



# 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 of such things, this is the thinking of the majority of those with whom we come in contact in our day.

## 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

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## Water to Wine

### Don Wright

The miracles of Christ started out in impressive fashion. Jesus and his new

disciples were invited to a marriage in Cana of Galilee to which Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also invited (John 2:1-2). These kinds of wedding feasts lasted up to seven days. It was a week filled with joyous festivities with plenty of food and drink. But on this occasion something went wrong — the wine ran out. Anyone who has ever arranged a wedding and the ensuing reception can immediately sympathize with the family of the bridegroom. To run out of wine on an occasion like this would have been an indelible disgrace to the family, to say nothing of what a humiliating experience it would be for the happy couple getting married.

This is where the story turns from an ordinary incident where a mistake is made to an extraordinary happening where a mistake is rectified by the miraculous powers of Jesus. It begins with Mary informing Jesus that the wine has run out (v. 3). By the response of Jesus, we know that Mary is asking her Son for more than a quick wine run to the local market before the guests notice the problem. She is asking Jesus to solve this dilemma by somehow using his miraculous power. Furthermore, her motive seems to be a desire for Jesus to manifest his glory to the world. Being God and having the ability to read the hearts of men (John 2:24-25), Jesus knew what Mary really wanted. This brings on a mild rebuke from Jesus. “Jesus saith unto her, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come?’” (v. 4). The rebuke is not seen by the term “woman” which was a term of courteous respect, but by the question, “What have I to do with thee?” Jesus was reminding Mary that he was not just her earthly son; he was her Lord and Savior. He had always been an obedient son so far as their earthly relationship is concerned, but his divine mission was between his Father and him, including the *hour* of his ultimate glorification. In regard to that heavenly task, Mary had neither part nor lot in the matter. Thus, Jesus tells his mother, “mine hour is not yet come.” In the book of John, the *hour* of our Lord repeatedly refers to his ultimate glorification which would take place in his death, burial, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of his Father (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). It was not time for the glory of Jesus to be fully manifested.

Nevertheless, while the hour had not yet come for Jesus to manifest his glory fully, Jesus would give secondary manifestations of his glory throughout his personal ministry (all of his miracles fall into this category). It seems clear that we do not have the full conversation between Jesus and Mary recorded for us, but Jesus said something to Mary to indicate that he would help with the present problem. So Mary tells the servants “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (v. 5). Jesus then proceeded to perform his first public miracle by turning water into wine and saving the day for the bridegroom and his

*see “Water to Wine” on p. 58*

# Healing the Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda

(John 5:1-17)  
Kevin Maxey

“Who is this Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’ But the one who was healed did not know who it was” (John 5:12-13). This question was asked of the impotent man who was healed at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-17). Here we find one of the most important questions ever asked concerning Jesus, “Who is this Man?” Your eternal fate depends on your response to this question (John 14:6). Who is Jesus? Is He a religious impostor, just a good man in history, or the Son of God who came in the flesh to save all who would obey Him? The healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda is one of numerous miraculous accounts recorded in the Scriptures verifying Jesus as the Son of God. “Who is this Man?”

### This Was a Man of Compassion

While certainly busy with activity during his trip to Jerusalem for a feast, Jesus took the time to visit a place of infirmity. Of all the things Jesus could have been doing, on this day we find him at a pool overflowing with “sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed” (John 5:3). Amidst this sick multitude Jesus “saw” a man in need, “knew” the severity of his condition (John 5:6), had compassion on him, and stopped to do something about it. No one else took helpful notice of this lame man of thirty-eight years. No friend could even be found to help him into the water (John 5:7). Jesus was a friend to this one who had no friend (Prov. 17:17; 18:24).

“Who is this man?” Know that just as Jesus had compassion on this crippled man in Jerusalem, Jesus also sees you, knows your condition, and has compassion on you. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to him” (2 Chron. 16:9; 2 Pet. 3:12). You may, at times, feel like the unnoticed lame man, but be assured that God knows. He knows of the things you need even before you ask (Matt. 6:8). He even knows the number of hairs on your head (Matt. 10:30). Our compassionate Savior came to “preach the gospel to the poor . . . to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Jesus not only knows of your needs, he acted by selflessly giving his own life in order to meet your spiritual needs of salvation (Rom. 5:6-11).

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As we can find comfort in Jesus' compassion towards us, how much compassion do you show toward others (2 Cor. 1:3-4)? How often do you visit places of infirmity (Eccl. 7:2-4)? How many troubled souls have you passed by that are like this lame man with no friend to help (Luke 10:31-32)? Remember that pure and undefiled religion demands your caring for those in need (Jas. 1:27). "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given" (Prov. 19:17). "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses" (Prov. 28:27). Jesus will bar from the gates of heaven those who do not show compassion on those in need. "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" because "inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Matt. 25:31-46). The ultimate expression of compassion you can show toward someone else is showing concern for his soul. "Brethren, if any man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). Will you be a friend to those who have none? How compassionate are you?

### This Was a Man of Power

Next this account teaches us that Jesus was a man who could do works like no other. "Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:8-9). For thirty-eight years this man could find no cure, until Jesus miraculously healed him.

Some religious leaders claim to have the ability to perform miracles today. However, these individuals, try as they might, cannot heal as Jesus did. Compare this miracle of Jesus with the false claims of "modern healers." (1) It was immediate. "And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:9). The lame man did not have to wait several months like many faith healers require today. (2) It did not necessitate faith on the sick person's part. At the time that the lame man was healed, he did not even know who Jesus was (John 5:13), yet many today excuse their failure to perform miracles on the so-called lack of faith of others. (3) It was supernatural. This was a man with a real illness for thirty-eight years and he was healed supernaturally. In their attempt to prove that they can perform miracles, "modern faith healers" lower the bar on what the definition of a true miracle is. A miracle refers to a work "of a *supernatural* origin and character, such as *could* not be produced by natural agents and means" (*Vine's*



*Expository Dictionary*, emphasis mine). A miracle is not a coincidence or even an amazing act within the laws of nature. A miracle is something that breaks a law of nature. Jesus did not "heal" someone coincidentally by natural means and then call it a miracle, like self-acclaimed "miracle workers" today. (4) It was undeniable. Notice Jesus' enemies did not and could not deny that he performed a miracle. The apostles performed similar miracles that their enemies could not deny. "For indeed that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16). This also was not just one isolated incident. Jesus demonstrated this power by healing the sick from town to town. "Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well" (Mark 6:56). Modern day faith healers should be able to go to places of infirmity, like Jesus did, and immediately, supernaturally, and undeniably heal those that are paralyzed, regardless of their faith.

Jesus' demonstration of supreme power over physical illness establishes our confidence in his supreme power over spiritual illness. Know that you serve a Savior who "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). He is the Great Physician come to heal our spiritual infirmities (Luke 5:31-32). Miracles like this one give you the confidence to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

### This Was a Man of Authority

This manifestation of omnipotence also confirmed the authority of Jesus. When some Jews saw this healed man carrying his bed they confronted him saying, "It is not lawful for you to carry your bed" (John 5:10). When the healed man replied, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk'" (John 5:11), they scorned at the idea of anyone commanding someone to act in violation of their traditions. This indeed was merely a man-made tradition and not a divine law because Jesus would never command someone to commit sin (Jas. 1:13; Luke 17:1-2). So they demandingly asked, "Who is this Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'" implying, "How dare anyone tell you to violate our authority?!"

