humans (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16)! In addition to this, when we study about Christ’s power to call men forth from the dead as he did in calling Lazarus forth from the grave; does this not also remind us to look ahead to a day when Jesus will not call one or two, but all of the dead out of the graves? A day is coming when all the dead shall arise and meet the Lord in the air (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)! Surely, if Jesus can raise one, he can raise all, and one day, he will do just that!

Furthermore, we learn the lesson that at times some folks, in spite of all the evidence before them, simply will not accept the truth. Consider the fact that after Lazarus comes forth from the dead, many believed on Jesus (John 11:45). However, some who were witnesses to this event and could not deny what had happened, still met with the Pharisees, chief priests, and the high priest and plotted Jesus’ death (John 11:47-53)! Here are men, the enemies of Christ, who could not deny the evidence, but they still rejected the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God! In like manner, we find some today, who despite all of our efforts to teach them the truth, simply will not accept the truth. When this happens, we must not become discouraged, but do as Paul and others did and turn our attention toward others who will listen (Acts 13:46, 51; 18:6). Yes, someday these folks may very well be convinced, but for now, they will not listen. For this reason, we need to look toward others who will listen and obey. I have no doubt that there were those who refused Jesus while he was on earth who later accepted his plan of salvation and were baptized for the remission of sins; yet on this day, they refused the plain evidence before them. Truly, this is sad!

CONCLUSION

In our study of this great miracle where Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, may we remember that its purpose is to cause folks to believe on Jesus as the Son of God. May we take comfort in the eye-witness testimony found within John 11 and know that this same Jesus is alive and well today, sitting at the right hand of God. May we be people who are subject to him and willingly follow his word, knowing that it is Jesus who will one day judge us, using his word as the standard of judgment (John 5:22, 27; 12:48).

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Sabbath Day Miracles

Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6

Jay Horsley

Jesus claimed to be the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). Seven of the thirty-five recorded miracles of Jesus occurred on the Sabbath. This study will examine two of these from the gospel of Luke. Jesus’ Sabbath miracles and teaching prove what Peter said about him: “God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power, and He went about doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil: for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). The Pharisees’ reaction to his miracles showed their hard-heartedness and partisan disregard for the truth.

WOMAN BENT DOUBLE FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS HEALED IN SYNAGOGUE (13:10-17)

Teaching in the Synagogue (13:10). On the Sabbath (the day of rest dedicated to God), Jesus was teaching in the synagogue where it was his “custom” (Luke 4:16) to go. Although unknown in the Old Testament, the synagogue system was well developed by New Testament times. It began either during Babylonian exile or shortly after the return from captivity. The further Jewish communities were from the temple, the greater their need for a place of worship and instruction. Synagogues and their associated schools became the central place for communal worship and teaching the Law of Moses. Jewish families in voluntary association provided a meeting hall, a copy of the law, and a teacher (rabbi). This system of worship, fellowship, and instruction was so effective that synagogues were established in every Jewish community large enough to support one—even little backwater Nazareth. Large cities, even Jerusalem, the temple city (Acts 6:9) had many. Like all observant Jews, Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. “I always taught in the synagogue” (John 18:20). Paul also used the synagogue as a place to preach the gospel (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8).

The Woman Sick For Eighteen Years (13:11). While teaching in a synagogue, Jesus met a woman who had been sick for eighteen years. Luke says, “Behold, there she was.” We are tempted to gloss over “behold” (although it occurs 140+ times in the gospels), but it is there to grab

our attention and point to some unusual or important fact. In this case, “Behold” (Look! Examine! Consider!) an unfortunate woman so infirmed that she could not stand up straight. Many might have given up on life or on God entirely after eighteen years in this condition—certainly it would have kept many home from services. But there she was, in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Great Rejoicing At Obvious Good (13:12, 13). It was obvious what the sick woman needed. No one needed to ask. Jesus did what all who have the power to help should do: He helped quickly and without ceremony. He came to this world to do good and she was oppressed by the devil—it was an evil spirit that caused her sickness. When set free from nearly two decades of suffering, the healed woman immediately praised God. Who wouldn’t? Wouldn’t the religious people who knew her in the local synagogue be the most likely to rejoice with her? Many did rejoice (v. 17), but not all.

The Hypocritical Objector (13:14). A hard-hearted synagogue official not only didn’t rejoice, he got angry. He wouldn’t give God glory that a sick member of his synagogue was healed because he said she didn’t get healed on the right day! He actually said that she shouldn’t have been healed on the Sabbath.

But his objection was *cowardly*—he didn’t speak to those involved although both Jesus and the healed woman were both present. It was *political*—he addressed the multitude to keep them from crediting Jesus with good and praising God through him. It was *slandorous*—it misrepresented what Jesus and woman did. He said that healings shouldn’t be done on the Sabbath as though Jesus was some doctor who had set up office hours to see patients on that day and she had come for treatment. (That such reasoning could be the basis of an objection shows how regularly Jesus preformed miracles.) Finally, his objection was *false*—he misused the Scriptures to argue that no good works could be done on the Sabbath day. Hypocrite.

Good Allowed on the Sabbath (13:15, 16). Good, necessary and merciful works could be, and regularly were, done on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:11,12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9). Here Jesus gave the example of taking one's animals from their stalls for water. Allowable Sabbath work also included priestly sacrifices (Lev. 16:3; Matt. 12:5) and circumcisions (John 7:22, 23). But letting animals out of their stalls for water was most appropriate comparison for this occasion. They allowed the work of unloosing animals on the Sabbath to relieve a real, but temporary, need, but condemned Jesus for permanently unloosing a woman from illness caused by a demon.

Their pretended zeal for the Sabbath was a mask for condemning Jesus whom they already hated. The synagogue official performing his teaching and other duties related to the Sabbath service was working much more than Jesus was, but he was excused (rightly so) because of the spiritual importance of his work. So why didn't he excuse Jesus? He had already decided that whatever Jesus did was wrong. Hypocrite.

The People Rejoice (13:17). Non-partisan viewers of the miracles were not persuaded by the Pharisees' arguments since the goodness and the divine power of Jesus' miracles left no doubt as to who was doing the Lord's work. So the people rejoiced, praised God, and the Pharisees were powerless to stop them.