Jesus told the lame man one thing, while the Pharisees told him another. Who should he listen to? The healed man was content to do what Jesus directed because his miraculous powers confirmed his authority as superior to the authority of men. John explains he recorded this

# “I Am the Bread of Life”

Frank Vondracek

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The pangs of hunger begin to gnaw away. Ever happen to you? My mother always said to eat a good breakfast. But there are so many things to get done. My schedule doesn't allow for much time to eat. It's grab something on the fly and hope it lasts until supper at home. Well, this scenario is probably all too familiar to most of us. Living in this present world is often rushed, if not chaotic. But we usually don't really suffer too much from that bout with hunger.

You remember the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus opens with the Beatitudes. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Considering our spiritual need for nourishment is vastly more important than that empty feeling in our stomachs. And it is only to the one who claims to be “the bread

of life” that we must turn for nourishment for the soul. As a poor analogy, you have to sit down to the supper table in order to partake of the nourishment.

All four of the gospel writers record the feeding of the five thousand people, making this event one to definitely notice (Matt. 14; Mark 6; Luke 9; John 6). Matthew and Mark write about the similar occasion when Jesus fed four thousand people (Matt. 15; Mark 8). It is to the disciples' benefit that we spend some time with these miracles of Jesus. After all, we are seeking to be filled and satisfied as to the hunger and thirst of our souls. The miracles of Jesus are paramount to his true identity as the Son of God. When Peter confessed that “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), he was given that knowledge,

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miracle at the Pool of Bethesda among the others written in his gospel in order to confirm the authority of Christ. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His 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 20:30-31).

Who will you listen to as your authority in matters of life and religion? There are only two kinds of authority; one from heaven and one from men (Matt. 21:25). For the lame man it was very simple. He followed Jesus because he confirmed his authority as superior to that of man. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Jesus is the only name whereby you can be saved (Acts 4:12). Therefore you ought to obey and please him rather than men (Acts 4:29; Gal. 1:10).

When the religious world tells you one thing and you find that it contradicts the words of Jesus, be like the lame man and obey Jesus because he told you different. When your denominational friends argue, “You don't have to be baptized to be saved,” you must assert that Jesus said different (Mark 16:16). When your neighbors say, “Most

people will go to heaven,” you must affirm that Jesus taught different (Matt. 7:13-14). When religious leaders declare, “Join the church of your choice,” you must proclaim that Jesus spoke different (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4). When a liberal society demands, “Divorce is acceptable for any cause,” you must explain that Jesus taught different (Matt. 19:9). Why should we listen to Jesus? Listen to Jesus because he alone has “the words of eternal life.” Listen to Jesus because of confirming miracles like this one at the Pool of Bethesda (Heb. 2:3-4).

## **This Was No Ordinary Man**

So who is this Jesus? How will you answer this question? The healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda teaches us that Jesus was no ordinary man. No man ever showed such compassion, power or authority (John 7:46; Matt. 7:28-29). God clearly answers the question the Jews asked our healed man of Bethesda. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5). Will you hear him? Will you respond to Christ's compassion, will you believe in his power, and will you submit to his authority? Are you crippled in sin? Today, Jesus says to you, “Take up your bed and walk.”

Jesus said, by the heavenly Father. How? It was made evident to the apostles by the miracles (actions) and the words of Jesus. These evidences are precisely those that God has given to each of us through his inspired written word.

It is intriguing to picture in the mind's eye the scene when so many hungry people were in one place at one time. This had been the throng that had been following Jesus all day. Now it was late, and the people had not had occasion to eat that day. It is interesting to include the comment of Mark, "... and they did not have time to eat" (6:31). This had reference to Jesus and the apostles. So these men were also hungry. Another detail of the scene is that when the disciples noted that the day was waning and the multitude had not eaten the evening meal, Jesus "was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep not having a shepherd, so He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). Jesus always sees the spiritual over and above the temporal. These folks felt their physical hunger by their empty stomachs, but they were unaware of the greater need for spiritual nourishment for their souls.

At another time, when teaching about the folly of being anxious about the necessities of life (Matt. 6:25-34), he said that for anyone willing to give priority to the spiritual over the temporal, God promised to supply that one's physical needs (v. 33). When you read all the accounts of feeding the masses, you will notice the position in which Jesus put the apostles. Remember, they were hungry, too. Jesus was going to test his chosen twelve. They first said that Jesus should send the people away to the villages in order that they might buy supper for themselves. Then Jesus wrested that idea from them by saying, "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9:13). Philip did some quick math and said that even two hundred denarii spent for bread would be insufficient for so many. Then Andrew chimed in that he had found a young boy in the crowd who had brought food from home, but it was just two small fish and five small barley loaves (John 6:9). But that was insufficient also. So the apostles were failing the test at this point. They were made to consider others before seeking to satisfy their own hunger. That was something to their credit.

When you consider that these men had been with Jesus for a period of about two years and had seen many miracles and heard many pronouncements of their Lord, it is baffling that they didn't see the solution to the problem sitting in their midst. But aren't we like that, too, about the affairs and problems of life? Don't we have a significant tendency to look everywhere for the solution to our problems *before* we look up to the Great Problem Solver? Things haven't changed since man first walked the earth.

Truly, the feeding of the masses were spectacular scenes. What seems most amazing to me, however, is not how Jesus



took the scanty provisions, gave thanks to heaven for them, and then had the apostles serve the crowds. What amazes me most is the leftovers. Twelve baskets full! Seven baskets full! More remained after everyone had "eaten and were filled" then the provisions the Lord used! Surely, no one can deny that this man from Nazareth was someone beyond a mere man. Who will not see that these supernatural feedings of so many with so little are evidence for Jesus being the Son of God?

In John 6, the inspired biographer goes into more details that develop from the feeding of the five thousand. He tells us that some in the crowd, recognizing something special about Jesus, said: "This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). They tried to take Jesus by force to make him king (v.15), but Jesus escaped that scene. Later, the Lord had this to say to those people, "You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (v. 26). Jesus uses this occasion to test the ones who appeared desirous of following him. The people remembered how that Moses had given their ancestors bread "from heaven" (v. 31). Yet Jesus makes a statement that began to sift his supposed disciples. "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread from God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (vv. 32-33). Jesus differentiated between the nourishment for the body and the nourishment for the soul. Then that great and memorable statement, "I am the bread of life" (vv. 35, 48). For true everlasting nourishment, one must partake of Jesus! "Eat My flesh, and drink My blood," if you will have eternal life. "I am the bread of life." "I am the bread which came down from heaven." "I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life." This is mind-boggling! "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (v. 51).

Talk about a hard saying! Who can understand it? Who can comply with it? Cannibalism just isn't something that God would allow! Many of his disciples went back, and

# The Son of Man Has Power on Earth to Forgive Sins:

The Healing of the Sick of the Palsy (Mark 2:1-12)

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John A. Smith

Upon his return to Capernaum, Jesus was met by a mass of people who assembled to hear his wisdom and witness his power. It was no wonder that the house was filled past capacity. After all, Jesus was unique. He taught as one having authority and healed all manner of disease. He attracted large crowds everywhere he went. Even some Pharisees and doctors of the law (Luke 5:17) came up from Jerusalem to see him. From their reaction, one could speculate that their motives were anything but pure.

We witness on this occasion the first manifestation of the kind of malicious antagonism that culminated in his crucifixion. In spite of the presence and antagonism of his enemies, Jesus did not change his message or behavior. “He neither feared their frown, nor courted their favor, and the gospel which they heard from His lips was the same as that which the common people listened to so gladly” (Taylor 123).