MAN WITH DROPSY HEALED AT SABBATH FEAST (14:1-6)

The Pharisees Are Watching (14:1). The Jews had feasts, often costly and lavish ones, on the Sabbath day. The feast recorded here was evidently quite a large one and involved many people. How could such feasts be done on the day of rest when even servants were not to labor (Deut. 5:14)? The cooking and as much set-up as possible were done the day before, leaving only a minimum to actually do on the Sabbath. Such elaborate work beforehand and minimal work on the Sabbath were more out of character with a day of resting than Jesus' healings, much less their continual Sabbath labors in looking for ways to accuse him. At a previous Sabbath feast (Luke 11:37-40), they faulted Jesus for not doing ceremonial hand washing. The clear pattern of the Pharisees was "what you do is wrong/work; what we do is right/not work" no matter what particulars were involved. Their only hope to condemn Jesus was by using an unfair standard of judgment that they applied only to him and not to themselves (Matt. 7:1, 2). Hypocrites.

Sick Man Waiting (14:2). A man with dropsy (a disease that caused the body to retain large amounts of water usually in the limbs and incurable in ancient times) was at the Pharisees' feast. He might have been there as a guest, or he might have come because the Great Physician was there. But because of the wording "in front of him" and

the Pharisees known record of "plotting against him, to catch Him in something He might say" (Luke 11:54), the man was likely placed there in order to find a reason to accuse Jesus.

Think of the very oddness of the situation: Without Jesus' enemies acknowledging his miraculous power, there is no possible way to find fault in him. If a man of normal ability met someone with incurable disease or possessed by an evil spirit, he could do no more than offer sympathy and a prayer. Jesus was tested only because everyone knew he had the power to do miracles. They diligently sought to accuse knowing that he was a miracle worker and even use his compassion and coupled with that power in a reason to accuse. Hypocrites.

An Unanswered Question and Silent Critics (14:3, 4). Knowing their desire to accuse, Jesus asked the teachers present if it was "lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" If it was wrong, then these experts in the law should have been able to clearly say so. But the learned lawyers and factious Pharisees would not answer the question because "Yes" would vindicate Jesus and "No" would publicly expose their misuse of the Law. They could not answer a simple, straightforward question because they were caught between their obvious prejudice and the obvious truth. Hypocrites.

Was it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Ask the demon possessed man in the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:21), Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38), the man with the withered hand (Luke 6:6; Matt. 12:10-13; Mark 3:5), the woman doubled over for eighteen years (Luke 13:13), the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:9), and the man born blind (John 9:14).

Another Question Left Unanswered (14:5, 6). Having done his good work of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus challenged them to condemn him. He asked which of them would not immediately do compassionate and helpful deeds to alleviate suffering of children or animals on the Sabbath. They could not give an affirmative reply because to honor God for the good done would vindicate Jesus. They couldn't reflexively condemn (as the Synagogue official in the previous chapter had done) since Jesus had questioned them before he acted. Nor could they thoughtfully condemn because the Law and the facts were against them. So what could they do? Nothing. So that's what they did, nothing. They were too partisan to do anything but harbor hate in their hearts in spite of the allowance of the Law and compassion for the healed man. The healed man rejoiced while they sat silently. Hypocrites.

Their silence was broken when the dinner bell called to sit for the feast (14:7). But that became just another display of their self-seeking as they jostled with members of their

The Withering of the Barren Fig Tree

Irvin Himmel

Lesson Text: Matthew 21:17-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24. Details omitted by Matthew are supplied by Mark.

TIME AND PLACE OF THE MIRACLE

On the first day of the final week of his earthly ministry, Jesus made the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He entered the temple, looked round about on all things, and that evening went to Bethany with the Twelve (Mark 11:11). Located on the eastern slope of the mount of Olives, the village of Bethany was the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, close friends of Jesus (John 11:1-5).



Fig tree in Israel

The following day, returning to Jerusalem from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing a fig tree with leaves, he approached the tree in search of figs, but he found nothing but leaves. He made a solemn pronouncement: “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (Mark 11:14), or “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever” (Matt. 21:19). Presently the tree withered away. That same day Jesus cleansed the temple of those who were making it a den of thieves. This fixes

the time for the miracle under consideration as the second day of the last week of our Lord’s ministry. Our calendar calls that day Monday. “And when even was come, he went out of the city.” Probably he and the Twelve went to Bethany for the night.

own party for the chief seats at the table. Jesus condemned this as well (14:8-13). Praise to God for the healed man didn’t move them, but they sure got moving when the food was placed on the table. Hypocrites.

CONCLUSION

Pharisees argument was simple, “This man (Jesus, the healer) is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath” (John 9:16). But it was simply wrong. The blind man, who was healed on the Sabbath, destroyed their *argument*: “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:31-33). For that the Pharisees threw him out of the synagogue. Hypocrites. But they didn’t shake the healed man’s faith—he could now see too clearly for that to happen. So when Jesus consoled him, he said, “‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9:38). Let us confess and do the same.

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The next morning (Tuesday), as they passed by they noted that the fig tree was dried up from the roots. Peter remarked, “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away” (Mark 11:21). The place where the miracle was performed was on the way between Bethany and Jerusalem, the vicinity of the mount of Olives.

FIGS AND FIG TREES

Tracing the history of fig trees takes us back to the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Their eyes were opened and they were ashamed of their nakedness, so “they sewed fig leaves together,” making coverings for themselves (Gen. 3:7). Fig-leaf attire is neither adequate nor of enduring quality. God designed clothing made of skins for them to wear (Gen. 3:21).

Palestine in Bible times was a land of figs. Note the following examples of this common and important fruit: (1) God told Moses to send spies into Canaan to gain firsthand information about the condition of the land. They brought back a cluster of grapes and samples of pomegranates and figs (Num. 13:23). (2) God was bringing Israel into a good land of wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives,

and honey (Deut. 8:8). (3) When Abigail brought provisions for David and his men, she included two hundred cakes of figs (1 Sam. 25:18). (4) To sit under one's vine and under one's fig tree symbolized prosperity and security (1 Kings 4:25). (5) Figs had medicinal value. Isaiah told the ailing Hezekiah to lay a lump of figs on his boil (2 Kings 20:7). (6) Jeremiah foretold Judah's invasion by a foreign nation as a time when their vines and fig trees would be eaten up, and their cities impoverished (Jer. 5:17). (7) Nathaniel was "under the fig tree" when Jesus saw him (John 1:48). (8) One of the parables of Jesus was about a fig tree (Luke 13:6-9).

ANALYSIS OF THE MIRACLE

Jesus spoke and the barren fig tree withered at once. The disciples marveled that the tree withered away so soon. The next morning, as they passed by, they noted how thoroughly it had withered; it had dried from the roots up. They should have marveled even more at the power of their Master's word. On another occasion Jesus spoke and Lazarus came forth from the grave after being dead for four days (John 11:38-44). In a synagogue Jesus spoke and a man's withered hand was restored whole (Mark 3:1-5). At another time Jesus spoke and a great storm ceased (Mark 4:37-41). The power of Jesus' word is marvelous, remarkable, and striking.

Like other miracles of Jesus, the supernatural withering of the barren fig tree attests to his being the Messiah, the Son of God. He stated in John 5:36-37, ". . . The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me." Again, Jesus said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:37-38).

While on earth, Jesus was both divine and human. He was "God with us" (Matt. 1:23), or "God manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). His humanity gave rise to hunger, thirst, weariness, suffering, and even death at the hands of his enemies. He was hungry when he saw and approached

the fig tree. Perhaps there was fruit on that tree, although it was not yet the season for figs. The fruit of the fig tree appears either before or simultaneously with the appearance of the leaves. There should have been fruit since the tree already had leaves, but Jesus found nothing but leaves.

Why did Jesus come to the fig tree and examine it? As the divine Son of God could he not know that the tree was fruitless without inspecting it? Clearly, our Lord had supernatural knowledge (Matt. 26:31-34; Mark 2:8; 10:33-34; John 2:24-25; Luke 22:9-13). There were times, however, when he obtained information in normal human ways. For example, he asked those who were weeping over the death of Lazarus, "Where have ye laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see" (John 11:33-34).

Jesus did not "curse" the fig tree in a fit of anger. "To suppose that Jesus angrily uttered imprecations against the inanimate object is not only irreverent, but gratuitous and silly" (Broadus). His words were a solemn pronouncement of doom, not to punish the tree, but to teach some valuable truths.

LESSONS TO LEARN

1. Faith gives power to remove mountains. When the disciples were amazed because the fig tree withered, Jesus said to them, "If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matt. 21:21). It may surprise us that Jesus connected this particular lesson to the miracle, but he did, urging his disciples to "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). It must be remembered that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

"Removing mountains" is a metaphor for overcoming difficulties and obstacles, solving great problems, or triumphing over troubles and hardships. Jesus gave miracle-working power to his apostles, but removing literal mountains was not included. To literally cast the mount of Olives into the sea would have served no useful purpose. It is the power of faith based on the word of God that conquers and overcomes. Jesus expanded this lesson to include prayer. It is vital that we pray in faith. Doubt short circuits prayer. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

2. The nation of Israel was barren of fruit and doomed to destruction. There is an interesting parallel between the fig tree and the Jewish nation. The fig tree had put on its foliage before the time of figs, giving the appearance that it was superior to other fig trees in that area, but it was without fruit. Consequently, Jesus pronounced its destruction. Remember that this tree was of the variety that produced fruit before or at the same time that it produced



The Healing of Malchus' Ear

Johnie Edwards

Among the extreme cases of healing done by Jesus was that of restoring an amputated ear! The Healing of Malchus' Ear can be found in Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; and John 18:10. When folks say they believe that healing still goes on like in New Testament days, I usually ask: "Can you or anyone you know put a man's ear back on, like Jesus did?" That usually ends the conversation. Let's take a look at "The Healing Of Malchus' Ear."

THE MAN MALCHUS

Malchus is identified as "a servant of the high priest" (Matt. 26:51). The Old Testament had priests and high priest. Aaron was the first to fill the high priest position. The high priest functions consisted partly in presenting the sin offering for himself and then the people (Lev. 4:3-21). Malchus assisted the high priest in his work.

THE SWORD-MAN

Simon Peter is the man with the sword. Only the account in John informs us of who the sword-man was. "Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear" (John 18:10). Few people probably remember that it was the right ear which was severed.

THE SWORD

Jesus said to Peter: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). The sword in Bible days was a symbol of slaughter and war (Lev. 26:25). In reference to "the powers that be . . . , he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:1-4). The government has been given divine power to punish those who do evil. This is one reason capital punishment needs to be practiced! The Lord's people are not to be a militant people. Isaiah told of the coming of the Lord's church and indicated that it was to be peaceful people. "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:2-4). The *Qur'an* teaches Islam to: "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the last day . . . nor acknowledge the religion of truth . . . until they pay the Jizyah (tribute tax) with willing submission" (Qur'an 9:29). The Lord would say to these Muslims: "Put up thy sword into his place" (Matt. 26:52)!

THE MIRACLE

The replacing of Malchus' ear was a real miracle. The

leaves. The Jewish people claimed to be superior to other nations; they boasted of being Abraham's offspring; they held to their rituals and traditions; they viewed themselves as God's chosen race; they gloried in outward forms of religion. But they were a tree without fruit and ready to be hewn down (Matt. 3:10). They had rejected the prophets and had stoned God's messengers, and now they were rejecting the Messiah. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Luke 13:34-35). In Matthew 24, Jesus foretold the impending doom of their proud city of Jerusalem.

3. Professed disciples who do not bear fruit are doomed to destruction. The illustration of the vine and

the branches in John 15 teaches that Christ's disciples must bear fruit. We are to be "fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10). To walk in the Spirit is to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Eph. 5:9; Gal. 5:22-23). The barren fig tree is a "striking symbol of the hypocrite, who, not content with appearing to be as good as other people, usually puts on the appearance of being a great deal better" (McGarvey). Our Master warned, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1). The tree which Jesus cursed had foliage without fruit. It vividly illustrates the person who has pretense without production, promise without performance, profession without practice.

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Elisha fit the same scenario. Isaiah, too, employs signs to confirm his mission (Isa. 7:10ff.; 38:5ff.).

In the story of Samson, the strong man’s locks are the apparent source of his power. But like the prophetic sign, they are no more than a setting for the manifestation of God’s will. When in this instance divine power manifests itself through the consecrated hair of the Nazarite, it is a sign that he is holy to the Lord. There is no independent causal nexus between Samson’s hair and strength. Its real source is the blessing and spirit of the Lord (Judg. 13:24, 25; 14:6, 19). When his locks were shorn, the Lord left him (16:20). His strength returned when his hair grew back, yet it was the Lord’s answer to his prayer that enabled him to destroy the Dagon temple. In every sense the Lord was the true source of his strength. God is behind every miracle of the Old Testament. Sorcery and magic are fully discredited in the Bible. Only God has the power to work wonders and perform miracles.