Mark provides us with significant details of the events surrounding the healing of the paralytic:

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven; or to say, Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (He said to the paralytic,) “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, We have

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walked with him no more. They truly went away hungry. Earlier, after their bellies had been filled, their misunderstanding of the nature of Christ and his kingdom led them to try to “take Him by force and make Him king” (John 6:15). Jesus left them behind as he hurried his apostles away from that effort. He did not want them to remain with the same misconception (Matt. 14:22). He would be God’s Christ and not fulfill the will and imagination of the people.

What effect do those words have on you: “I am the bread of life”? Does your spirit feel the hunger pangs from not having eaten for a while? Do you seek another source to satisfy that hunger? If you are interested in growing in the

“grace and knowledge” of God, you must sit at the table of knowledge provided by our Lord through his word (John 14:23-24). He has given to us “all things pertaining to life and godliness” in his Son Jesus Christ. And God’s provision for our spiritual hunger is a bountiful feast prepared for us. Eat heartily every day, my brethren, in order to maintain your spiritual health and well being. As I conclude this article, my wife reminds me — “You are what you eat”!

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never seen anything like this (Mark 2:1-12, NAS95).

From the perspective of a twenty-first century American, the thought of someone cutting a hole in one's roof might seem a bit extreme. However, from the perspective of a first century citizen of Capernaum, it would not have been unusual or extreme at all.

In *The Miracles of Our Saviour*, William Taylor quotes from *The Land and the Book* and provides some helpful insight into the architecture of Palestine. "The whole affair was the extemporaneous device of plain peasants, accustomed to open their roofs and let down grain, straw, and other articles, as they still do in this country. . . . The materials now employed are beams about three feet apart, across which short sticks are arranged close together, and covered with the thickly matted thorn-bush called *bellan*. Over this is spread a coat of stiff mortar, and then comes the thick marl or earth which makes the roof. Now it is easy to remove any part of this without injuring the rest. No objection, therefore, would be made on this score by the owners of the house. They had merely to scrape back the earth from a portion of the roof over the lewan, take up the thorns and the short sticks, and let down the couch between the beams at the very feet of Jesus. The end achieved, they could speedily restore the roof as it was before . . . the roof was flat, easily reached, and easily opened, so as to let down the couch of the sick man; and all these points are rendered intelligible by an acquaintance with modern houses in the villages of Palestine" (Taylor 123-125).

Upon the paralytic's aerial entrance into the house, Jesus the compassionate Redeemer said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The four faithful friends had dug through the roof of the house seeking physical healing for the paralyzed youth, but Jesus provided something of greater value and blessing — the forgiveness of sin.

With the insight available only to One who is Divine, Jesus perceived the malicious accusation about to be hurled against him. Jesus knew their hearts and perceived their reasoning. He was prepared to respond with an amazing demonstration of his divine power and authority to forgive sin. The Pharisees and scribes started with the right principle but drew the wrong conclusion. They were correct in thinking that no one could forgive sins except God. They were correct in thinking that if a person assumed authority that belonged exclusively to God, he would be guilty of blasphemy. Jesus accepted the foundation of their case but moved to demonstrate that their conclusion was faulty. He did so by demonstrating his divine power and thus his right to forgive sins.

"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk?'" (Mark 2:9). Try to imagine how startling this

question must have been. Jesus singled out the leaders of Judaism and exposed the thoughts of their hearts even though they had not opened their mouths.

On the surface, the answer to this question might seem rather obvious. Of course, it is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven." After all, there can be no earthly investigation of this claim. The forgiveness of sins takes place beyond the view of human eyes or experience. However, the command, "Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk," would be open to investigation. All in the house could see with their own eyes whether or not this took place. Jesus did not ask them to believe in his authority to forgive sins (and consequently his deity) without evidence. He would provide them with a rational ground on which to rest their faith. "If proof is absent, Jesus is indicted as a blasphemer; if the evidence is seen, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees must logically, though grudgingly, accept the right of Jesus to forgive" (Stauffer 47). Jesus based his claim to deity on a physically verifiable event and ordered the paralyzed man to get up, take his bed, and go home.

Without hesitation or delay, the man who had to be carried to the house arose, took up his bed and walked home. The crowd was amazed and glorified God. "This miracle elicited awe and worship (the very reaction miracles were designed to produce) for the people recognized the hand of God" (Chumbley 171). Was Jesus guilty of blasphemy? Absolutely not! He is the Son of God.

### Practical Application

Powerless to move, the paralyzed man was peculiarly dependent on the kindness of his friends. Fortunately, he had friends who were willing to help him — friends who were willing to overcome obstacles in order to bring him to Jesus, the Great Physician. You and I cannot bring paralyzed people to the Lord Jesus and have him miraculously heal them. However, we can be of great service to them by bringing them to Jesus for a greater healing — spiritual cleansing. Like Andrew with Peter and the Samaritan woman with her fellow Samaritans, we can bring others to Jesus so that they can learn for themselves that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

You and I can bring our loved ones to Jesus by sharing the story of Jesus with them. We can expose them to the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16) by making the gospel a part of our every day conversation. We can tell others what Jesus has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us. Out of appreciation for what Jesus has done for us and a genuine love for others, we should feel compelled to do all we can to turn hearts toward Jesus.

You and I can bring our loved ones to Jesus by living the gospel. Women, married to unbelievers, are told that

# The Garasene Demoniac

Mark 5:1-20

Jeremy Sweets

The power and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ is illustrated throughout the gospels. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. Even the wind and the sea obeyed his voice (Mark 4:41). Jesus possessed and displayed power over all nature, and understandably so, since he created all things (Col. 1:16). His power did not end in the realm of nature, however. He also ruled in the spiritual realm, and this can be clearly seen when Jesus exercised all rule and dominion over Satan and the demons. One such example can be found in Jesus' exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20; Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39).

## The Demon Possessed Man

Having just calmed the treacherous, stormy sea, Jesus

and the disciples "came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Garasenes" (Mark 5:1). It is here that Jesus encountered a man with an unclean, defiled spirit. The demon had taken over the body and possessed complete control over the man. Through his actions a glimpse into the power and character of the unclean spirit is offered.

The living conditions of the demoniac were in complete disarray. Naked and destitute, he was not fit to live in society. Instead he lived in the wilderness, dwelling among the tombs (Luke 8:27). Although he did not live in society, he was known by the general public. Crying out all day and all night, his incessant shrieks and shrills certainly made their way to the ears of the townspeople. No one dared pass by his way due to his violent behavior (Matt. 8:28). He cut

they can win their husbands to the Lord without saying a word as their husbands witness their chaste and respectful behavior (1 Pet. 3:1-2). If our lives are not consistent with what our mouths profess, no one will listen to our words.

Jesus conferred a blessing on the paralyzed man by commanding him to do that which, according to human logic, was illogical. The mere speaking of a command would restore strength to useless muscles? What? We all know that is impossible. However, if one believes that Jesus is Divine then nothing is impossible for him (Mark 10:27). In like manner, what logical connection is there between baptism and the forgiveness of sins? Yet, Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). By faith, the untestable and the unseen becomes real (Heb. 11:1).

Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26). The four faithful friends demonstrated faith through their works. "The urgent and persistent efforts of these four men to bring the child into His presence spoke volumes about their confidence in Jesus" (Stauffer 45). If we truly believe that Jesus has the power to forgive sins, then we should be willing to do whatever he commands — without hesitation, reservation,

or explanation.

The paralyzed man was in a helpless and hopeless condition. He could not bring himself to Jesus, nor could he heal his disease. Also, his disease was beyond the power of medical science to heal. His helpless and hopeless condition is analogous to the sinner's pitiable and gloomy condition. Apart from Jesus they are hopeless (Eph. 2:12). They cannot make atonement for their own sins. Like the paralyzed man, all sinners must be brought to Jesus for he alone can heal and restore hope.