SCIENCE AND MIRACLES

Some modern scientists suppose that their discipline is a sort of omniscient god, unlimited in its capacity to make extrapolations into and about areas wherein they have no expertise and little or no knowledge. In fact, genuine science is nothing more than true knowledge. It is what we may know about the material world around us. As Dr. L.T. More once grudgingly admitted, “Science does not embrace

all phenomena and it has not, for its use, all the criteria for truth” (*The Dogma of Evolution* 354). Those words were penned in 1925, and not much has changed in this regard in the years that have passed since that time. Even though much more genuine knowledge has been collected and analyzed, science is yet limited to the physical world and what may be known about it.

J.N.S. Sullivan, in his book *The Limitations of Science* (1933), pointed out that, “Science is confined to a knowledge of structure . . . science deals with but a partial aspect of reality, and . . . there is not the slightest reason for supposing that everything science ignores is less real than what it accepts” (142, 147). E.A. Burt of Cornell University spoke of the “metaphysical foundations of modern science” because today’s science often palms off unrecognized and nonscientific value judgments as empirical fact. Anthony Standen even spoke of modern science as a “sacred cow.” Science has its proper sphere, but that sphere is not in the realm of what it cannot measure, quantify, or even observe. Genuine science cannot comment about miracles, because they are not today observable, and therefore are in the realm of all other historical events, and especially metaphysical ones. Therefore, whatever some well-known scientist may say about such things may find a friendly hearing in the ears of many of our contemporaries, but the plain fact is that neither science itself nor scientists in their role as representatives of the discipline do not have a knowledge base from which to comment regarding that which lies

right ear had been sword-severed. The Bible says: “And he (Jesus) touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:51). A lot of things folks call miracles are not miracles at all. Miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles were extraordinary, divine in nature and above the normal, in that they were supernatural. They were such as could not be produced by natural agents and means. Bible miracles were always instantaneous and never partial! Just as in the case of the healing of Malchus’ ear; Peter cut it off and Jesus just “touched his ear,” and it was healed. By the way, do you know of anyone one, today, who can do this kind of healing?

SO-CALLED MIRACLES OF TODAY

There are many today claiming to perform miracles. You can be assured from Bible teaching, such is not the case. The “faith-healers” of today are just deceivers. They work on the hard of hearing, those who can’t see very well, stomach ailments, and the like. Ever see any of these fellows raise the dead, walk on water, turn water to wine, still a raging sea, stop a storm, cause the dumb to speak, the blind to see as can be read about in the Bible? It’s always something one cannot really see or even know the ones being healed. Isn’t that rather strange?

WHY MIRACLES ANYWAY

When we know the real reason for miracles in the days of Jesus and the apostles, we will understand why we have none and need none today. Apostles performed miracles, called “signs” as a means of “confirming the word” spoken by the apostles (Mark 16:17-20). Since the word of God has been confirmed, it does not need to be reconfirmed by such miracles (Heb. 2:3).

JESUS AND MIRACLES

Jesus and the apostles did not perform miracles, just to get folks well, but the miracles served as a badge of authority to prove they were who they said they were and their message was true and from God. It is said of Jesus: “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).

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outside the jurisdiction and purview of their understanding and cognizance.

“PARTIAL THINKING”

Throughout the history of mankind, the human psyche has been wed to the fallacy of “partial thinking.” This has been the case in a variety of different ways at various times. At one time, for example, only the spiritual aspect of the world possessed validity in the scholarly community. When the Catholic Church and her jealous leadership held sway during the Dark Ages, genuine science was kept under the heel of the religious hierarchy. The powerful arm of the State was employed at the behest of the apostate church to quell honest dissent. This was both foolish and counter-productive. In our own time, precisely the opposite is the case: Religion is being crushed under the heel of modern pseudo-science and her ambitious hierarchy. The tables have turned, and the power structure has changed, but we have only exchanged one form of half-truth for another. This also, is both foolish and counterproductive.

In yielding to the fallacy of “partial thinking,” in whatever form it happens to take, man has always cut himself off from part of the truth, as he has put undue emphasis on the other part. Like the proverbial blind men who examined the elephant with only their bare hands, each coming away with a partial, and so partially true, description of the enormous beast, he may be partially right but he is also partially wrong. According to the story, one blind fellow who happened to feel the tail said it was, “Like a snake”; the next man felt the side of the animal and said it was, “Like a wall”; another took hold of the huge floppy ear and intoned that it was, “Like a great fan”; the last man grabbed the trunk and surmised that it was, “Like a huge water hose.” All were right, but only partially so. However, this means they were also partially incorrect as well. There was much more to be experienced than just that part which each of them had sensed.

Denying the existence of the spiritual side of man and the relevance of a spiritual world, as so many do in our day, leaves us with a perverted view of reality. It also makes it difficult to reason with the skeptic regarding the possibility of the miraculous. His “partial thinking” limits his capacity for appreciating this “other side” of life. As Dr. Frank O. Green of Wheaton College has written, “It is logical that if we are governed only by the laws of nature, we have no basis for belief in anything that we would call miraculous. But if the laws of nature do not constitute the entire picture, we may logically include miracles as a necessary part of the complete whole” (“Can We Believe in the Miraculous?” in *Can I Trust the Bible?* Edited by Howard F. Vos, 37).

PRESENCE OF APOLOGETIC ELEMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

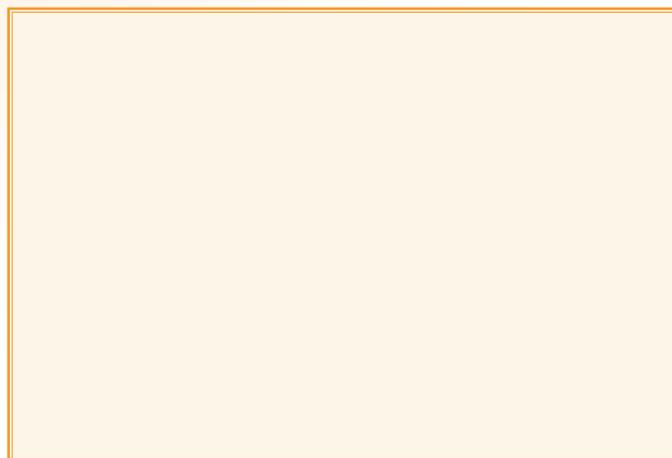
Because many religious people today have been anes-

thetized to this aspect of reality by popular culture, they do not recognize the existence of this “other side” of life. As a result, they do not appreciate the validity of the enterprise that we sometimes refer to as “apologetics.” The presence of patently obvious apologetic elements within the New Testament literature, however, fly in the face of this viewpoint. As J.K.S. Reid wrote, “There is in fact no difficulty in identifying apologetic elements in the New Testament. They appear both early and prominently. Apologetic activity is built into the foundations of the apostolic witness” (*Christian Apologetics* 15).