May each of us stand amazed in the presence of Jesus and give him glory.

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himself with stones and apparently offered a real threat to any in his presence. His actions necessitated a response from the community. He was kept under guard and bound hand and foot in chains. The people of the town attempted to control this uncontrollable man, but they failed in their endeavor. The demoniac wrenched apart the chains and broke the fetters in pieces (Luke 8:29). Mark's account twice mentions the inability of man to control the demon. Continual efforts were made to restrain him but "no one was able to bind him" (Mark 5:3). The text also notes "no one was strong enough to subdue him" (Mark 5:4). The word *subdue* carries the idea of taming. As a wild animal cannot be controlled, neither could this demoniac.

### The Response to Jesus

The preeminence of Christ is declared in every detail of this account and his supremacy over every creature is unmistakably illustrated. Although this demon wrought fear in every man, his response to the Savior betrays his inferiority. As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, the demon possessed man immediately ran to meet him. The demoniac was a violent man that threatened the safety of any traveler who passed his way. Other pilgrims likely witnessed this same scene and ran the other way. This encounter was different: Jesus did not run, and the demoniac did not attack him. After approaching the Savior, the demon controlled man bowed down to Jesus, rendered in many translations as "worship." The word means "to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure" (BDAG 882). The demon had a deep reverence for the Savior and he likely fell to his knees in recognition of his greatness. Jesus repeatedly commanded the demon to vacate the body of the man whom he occupied, eliciting a response from the demon. "And crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What do I have to do with You, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me'" (Mark 5:7).

The demon's reply provides a three-fold insight into his understanding. First, he recognized their lack of fellowship. Jesus ordered the demon, and he responded with a rhetorical question about their relationship. What do Jesus and the demons have to do with one another? Paul asks the same question in 2 Corinthians 7:14. "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" The answer is none; they share no fellowship, no unity. However, this did not prevent Jesus from commanding the demon according to his purpose. Second, the demon knew who Jesus was. He was the Son



of the Most High God! The demon's language portrayed his respect, reverence, and faith in Jesus. A reaction of faith should not be surprising. James says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (2:19). Some people in an attempt to justify the unjustifiable doctrine of "salvation by faith alone" will condemn the demons for having an insufficient faith. The demons, however, had an immensely powerful faith. They have the same faith that is required of us today. Their problem was that they did not accompany their faith with works of obedience to God. Finally, the demon recognized the consequence of their lack of fellowship. He would be tormented. Matthew's account adds the phrase, "Have you come here to torment us *before the time?*" (8:29, emphasis mine, jns). The fate of the devil and his demons was fixed. A time would come when their power would be limited, and ultimately, they would suffer torment eternally (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). The demon appears to think that Jesus' intervention was premature.

Christ again spoke to the demoniac, inquiring about his name. Apparently, it took repeated requests from Jesus to receive a response. The demon finally replied by saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." The name Legion would be quickly recognized by everyone of the first century. It was the principle military unit of the Roman army consisting of 3,000 to 6,000 men. The demon's name referred to the multiplicity of unclean spir-

its that inhabited this particular man, leaving him much worse than a single demonic possession (Matt. 12:43-45). Legion proceeded to the business of his departure, asking permission to enter the swine. Jesus granted them permission, and they entered the swine, causing them to run off the cliffs to their death.

### The Result of Their Encounter

After witnessing such a spectacle "their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country" (Mark 5:14). An amazing event usually leads to spreading the news to others. The demoniac had terrorized the whole region, so the herdsmen informed the whole region of his change. With curiosity and wonder, the informed crowd approached Jesus to see if the news was true. They witnessed the answer to their question as they observed the result of Jesus' power and mercy. The man who was once naked, violent, and deranged was calmly sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind (Mark 5:15). The power and compassion of Jesus was unquestioned, but sadly, it was also misunderstood. Out of fear, the multitude urged Jesus to leave. As Jesus began to depart, the once demon pos-

essed man sought to accompany him. With a completely altered life and an inability to repay the Lord, he desired to follow Jesus as one of his disciples. The man could have undoubtedly benefitted from his time with Jesus, but the Lord's will would not have been accomplished. Instead, Jesus told him to "go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

Miracles of the New Testament testify to the message that Jesus instructed the demoniac to spread. They illustrate his power and his ability to do "great things." The demon seemed invincible to other men but powerless in the face of our Savior. Furthermore, miracles demonstrate the character of Jesus. He is a Savior with supreme loving kindness and mercy. In casting out Legion from this man, Jesus did not merely seek to display his power, although he did accomplish that. He acted out of a sense of compassion. The demoniac was without hope and living in a terrible situation. Jesus, perfect in all ways, overcame the demon and displayed his true character.

### What About Today?

The message of the Bible is a wonderful message, but it is not simply an antiquated work of history to be admired. The Bible contains the very word of God and provides perfect instructions for life in every culture, country, and time period. The book of James admonishes, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas. 1:22). If we fail to apply

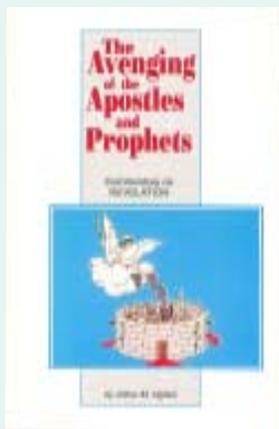
the lessons of the Bible to our lives, we have missed the point. Notice a few lessons from the Garasene demoniac in Mark 5.

Although Satan does not work in the same way today, he still has a tremendous amount of power. He seeks to exercise this power to our detriment and ultimate damnation (1 Pet. 5:8). The clutches of sin can be just as devastating for us as they were for the demoniac. Sin enslaves, defiles, entangles, and destroys a man (2 Pet. 2:19-20). When we sin, we are senselessly gashing ourselves with stones. Every person stands condemned in the presence of God due to sin, and like a demon possessed man, we have no power to save ourselves (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Eph. 2:8). Someone greater must intervene. Thanks be to God that Jesus is that person. He has the compassion, power, and willingness to overcome the clutches of Satan. He extends to us an opportunity to overcome with him (1 John 5:4-5). We will either choose to repent of our sins or to remain in our sins. There are no other choices. To choose sin would be to choose the tortured life of this demon possessed man. Lastly, having encountered Jesus, we should be compelled to tell others. After receiving the Lord, it is not God's desire that we immediately die and join him in heaven (Phil. 1:21-26). We must tell others of the great things God has done, and how he had mercy on us.