The word “apology” and its cognate “apologetics” are of Greek origin. The noun *apologia* (“a defense”) and its verbal form *apologoumai* (“to make a defense”) are both found in classical Greek, New Testament Greek, and also in the Patristic writings. The word *apologia* occurs eight times in the New Testament, and the verbal form appears eleven. The verbal form always, and the nominal form almost always, denote an answer given in reply to a charge leveled against an individual, or an argument justifying a claim advanced by an individual. Paul, for example, made his “defense” in the presence of King Agrippa regarding all the charges brought against him by the Jews (Acts 26:1, 2). On other occasions, Christianity is the immediate object defended. When Paul was in prison in Rome, he wrote to his fellow Christians in Philippi, twice referring to his plight as the consequence of his “defense” of the Gospel (Phil. 1:7, 17). Peter called on his audience to be always prepared to “give a defense” of the hope which they had in them (1 Pet. 3:15, 16).

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

The most powerful “defense” of Christianity, however, appears in the four Gospels and in the book of Acts. All of the Gospels provide significant numbers of accounts of the miracles performed by Jesus in the presence of his disciples and others. The following chart gives a summary of the Lord’s miracles as they are recounted in the four gospel records:



HEALING AND RESURRECTION MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

Recipient	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Official's son				4:46-54
Possessed man		1:21-27	4:33-37	
Peter's in-law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Many at sunset	8:16-17	1:32-39	4:40-41	
Leper	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-15	
Paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:18-26	
Man at Bethesda				5:12-15
Withered hand	12:9-13	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Crowd in Galilee	4:23-25			
Centurion's son	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Widow's son			7:11-17	
Two demoniacs	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Jairus' daughter (1)	9:18-19	5:22-24	8:41-42	
Unclean woman	9:20-22	5:24-34	8:49-56	
Jairus' daughter (2)	9:23-26	5:35-43	8:49-56	
Two blind men	9:27-31			
Dumb man	9:32-34			
Touching clothes	14:34-36	6:53-56		
Crowd in Galilee	9:35			
Few in Nazareth		6:1-6		
Gentile's daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Deaf man		7:31-37		
Multitude	15:29-31			
Epileptic boy	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-42	
Blind man				9:1-41
Blind/dumb man	12:22-24		11:14-15	
Man of Bethsaida		8:22-26		
Stooped woman			13:10-17	
Man with Dropsy			14:1-16	
Lazarus raised				11:1-45
Ten Lepers			17:11-19	
Crowds in Judea	19:1-2			
Bartimaeus	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Many in Jerusalem	21:14			
Ear of Malchus			27:47-53	18:10-11
Resurrection	28:1-10	16:1-20	24:1-53	

OTHER MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Water to wine				2:1-11
Draught of fish			5-1-11	
Calms the sea	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Feeds 5000	14:13-21	6:32-44		6:1-13
Walks on water	14:22-33	6:45-51		6:15-21
Feeds 4000	15:32-39	8:1-10		
Money in fish	17:24-27			
Tree withered	21:18-22	11:12-24		
Second great catch of fish				21:1-14

These charts point out the fact that Jesus performed many miracles of different character and type. Not only so, but it shows that all of the Gospel accounts display the miracles of Jesus prominently in their presentation of his life. Obviously, these writers were very much unashamed of the miraculous aspect of the work of Christ. Evidently the miracles proved something to those who witnessed them at the time, and they demonstrated something even to the one who read about them later: "Jesus said to him, Because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:29-31).

What is the justification of the Lord's miracles? How may they be logically defended? God is all-powerful, or omnipotent. The miracles of Christ are illustrations of his power. They also associate him with the all-powerful God, for only God is capable of such genuine wonders. Each type of miracle demonstrates some aspect of that divine faculty. The Lord's healing miracles demonstrate his power over human illnesses. His ability to walk on water and calm the stormy sea prove his mastery over the forces of nature. His power to feed enormous numbers of people with small amounts of food, and turn water into the best wine, establishes his creative potential. The miracles of resurrection demonstrate his authority over the great enemy of life, death itself. His own resurrection is the most powerful antidote to the fear of death that the human family has ever known: ". . . that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14b, 15).

Several unusual facts establish the miracles of Jesus as unique among ancient stories of wonderful happenings in

history. These novel circumstances make the miraculous works of Christ peerless, and not at all at home among the myths and legends of the ancient world.

1. The Lord's miracles were performed in the cities and towns, when he was surrounded by mobs of people, and when he was speaking to multitudes. In other words, they were performed under circumstances that invited investigation. They did not happen in isolated places. There was nothing hidden or concealed about them. They were not merely the whispered rumors of his disciples about things done only in their presence and before their eyes only. Healing cults of our time can produce only their own devotees as witnesses of their so-called miracles. Jesus performed his miracles before unbelieving critics and put them to silence with irrefutable proof of his divine power

2. The Lord's miracles were constant and varied. Modern faith healers and others who claim such power restrict their own attempts at the miraculous to speaking in tongues and healings. Moreover, they limit their activities to friendly gatherings. Jesus, on the other hand, performed miracles wherever he happened to be at the time, and more often than not, demonstrated his power in the most unfriendly circumstances and in front of the most unbelieving audiences. Too, his miracles were of greatly varied types, including healing blindness, leprosy, palsy, a withered hand, deafness and dumbness, demonic possession, and insanity. His healings involved a simple touch, and at other times were performed at a distance from the one affected. He raised individuals from the dead in front of crowds of people and in private homes with only the parents present. He demonstrated miraculous knowledge of persons and events about which he had no possible way of knowing as a mere human being (John 1:47-51; 4:17-19, 29; etc.). It would have been utterly impossible for a mere man to have perpetuated so many hoaxes on so many people for so long a period of time. The miracles of Jesus were real.