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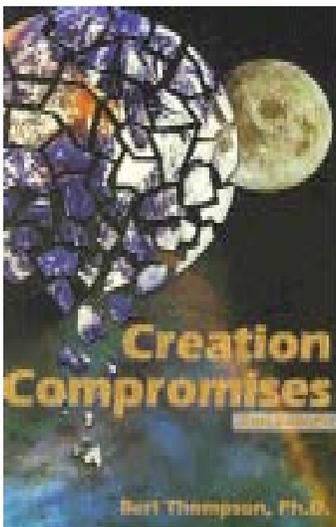
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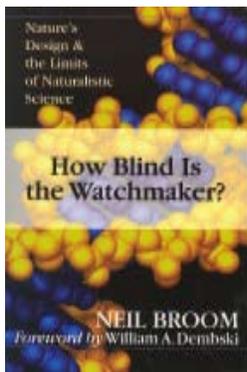
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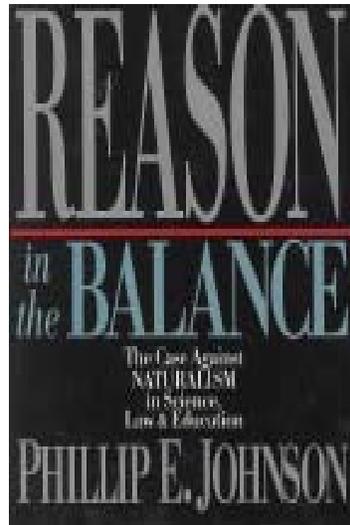
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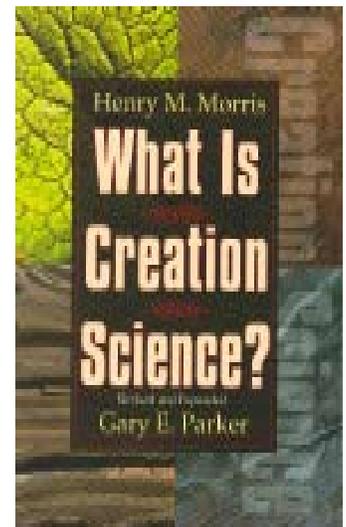
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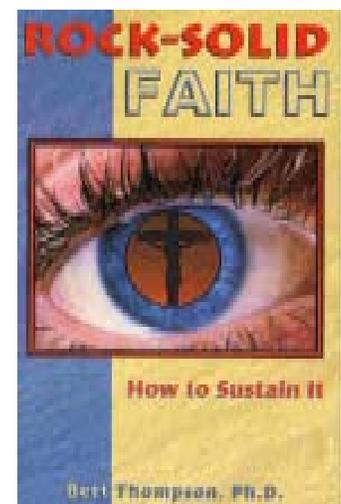
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# Calming the Storm and Walking on the Sea

Doug Roush

The purpose of miracles was to

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confirm the word (cf. Mark 16:20). The miracles performed by the apostles and first century Christians confirmed that their spoken word concerning spiritual matters was, in fact, the word of God. In much the same way, the fact that Jesus was the Word of God in the flesh was confirmed by the several and varied miracles he performed (cf. John 1:1-5, 9-14; Matt. 9:6). Although divine revelation and experience teach us that the age of miracles has ceased (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Acts 8:18), the miracles that are recorded in the Scriptures continue to perform their purpose — confirming the word and, thereby, strengthening our faith.

John wrote that Jesus performed many signs that are not written (John 20:30) and that, if all the things Jesus did were to be recorded, “the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” Therefore, we should deeply appreciate the relatively few things that we do have recorded about Jesus. Especially, in the context of this series of articles, we should appreciate the value of the miracles that have been recorded and preserved for our edification.

This article will consider the incident in which Jesus commanded the sea tempest to cease (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41) and the incident in which Jesus walked on the sea (Matt 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21).

The first thing that must be examined and established is, were these, in fact, miracles? Much like the apostles wrongly concluded they saw a ghost when they actually saw Jesus walking upon the sea (Mark 6:49), people today wrongly conclude they see a miracle when they witness or hear of

something wonderful. The apostles, nor anyone else, had ever seen a ghost, but like us, they had probably heard ghost stories. Their reaction to such a site had been programed by their superstition rather than truth. In a similar vein, the contemporary concept of a miracle is shaped by ignorance rather than knowledge of the nature of a genuine miracle. In contemporary times, the word “miracle” has been “defined down” to mean, “any wonderful or marvelous event.” Al-

though the contemporary event may indeed be something that is wonderful and/or marvelous, it is also something that can be explained to be within the realm natural possibility. However, a genuine miracle is that which obviously suspends natural law and can only be explained by supernatural power acting upon elements that are governed by natural law.

## Calming the Storm (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41)

The threat of the storm was genuine; “. . . there arose a great tempest in the sea, inasmuch that the ship was covered with the waves” (Matt. 8:24), “. . . there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full” (Mark 4:37). No doubt, these experienced men of the sea had been bailing water and doing all they could to keep their vessel afloat. However, in spite of their best efforts, they were on the verge of sinking. Although it was especially intense, there was nothing miraculous about the storm. However, it is apparent that the cessation of the storm was not only marvelous and wondrous; it was miraculous. Jesus “rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matt. 8:26). The word from which the word “great” is translated in all three of the cited verses is the Greek word, *me-gas*. In other words, “there was a



mega storm” at one moment and “there was a mega calm” in the next moment. That does not happen in nature. In nature, intense storms gradually taper off until their effect is no longer experienced. Therefore, we see that this was a miraculous event that occurred on the command of Jesus, the Lord. Those who witnessed this event certainly recognized the fact that, at the command of Jesus, natural law was suspended (cf. Matt. 8:27; Mark 4:41). This miracle was one piece of evidence that confirmed Jesus to be the Son of the living God (cf. Matt. 16:16).

Christians face times in which the ship of their life is covered with waves of trouble. Even in times when we do all that we can, the storm is so overwhelming that our ship is full and we feel like we are doomed to sink. Christians need to understand that the human family has not been “in the garden” for at least 6,000 years. Therefore, “. . . we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (cf. Acts 14:22; John 16:33). These are the times in which we need to subject our storm to the word of God. He has said, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). Now think of that; no mega storm is greater than Almighty God! He can’t be defeated, and neither can the one who, in faith, stands beside him. When the “waves and the winds” appear to be overwhelming, “. . . the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life” (Ps. 42:8; cf. 124:4-8). In the midst of our storm we can be comforted with Jesus in the bow of our ship by the words of Romans 8:31-39:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Even if the storm of our life should bring us to our passing through the Jordan of our death, we find comfort and peace in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 and Revelation 2:8, 10-11.

**Walking on the Sea (Matt 14:22-33;  
Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21)**

The miraculous nature of walking on water is self-evident. In our age of special effects and technology, people have tried to imitate this feat. Sceptics have suggested that Jesus was walking on rocks or a ledge that was just below the surface. However, the record of the event reveals the folly of such an explanation. There was a great (*mega*) wind blowing (John 6:18), causing the ship in which the apostles were traveling to be “tossed with waves” (Matt. 14:24). Jesus was walking, “on/upon the sea” (Matt. 14:25, 26; Mark 6:48, 49; John 6:19). This means that Jesus was walking on top of *waves* that were so substantial, they were causing the ship to be “tossed”!

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this event was the request of Peter to join Jesus in walking on the waves (Matt. 15:28-31). It took great faith on Peter’s part to make such a request. Peter had faith that if this was Jesus approaching their ship, he would be able to grant his request. Peter’s faith was demonstrated by first requesting authority from the Lord to join him. He did not assume anything. Having been granted the word of authority from the Lord, it took great faith to step out of the ship and step onto the waves. Various emotions must have come over Peter. He must have been full of joy and full of confidence as he approached his Lord. However, these emotions were soon overwhelmed by fear and doubt. Peter was rising and falling on top of the same waves that were causing the ship he had just left to be tossed. Verse 30 indicates that Peter’s focus changed from Jesus to the tempest and infers that from there his focus changed to himself, in that “he was afraid.”

I find it interesting that Peter was seemingly not afraid to request of Jesus that he join him on the water and that he was not afraid to step out of the ship. The only explanation the text infers is that until the moment he began to consider the tempest, his focus was entirely on Jesus and his ability. Perhaps this incident is an illustration of the truth that is revealed in 1 John 4:18; “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear . . .” Love, being others focused and greater than the sum of our circumstances, moves us to perform heroic tasks. “Perfect love” is God focused and is coupled with faith in God (cf. 1 John 4:8b, 16, 17). Such “perfect love” gives us the confidence to conquer mountains of tribulation and lifts us above the tempests of trials and temptation (cf. Matt. 17:20). Paul articulated the focus of this perfect love in Galatians 2:20; “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” It was Paul’s perfect love that permitted him to accept his “thorn in the flesh” and use it to the glory of God (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The knowledge that God can be glorified in spite of our situation (and sometimes because of our situation) allows us to experience the peace of God that surpasses explanation (cf. Phil. 4:7). It is this “perfect love” that changes our focus from things earthly

# Opening the Eyes of the Blind

Brian Price

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).

When offered the opportunity to write an article that will be part of a series, there is always the potential for overlap. Without much hesitation, I imagine that the passage above will be mentioned somewhere else in this issue. The testimony of those who witnessed the miracles, signs, and wonders of Jesus is vital to our faith. It is through that testimony that we believe that he is the “Son of God” and through that belief we “have life through his name.”

Opening the eyes of the blind was certainly part of the evidence that Jesus set forth in demonstrating that he was truly the “Son of God” (Matt. 11:5; 15:30, etc.) Though there are many specific accounts of the blind receiving their sight (Matt. 9, 20, Mark 8, Luke 18, etc.), our focus will be on John 9. It may prove beneficial for you to read the text of that chapter, as we will not have space to quote

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to things heavenly (cf. Matt. 6:19-34). “Perfect love” is intent on living to the praise of the glory of God (cf. Eccl. 12:13; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:20; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 1 Thess. 1:12; 1 Pet. 2:9).

Although we certainly understand how Peter’s focus was changed from the Lord to the tempest, let us not follow his latter example, but his former example of “perfect love.” May our love for Christ and our faith in him lift us above the circumstances of our tribulations, trials, and temptations. May our focus always be fixed on glorifying him, especially in the midst of the storms of our life. May we always lift him up in our adversity and in our prosperity. In so doing, he will lift us above our circumstances, give us peace in the midst of our storms, and calm the tempests of our life. May we never doubt this. May we always trust him, for he is worthy of our trust. May we be worthy of his trust.

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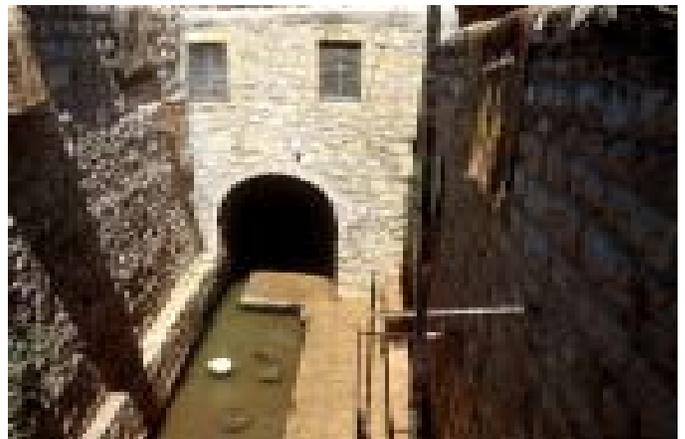
each section that we want to examine.

## “I am the light of the world”

Without question that is a fitting description of our savior (v. 5). Our Savior and his disciples encounter a man who had been “blind from birth” (v. 1). A continual physical darkness had been the reality for this man from the day he was born. Even the eyes of the healthy will have difficulty seeing when there is no light. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that the miracles went beyond simple compassion (Matt. 20:34). The intent for the recipient, as well as the witnesses, was to produce faith in their hearts. His purpose was not simply to open the eyes of the physically blind but to open the eyes of the heart of all men. There comes a point when everyone should move beyond the amazement of the miracle and begin to see that Jesus is who he claimed to be and that our faith should grow stronger in him (Mark 6:51-52). Though not all who were physically blind received their sight, all men could have their spiritual blindness removed by “the light of the world.”

## “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”

Not every miracle that Jesus performed included instructions as to how to receive the healing that he offered. In this



case however, instructions were given. It was not until the blind man had gone and washed the clay from his eyes in the pool of Siloam that he came seeing (v. 7). There seems to be no hesitation on the part of the blind man to fulfill the instructions. Certainly his desire to have his eyes opened, moved him to this positive response. Though Jesus provides all things necessary for our eyes to be opened spiritually, it ultimately becomes a matter of choice as to whether I will see. In Matthew 13:14-16, Jesus warns of those who have every ability to have their eyes opened to his truths but refuse to see. Yet, he also speaks to how blessed it is when we open our eyes to his will. Great privilege comes to all who choose to “walk in the light” of Jesus (1 John 1:7). It is interesting that Jesus applies a sight hindering substance (clay) to the eyes of the blind man and then instructs him to wash it off in order that he might see. We too need to wash off the clay on our spiritual eyes. Jesus offers life-giving sight to all who will receive it. We should have every desire to remove any and all obstacles that we might see the truth from our Savior. All that pertains to life and godliness has been offered through God’s word. Let us all choose to open our eyes to that truth. The testimony concerning the miracles of Jesus is our “pool of Siloam.” Jesus provides an enlightenment that is beyond description. The message of Christ may seem foolish to some, but if we will open our eyes of faith, salvation will come to the believer (1 Cor. 1:21).

#### **“How then doth he now see?”**

It is interesting as you read the narrative that in the absence of any genuine ability to deny the miracle itself, the focus went to whether or not anyone would admit that Jesus was the source of that miracle. Some claimed that one before him simply looked like the man they had known to be blind from birth (v. 9). He quickly resolves that issue by saying “I am he.” It even caused division among the Pharisees because they were unwilling to admit that Jesus had the power to do these things and yet they could not deny what had happened. It was also difficult for them to deny the only true source that allowed for such a miracle to occur (v. 16). It is amazing that it seems that no one, with the exception of the man himself, is willing to acknowledge that Jesus had the power to perform such a miracle. This occurs despite the fact that everybody knew that it had happened. Even the man’s parents were afraid to admit it for fear that they would be thrown out of the synagogue (v. 22). The answer to “how then doth he now see?” is obvious.

When we study the testimony of these events, we have only two choices. We must either accept the fact that Jesus healed the man and thus had the power to do so. Or we must deny that it ever happened. It is obvious to see that it was impossible for them to honestly acknowledge that a miracle had occurred, but yet deny that Jesus had performed it. What would we have done with Jesus? Would we have

opened our eyes to the truth of whom he was and what he should mean to me? Or would I have tried to deny the account in some way? If we try to deny its occurrence, what do we do with a man who was once blind but now sees? If we accept that a blind man was healed are we also prepared to take the necessary step of believing in the one who healed him? Again we note that the purpose of the miracle was not solely for the blind man’s benefit. This account requires us to answer the same question, “how then doth he now see?” and accept the results of our answer.

#### **“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”**

After fielding the questions from the Pharisees the blind man concludes by saying, “If this man were not of God, he could do nothing” (v. 33). That was sufficient enough for the Pharisees to throw him out of the synagogue. They attempt to discredit him by labeling him a sinner (v. 34). When Jesus approaches the formerly blind man, he asks a simple question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (v. 35). When he realizes that the one who had done this wonderful work was the Son of God, he begins to worship and express his belief in Jesus. One would think that he would have had no choice but to recognize Jesus for whom he was, yet I remember nine lepers who didn’t bother to even thank Jesus for healing them (Luke 17:17).