3. The Lord's miracles cannot be explained away.

There is no adequate alternative explanation, nor contrary evidence to contradict the biblical claim that Jesus was God's Christ. Consider the case of Judas Iscariot. When he went to betray the Lord, what could have been more damaging than the first-hand evidence that the miracles of Jesus were fakes or tricks? On this score, however, the mouth of Judas was sealed. All the traitor could do was to inform the Jewish authorities where Jesus prayed. In addition, the fact that Jesus was hated by many of his fellow countrymen is a matter of the Gospel record. The same is true of the infant church. Yet the inhabitants of Palestine who certainly harbored sufficient motive in their hatred and sufficient proximity to the life of Jesus Christ never wrote a single line in denial of even one of the miracles that the Gospel accounts relate.

THE MIRACULOUS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts is the most potent testimonial to the use of miracles as proof of the genuineness of the gospel message which formed the ideological basis for the spread of primitive Christianity. The miracles of Jesus recounted in the Gospels demonstrate the deity of Christ and effectively prove that he is the Son of God. But the miracles in Acts establish the efficacy of the message preached by the apostles and explain the rapid growth of the church in the Greco-Roman world. It is, in effect, an *apologia* to Greeks and Romans that demonstrates God's interruption of the normal flow of human events by mighty acts of power wrought through the apostolic representatives of Jesus Christ. It leads the reader to only one conclusion: God is in this rapidly spreading movement, and it cannot and ought not be deterred or harassed by governmental intervention.

As Luke opens the book of Acts, he records the unusual events of the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. He speaks of massive crowds gathering because of the extraordinary sights and sounds that attended the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of Christ (Acts 2:1-4). Secondly, he gives an account of various reactions to this remarkable series of happenings from the perspective of the bystanders: "And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What does this mean? But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine'" (2:12, 13). The crowd was clearly at a loss to explain the nature of those things they were seeing and hearing.

This is where Peter and the eleven apostles enter the picture. Peter was not mystified by what he saw and heard. He did two things. To begin with, he demolished the interpretation that had been offered by the skeptical in the crowd: it was too early in the day for people to be under the influence of strong drink. Next, he gave his own construction of what was unfolding before this gathering. Jesus, once crucified and humiliated, had now been raised gloriously from the grave and was announced to be "both Lord and Christ." The Old Testament prophetic statements gave their endorsement of all these things.

The apostle also introduced the persuasive power of the miraculous deeds of Christ as evidence God was working in and through him: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). The most powerful of his miracles, though, was plainly the resurrection from the dead: ". . . whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (v. 24).

One will immediately notice that Peter in both these instances made his apology on the basis of the miracles of Christ. Fortunately, he could rely upon the memories and experiences of many in the audience. They had seen these things with their own eyes, so that he could say, "even as ye yourselves know." Quoting from Psalms 16:8ff. and 110:1, Peter concluded that Scripture had given ample testimony that these things were to come to pass. Thereupon, many enquired what they must do, to which he replied, "Repent and be baptized" (2:37, 38). The force of these apologetic arguments had taken their toll upon the audience. Many were convinced. Thus, the apologetic value of the miracles of Christ and their evidential importance were proven by the effect it had upon those first hearers.

Apostolic miracles are treated in much the same way as they are recounted throughout the remainder of the book of Acts. The miracle at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, wherein a man who was lame from his birth was healed by Peter, is offered as a potent evidence of the power God

had granted these rather ordinary men because of their relationship with Jesus. In Luke's words, the reaction of the people is especially emphasized: "Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and anklebones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering" (Acts 3:6-11).

These instances are indicative of the general trend in the book of Acts, which clearly offers apostolic miracles as evidence of their divine sanction. God gave proof of his presence in the work of Philip through the miracles he wrought (8:6, 13), miraculous intervention brought Saul of Tarsus to repentance (9:3ff.) so that "all that heard him were amazed" (9:21), at Lydda brought many to turn to the Lord because of the healing of the palsied Aeneas (10:34, 35), caused many to believe in the Lord on account of the raising of Dorcas at Joppa (10:36-42), "astonished" those of the circumcision at the household of Cornelius by a divine manifestation (10:44, 45), delivered Peter from Herod's prison (12:7) to the astonishment of the Christians gathered at the house of Mary the mother of John (12:16), blinded Elymas the sorcerer before Sergius Paulus at Paphos on the Isle of Cyprus so that "the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished" (13:4-13), at Iconium God "granted signs and wonders to be done" by Paul and Barnabas (14:3), at Lystra they healed a cripple from his mother's womb (14:8-10), at Jerusalem the audience of Barnabas and Paul listened as they recounted "what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (15:12), at Philippi in Macedonia Paul delivered a damsel possessed with a spirit of divination (16:16-18), in Asia "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" (19:11) while the seven sons of the sorcerer Sceva were thwarted in their efforts to cast out an evil spirit, and "fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds" (19:14-18).

In Troas, Eutychus, who fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead, was raised to life by Paul and the Christians "were not a little comforted" (20:12). At Tyre Paul is warned of God that, if he went on to Jerusalem, trouble awaited him (21:4); Agabus offered a similar warning at Caesarea (21:11). In Jerusalem, Paul recounted his miraculous vision of the Christ (22:6ff.), and his subsequent conversion and commission. There

also Paul was comforted when the Lord stood by him and promised that he would preach in Rome also (23:11). Again, he retold the story of his conversion before King Agrippa (26:12ff.), saying, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

During his voyage to Rome, at Crete he warned the centurion and others of the imminent dangers that awaited them on the seas, "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives" (27:10). When the centurion believed the ship's captain and entered upon the voyage, Paul was quiet until the tempestuous winds threatened the ship for many days, then he spoke out to all who would hear, "I exhort you all to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, 'Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee'" (27:22-24). All 276 lives were saved because the captain listened to Paul's advice (27:37, 44). When they reached shore, Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper, and yet shook the creature off without feeling any ill effects from the bite (28:3-6). The natives on the island "said that he was a god" (28:6) when they saw this amazing feat. The final miracle in the book of Acts is the healing of the father of Malta's ruler, Publius, who was ill from dysentery and fever (28:7, 8).