As we consider all the miracles of Jesus, it begs the question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Jesus further instructed them that there would be more who would have their eyes opened to belief in him. He also warned of others who thought they had sight but were actually blind (v. 39). For those like the Pharisees who see only what they want to see, they will remain in their sins (v. 41). Salvation from spiritual blindness will come to those who not only acknowledge what Jesus did, but also express their belief that these things were done because he truly is the Son of God. What do we see when we look at Jesus? Do we believe that he performed these miracles and if so, are we willing to accept the fact of his authority as the Son of God as well? Though all the evidence may seem so obvious and the answers seem so clear, we must still choose how we will respond to the miracles of Jesus. Not with just simple acknowledgment that something out of the ordinary occurred but with genuine faith that moves us to serve him as Lord. We were not present for the miracles of Jesus but through the testimony of Scripture and with the eye of faith we can see each and every one. The power of that evidence is just as compelling for us as it was for those who were eye witnesses. Let us seek the remedy for spiritual blindness and have our eyes opened by the truth delivered to us in the word of God. Let us wash our eyes in the pool of Siloam and come seeing the blessed Savior of our souls.

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# Sabbath Day Miracles: Lawful Or Unlawful?

Tom O'Neal

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In Matthew 15:1-14 we have the record of the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem asking Jesus why his disciples transgressed the “tradition of the elders”? That tradition was that hands were to be washed before eating bread. By way of contrast, Jesus asked them, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” We have a contrast between the “word of God” on one hand and the “tradition of the elders” on the other hand. Obviously, the two are not the same.

Suffice it to say that the rabbis of Jesus’ day had interpreted the Law of Moses in such a way that they wrote in the Mishnah very minute laws or rules of how they perceived the Law of Moses was to be obeyed. Thus, there was a very distinct difference between what the Law of Moses actually said and what the rabbis thought or wanted it to say. Jesus never violated the Law of Moses. However, on many occasions the Jews accused Jesus of violations of what they perceived or wanted the Law of Moses to say. Thus, when Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38) and healing on the Sabbath day, they confronted Jesus as if he had actually violated the Law of Moses. We see this in his healings or miracles on the Sabbath day.

## Right Withered Hand Healed

In Mark 3:1-6 we have the record of Jesus healing a man who had a right withered hand on the Sabbath day. Both Matthew (12:9-14) and Luke (6:6-11) record this miracle.

We are told that the scribes and the Pharisees were watching Jesus as to what he would do in order to be able to accuse him. Here was God on earth and instead of benefitting from his wonderful life, these Jews were watching his every move in order to find fault. Being Deity on earth, Jesus could look into their hearts and see the evil that was there. Mark tells us that “he knew their thoughts” (6:8). Imagine what it must have been like to be plotting against the Son of God and him being able to look into your heart and know what you were planning even as you

planned it.

Jesus asked the man to get up and stand in the midst of them, which he did. Then Jesus asked these scribes and Pharisees “Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy (kill) it?” Jesus, not the scribes and Pharisees, had control of the situation. These Jews dared not try to answer the question of Jesus. “They held their peace.” Why? They had hearts that were hardened against Jesus.

Jesus, with the man standing in their midst, heals his hand and it becomes like his other hand. Some rejoiced, especially the man. However, these hard hearted scribes and Pharisees were not happy. They immediately went out and consulted with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. Jesus used the miracle to expose the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. They had the man but could not heal him. That fact that Jesus healed the man of his withered hand shows us that Jesus was more than a mere man on earth, he was the Son of God with power. People marveled at what happened when he spoke. He did not have to get permission as some erroneously have thought. Why would One who spoke the worlds into existence (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29; Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:2) have to get permission to heal a right hand? When Jesus healed one who had an unclean spirit, people were amazed at the power of his speech. They said, “What word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Luke 4:36). When Jesus “rebuked the wind and the raging of the water” “they ceased, and there was a calm.” His disciples said, “What manner of man is this! For he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him” (Luke 8:24-25). On earth Jesus exercised his power of God, Deity, Divinity, and Godhead, that which no mere man possessed.

## One Healed of Dropsy

In Luke 14:1-6 we have the record of Jesus healing a man of dropsy, a disease in which the body retained fluid — like congestive heart failure. Jesus went into the house of not

Before, she “could in no wise lift up herself” and after, “she was made straight.”

With this miracle, Luke tells us “*immediately* she was made straight.” It is interesting to observe the number of healing miracles of Jesus that we are told they were done “*immediately*.” Never were people gradually better and finally after some time, short or long, they were well. Brethren through the years have correctly shown that the miracles of the Bible were *immediate*. Faith healers, so-called, often claimed great miracles of healing by saying over time those they claimed to have healed got better until they were fully made whole. Not so when the power of God worked.

just a Pharisee but one of the chief Pharisees. Luke tells us he went there for the purpose of eating. Isn't it amazing that of all the laws the Jews made and added to the Law of Moses which they considered work, like healing on the Sabbath, they did not consider eating work. They looked out after their own welfare. In the house of this chief Pharisee, Jesus was watched to see what he might do and wherewith they might accuse him. To the lawyers and Pharisees Jesus asked, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” Again, notice what this group does? “They held their peace.” Jesus then heals this man and he goes on his way. Jesus raises a question for these lawyers and Pharisees. Jesus draws a contrast between a man and a dumb animal — the ox and the ass. The Pharisees would permit getting a dumb animal out of a pit on the Sabbath, but they did not see that would require work. They, with all of their self imposed laws, rules, and regulations, did not see helping a dumb animal on the Sabbath a violation of the Law, but when it came to Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath, this violated their perception of the Law of Moses.

Luke tells us that these Pharisees and lawyers “could not answer him again to these things.” “They watched him” but they could not answer his question.

### Woman With Spirit of Infirmity

In Luke 13:10-17 we are told of a woman with a spirit of infirmity which she had for eighteen years. Her physical problem caused her to be “bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.” “The woman healed by Christ of an eighteen-year infirmity had a severe form of arthritis which bowed her forward (Luke 13:11-13). This sounds like rheumatoid arthritis, which affects women more than men” (*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* I:462). With her infirmity, this good lady had suffered and waited eighteen years before she came in contact with Jesus. How many people have lived in sin for years before they come in contact with the Great Physician? When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” In this miracle, “he laid his hands on her.” Jesus did not wait to get permission but laid his own hands upon her. The text says, “Immediately she was made straight and glorified God.” We have her contrasted before and after the miracle.

When Jesus created this old world (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:2) the Genesis text says, “God said . . . and it was so” (Gen. 1:3, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 24, 29, 30). It has amazed me that in recent years we have had brethren, some well known and some not so well known, that have denied that miracles were instantaneous. The idea of miracles being instantaneous has been called an “extreme position.” Do not take my word for it, look at the record and check it out for yourself.

1. Hill Roberts: “The parting of the Red Sea was a miracle. It was not instantaneous. . . . *Never* in the Bible does God argue for His nature on the basis of *how fast* He created or does anything” (Response by Hill Roberts to the *Open Letter* of King, *et al.*, posted on Ferrell Jenkins web site).

2. Tom Couchman: “not all miracles are instantaneous” (A Response to The Creation Account and Florida College, from *Watchman Magazine*, September 2000).

3. Shane Scott: “The next step in the argument is that God's work in creation must also follow the same pattern of instantaneous action unexplainable by nature law. This extreme position is seriously flawed from a number of biblical perspectives . . .” “The definition of miracles as instantaneous . . . does not apply to many Bible miracles” (*Gospel Truths*, August 2000, 15 and also on his web site).

4. Ferrell Jenkins: “There are other examples of miracles recorded in the Bible which were not instantaneous” (Connie W. Adams, Shane Scott, Tim Haile, Miracles, *Truth Magazine* and the CD from *Watchman Magazine*, September 2000 and Ferrell Jenkins web site, July 24, 2000, <http://bibleworld.com/>, 7).