Thus, the pages of Acts are dotted with the accounts of the miracles of the apostles and of astonishing events that surrounded their lives. It is patently evident that Luke is offering these reports in order to show that God was with these men in their work in a way that is only explicable on the ground that Christianity was a religion revealed by God and protected by his providential hand.

CONCLUSION

Even early, non-Christian sources testify to the miracles of Jesus as evidence that he was a remarkable man. Josephus says of him, "Jesus . . . wrought surprising feats" (*Antiquities* 18:63). The *Talmud*, written much later and making the case for the rabbinic view of the Lord, says that "They hanged Jeshu" because "he practiced sorcery" (Sanhedrin 43a), which is probably a reference to exorcism by the power of the devil, something Jesus was accused of in the gospel account (Mark 3:22). Justin Martyr responded to this charge directly in chapter 30 of his *First Apology* ("he performed what we call His mighty works by magical art, and by this appeared to be the Son of God"). The fact that this explanation was still being offered to explain the miracles of Christ is actually a valuable evidence of the reality of these miracles. The Jews were thereby admitting that Jesus worked wonders and signs, but they were still attempting to explain them on the ground that he was in league with the Devil.

The miracles of Christ and of the apostles are a most valuable asset in a genuine dialogue with those who do not believe. We do not agree with A.B. Bruce, who wrote that “miracles cannot be offered as evidences of Christianity now with the confidence with which they were employed for this purpose by the apologists of a past age. Men do not now believe in Christ because of his miracles: they believe in miracles because they have first believed in Christ.” When the wonderful works of Christ and the apostles are analyzed with care and fairness, they remain a powerful force in bringing unbelievers to the Lord.

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“**Syro-Phoenician**” continued from page 2

bition was rooted, not in prejudice, but in principle. Salvation was of the Jews (John 4:19-24, esp. v. 22). Spiritual blessing extended unto all mankind through the lineage of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; Gal. 3:6-9). According to God’s scheme, the gospel was preached in orderly progression: first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, and finally to the Gentiles/Greeks (Acts 1:6-8; 3:25-26; 8:4-8, 25; 9:10-16; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 13:44-49; Rom. 1:16-17; 2:9-11; 15:7-13).

BREAD AND DOGS

Reflect also upon his reply, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” In ancient Israel, the dog was not “man’s best friend.” In fact, according to *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, calling someone a dog was one of the most offensive ways of insulting that person (s.v. “Animals of the Bible: Dogs”). Most biblical references to dogs are derogatory. Used metaphorically, it is a term of contempt (1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Sam. 16:9) and self-abasement (1 Sam. 24:14; 2 Sam. 9:8). Male cult prostitutes and those who are sexually immoral are identified as “dogs” (Deut. 23:17-18; Rev. 22:14-15). So also are persons of low status, i.e., violent, vicious, and evil (Pss. 22:16-18; 59:5-8, 13-15), along with those who are faithless and false (Matt. 7:6; Phil. 3:2).

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

In speaking to the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus was not manifesting bigotry, for he committed no sin (2 Cor. 5:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:21-22; Heb. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:4-5). Furthermore, he was not tempting her by evil to evil (Jas. 1:13-14). As a full-member of the Godhead (John 1:1-3, 14-18), the words of Jesus test and try the sons of men (Pss. 11:4-7; 139:23-24; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; Heb. 4:12-13; Rev. 2:23).

In the Old Testament, God tested Abraham (Heb. 11:17-19; Jas. 2:21-24; Gen. 22:1-3) and Israel (Deut. 8:1-3, 15-

16; 13:1-5). In like manner, Christ examined Philip (John 6:1-14, esp. v. 6). In the present context, he does the same to the Canaanite woman. Through testing and trial, her character is revealed.

Would she stoop to bigotry and bias? Would she respond with bile and bitterness? No, marvelously and wondrously, she rose above the prejudice and partiality. Her heart was not tainted with antipathy and aversion. Rather, it was filled with faith, fidelity, and full-assurance. Her reply was marked with humility and grace: “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

HORROR AND HEALING

Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” As a result, her daughter was healed at once. According to Mark’s account, Jesus said, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.” And going back to her home, the Canaanite woman found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

In the New Testament, demon-possessed persons were afflicted with various physical and mental diseases (epilepsy, paralysis, loss of hearing, sight and speech, lunacy, madness, etc.). Such maladies were caused by evil spirits who entered and controlled certain unfortunate individuals, afflicting the mind and body, debasing their lives, dominating their existence, destroying health, and dethroning reason.

In our present context, the Canaanite woman cried out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.” The Greek word *daimonizomai*, occurring here and twelve other times in the New Testament, means “to be possessed by a demon” (Thomas) or “be possessed by a hostile spirit” (BDAG). Besides general references (Matt. 4:24; 8:16; Mark 1:32), this word is used of the Gadarene/Gerasene Demoniac(s) (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39), a man who was mute (Matt. 9:32-34), another who was blind and mute (Matt. 12:22-24), and also here (Matt. 15:21-28, esp. v. 22).

While effecting physical disability (deafness, muteness, paralysis, etc.), demon possession was far more serious than the disorder itself. Often identified as “unclean spirits,” demons are the malignant foes of truth and light, goodness and grace, health and happiness; they are the enemies of God and man. For the individual so accursed, their effect was debilitating, degenerative, and destructive. Ministers and minions of Satan, agents of the prince of darkness, servants of the god of this world, demons are subjects of Beelzebul, the lord of filth and flies (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15).

Through miracles, signs and wonders, Jesus demonstrated his authority over the physical and spiritual realms (John 5:36; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4). Life and death, misfortune and disease, distance, quality, quantity, the forces of nature, and evil spirits were all subject to his power (Matt. 9:33; 12:22-23; Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36).

On other occasions, when Jesus cast out demons, the crowds were amazed, saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" (Matt. 9:32-33; cf. Luke 11:14). To honest and open minds, this evidence suggested that he was the Son of David, i.e., the Messiah foreshadowed in prophecy (Matt. 12:22-23).

CONCLUSION

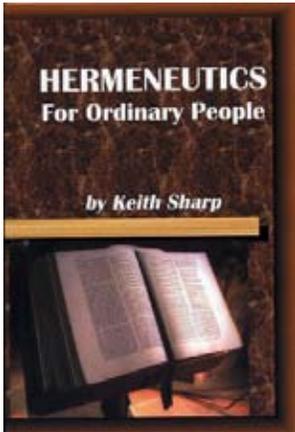
The Syro-Phoenician woman's faith is evidenced in

many ways. She sought out Jesus. She would not be dissuaded by his disciples. She would not take "no" for an answer. Humbling herself before the Master, she allowed an indecorous designation to be applied to her daughter, deferentially pleading for whatever crumbs of goodness that he might bestow.

Are we willing to pursue the Lord with the same fervor? Do we look to him in time of trouble? Are we willing to humble ourselves? Do we trust in his goodness and grace? These abiding lessons are beautifully illustrated by an otherwise obscure woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon.

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Hermeneutics for Ordinary People



Bobby L. Graham

This book, recently written by Keith Sharp, makes no claim to being a work on the par with Dungan's *Hermeneutics*, Lamar's *Organon of Scripture*, or Berkhof's *Principles of Interpretation* (Sacred Hermeneutics). It does, however, purport to present the reader not well versed in such matters an easy course in learning to understand the Bible. Such a purpose is much needed and well pursued in this work.

The topics considered in the book distinguish it from the classic hermeneutics text. Chapter headings include "How Do We Know We Have the Bible?" (2 chapters), dealing with the canon and text of the Bible; English Translations of the Bible (2 chapters); "Translations: Dynamic Equivalence or Essential Literal"; "The King James Version Only Controversy"; "Can We all Understand the Bible Alike?"; "Behold, a Sower Went Forth to Sow"; "Methods of Bible Study"; "The Rules of the Game"; "Rules of Biblical Interpretation"; "Figures of Speech Used in the Bible"; "The Authority of the Scriptures"; "The Two Covenants"; "How to Use the Old Testament"; "The Authority of Christ"; "Taught by God"; "Do We Need Scriptural Authority?"; "The Pattern of Sound Words"; "The Nature of Authority"; "How the Lord Expresses His Will"; "How to Tell What the Lord Requires"; "Faith and Opinion"; "Legalism?"; "Liberty; Gospel and Doctrine"; and "Expedience."

One who reads widely so that he is informed about current issues, questions, and controversies immediately recognizes in these chapter headings much that is current and timely. While the depth of the material is not what one finds in most hermeneutics books, the ordinary reader will find much to satisfy his inclination to study and to understand the will of the Lord. Evidently it was for such readers that the author worked. An example of the brevity and simplicity needed by many, yet sufficient material to ground faith, is found in the chapters concerning canon and text. It appears to this writer that the ordinary reader will find adequate treatment of these matters.

No book satisfies all people, nor are most books aimed at all readers. Those to whom this one hundred thirty-page work is directed can and will profit from it.

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Quips & Quotes

Hafley-Brandenburg Debate

"The Scriptures teach that a child of God, one saved by the blood of Christ, may so sin as to be eternally lost in hell."

Affirm: Larry Hafley (member of the church of Christ)

Deny: Kent Brandenburg (Bethel Baptist Church)

"The Scriptures teach that a child of God, one saved by the blood of Christ, cannot so sin as to be lost eternally in hell."

Affirm: Kent Brandenburg (Bethel Baptist Church)

Deny: Larry Hafley (member of the church of Christ)

Dates: for this Bible discussion will take place on the March 27, 28, 30 and 31, 2006. Each session will begin at 7:00 P.M.

Location: The meeting place of the Pinole church of Christ, 755 Pinole Valley Rd. Pinole, CA 94564 (510) 724-1994.

Accommodations: There is a Best Western in Martinez, CA (John Muir Inn), Marriot Courtyard in Richmond CA, Motel 6 in Pinole, CA, Marriot Residence Inn in Concord, CA, and others. If you need further assistance as far as finding out specifics about their accommodations, please call the phone number above, or contact Dwight Bowerman at dwightbowerman@comcast.net.

Video Tapes, CD, DVD, and Cassette tapes of the debate will be available, at www.Biblework.com, free of charge. For DVDs, CDs, Sermon Charts, and Bulletin Articles: www.biblework.com.

California State Campus Bars Student Group

"San Bernardino, Calif. — California State University, San Bernardino, has barred a Christian student group from organizing on campus because it would discriminate against non-Christians and homosexuals.

"As in similar disputes on other campuses, the Christian Student Association's proposed constitution included a sexual morality statement and required that members and officers be Christians.

"The university said it acted under a section of California's education code that says public university student groups cannot exclude people on the basis of religion or sexual orientation.

"Ryan Sorba, a student who tried to form the association, said, 'This is about whether the First Amendment is allowed to exist at Cal State San Bernardino and whether or not Christians are allowed to exist,' he said" (*The Indianapolis Star* [January 7, 2006], B 3).

Unmarried Couple Told to Get Separate Rooms

"St. Paul, Minn. — Two University of St. Thomas profes-

sors quit a trip with students to Australia after their Roman Catholic school required them to book separate rooms.

"Ellen Kennedy, 57, and Leigh Lawton, 61, who live together as an unmarried couple, have taken such trips before, but this time the school required separate rooms. The couple said that pretending to sleep apart would be deceitful, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* reported. Neither is Catholic.

"Months before, St. Thomas told a lesbian conductor she couldn't bring her partner on a choir tour to France after a few students complained.

"Theology professor David Landry wrote in a recent faculty newsletter, 'If sin and vice become disqualifying factors for university employees, then students might have to start teaching themselves'" (*The Indianapolis Star* [January 7, 2006], B 3).

Russian Orthodoxy Breaks With Church of Sweden

"Moscow — The Russian Orthodox Church, one of the world's largest Christian bodies, has severed relations with the Church of Sweden over the latter's recognition of same-sex unions. The Russians previously broke with the U.S. Episcopal Church for consecrating an openly gay bishop.

"Metropolitan Kirill, who heads the church external relations department, said the Russian synod expressed 'categorical condemnation' of the Swedish action" (*The Indianapolis Star* [January 7, 2006], B 3).

Preacher Needed

Wakulla, Florida: The Church of Christ at Wakulla, located fifteen miles south of Tallahassee is seeking a full-time gospel preacher to work with a non-institutional congregation which can provide part of his own support. They have a membership of approximately 35. Wakulla is one of the fastest growing counties in Florida with good schools. If interested please contact Willard Waldrop at 850 509-9158; email wwwtilesnake@comcast.net or Joe Walker 850-421-8051; email wimpyjoe@comcast.net.

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