When Jesus healed this woman of an eighteen year infirmity, the synagogue's ruler answered with indignation. Why? “Because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day.” He

# The Cleansing of the Lepers

Eric Norford

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The life of Christ was one where our Lord often said and did many things to convince those of that generation to believe in him as the Son of God. John wrote at the conclusion of his gospel why these things were written down — to cause man to believe “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:31). We have in our possession today those same stories of the lessons our Savior taught and the signs he did that convince us that we ought to “look unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith” for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 12:1; 11:6).

One of the many things Jesus did when he walked on this earth was on two occasions cleanse some men who were lepers (Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15; 11-19). The purpose of this article is to help us see what these miracles teach about Jesus and more importantly to show us the ability Jesus has to address our spiritual needs.

## Brief Description of Leprosy

Leprosy was a dreaded disease that seemed to cover a variety of skin ailments. The people were warned to very

careful around those who had leprosy. Those who had leprosy were to do exactly what the priests instructed them regarding this disease. Leviticus reveals if one had a skin blemish of any kind, and it was suspected of being leprosy, he was to be brought before the priests to be examined. The priest made his examination and diagnosis based on what God had revealed in the law of Moses (Lev. 13:2, 9, 12, 18, 25, 30, 39, 43). All ailments of the skin were covered for the priest to know if one was leprosy or not (Lev. 13).

One who contracted the disease leprosy was to be separated from the camp of people. Moses writes, “And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be” (Lev. 13:45-46).

One who was fortunate to be healed of this disease was to go show himself to the priest. The priest was to go out and inspect him (Lev. 14:2-3). If the plague was healed,

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said, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Jesus called this man a hypocrite: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman being a daughter of Abraham, who Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” Upon hearing Jesus say this, those who were “adversaries were ashamed” but “all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.”

When one understands the Sabbath day healing miracles of Jesus, one sees: (1) The concern Jesus had for people. When I see the great concern Jesus had for the physical

afflictions of people, it should cause me to understand to a greater degree the concern he has for our spiritual affliction by sin, for this is why he came to this earth (Luke 19:10). (2) The power of the word of the Son of God. In an instant by his word one is healed just like in an instant his word spoken created the world and all things therein, including man. That same word (Rom. 1:16-17; Heb. 4:12) when obeyed by man brings salvation and the hope of eternal salvation in the word to come. (3) Jesus “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). Nations rise and nations fall, but the Christian can have the assurance that regardless of what happens in the affairs of men, God is in control. One day he will bring it all to a close and bring his children home.

the priest was to follow the procedures of the law that required sacrifices (Lev. 14:4-7). The leper was to take a bath, shave off all his hair, wash all his clothes (Lev. 14:8). It was then the leper could come into the camp, but he still had to dwell outside his tent for a week (Lev. 14:8). After this week, he was to once again shave all of his hair, including his eyebrows, wash his clothes, take a bath, then he would be clean (Lev. 14:9). The next day after he was clean, he was to offer the prescribed sacrifice to Jehovah (Lev. 14:10). The priest who announced this man clean was to bring the man and his offerings to the door of the tabernacle (Lev. 14:11-20). As we can see it was a disease people did not want. God also used this disease as a form of punishment. Miriam, Moses' sister, was struck with leprosy for criticizing Moses (Num. 12:10). Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was struck with leprosy for deceiving Naaman to give him the silver Elisha rejected and then lying to Elisha (2 Kings 5:26-27). King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for unauthorized entry into the temple to burn incense (2 Chron. 26:18-19).

### **Brief Description of Miracles**

When the Bible uses the term "miracle," it has reference to something supernatural. It is a phenomenon that surpasses the law of nature by divine activity. Other terms for miracles were signs and wonders.

When God created heaven and earth, he did so without any assistance of natural law. All of creation began by supernatural activity, which now continues by natural law that Jehovah put in place (Gen. 1; 8:21-22). However, there were times Jehovah would suspend natural law to fulfill his will (for example, the time Joshua fought the five kings of the Amorites). The Bible says the Lord discomfited them and slew them with a great slaughter. One of the measures he used was to cause the sun and the moon to stand still in their place for one whole day, thus allowing Joshua to fight in light to defeat the Amorites (Josh. 10:8-14). Another example was the time Jehovah caused the sun to go backwards ten degrees as a sign that he would extend Hezekiah's life fifteen years (2 Kings 20:1-11; Isa. 38:1-8).

### **What the Miracles Teach About Who Jesus Is**

On two occasions Jesus healed some who were lepers. In Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15, all three gospel writers reveal Jesus healing a leper and this man showing himself to the priest and announcing who healed him, which caused others with infirmities to come to be healed by Jesus. The other occasion occurred when Jesus healed ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19. As they went their way to show themselves to the priest, as Jesus instructed them to do, one returned to Jesus to give him thanks, glorifying God; this man was a Samaritan. Jesus said to him, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" When this stranger was the only who returned, Jesus said to him, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke

17:17-19).

Jehovah revealed his power, majesty, and glory in the Old Testament in preparation of the coming of his Son. Paul says, "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). The man Jesus Christ had to be equated with his Father, Jehovah. The miracles he performed were to show that he came from God, that he did the works of God, and thus was the Savior God promised.

### **What the Miracles Teach About Who Jesus Was**

Nicodemus and others recognized properly who he was when he was on earth. Nicodemus said, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with Him" (John 3:2). Peter said in his sermon on Pentecost, Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him" (Acts 2:22). The purpose of miracles was to stir up belief that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. Thomas would not believe until he saw the nail scarred hands of Jesus and his spear riven side. Thomas saw and believed. Jesus said, "Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). The miracles Jesus did were to prove that one could believe and have eternal life in the name of Jesus. John wrote in 1 John 5:11-13, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

We can read and study the signs and claims of Jesus and make the proper conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The same conclusion the apostle Peter made when Jesus asked his disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded to Peter's remark by saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:15-17). Jesus commended Peter for properly believing that he was the Son of God. Peter had been with Jesus and had heard the things Jesus taught and seen the miracles which he had done. Peter was one of only five to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56). Peter was there on the storm tossed sea when he walked on the water to Jesus. He also witnessed Jesus calming that same storm when they arrived back at the boat. The Bible says, "Then they that were in the ship came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Of a truth thou art the Son of God'" (Matt. 14:33).

Even though we have not personally witnessed these miracles Jesus did, we can read, understand, and believe

that the accounts written of our Lord and Savior are true and worthy of acceptance. Unless we believe that Jesus is who he says he is, we will die in our sins (John 8:24). The miracles give striking, undeniable proof that Jesus was the Son of God. It demonstrated his divine power. This is what the miracles teach about who Jesus is.

### **The Ability Jesus Has to Address Our Spiritual Needs**

Jesus had the ability to address the spiritual needs in the healing of these leprous men. The unbelievers refused to understand what Jesus meant when he focused on spiritual matters. But Jesus came to earth “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Those who believed would understand and follow. When we read the accounts of Jesus healing these men of leprosy, one view that comes to mind concerning leprosy is the view God has of sin in general. Like leprosy, sin is unclean. It is only in Jesus that one can be cleansed of their sins,

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

The Great Physician came to heal the unrighteous, those lost in their sins. But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13-14).

Another need Jesus addressed in the healing of the leprous men was the need to be cleansed spiritually. Naaman, the leper, washed himself in the river Jordan seven times. Elisha had said through his servant, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come clean again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10). After calming down from being angry, Naaman did wash and became clean (2 Kings 5:14). The Bible shows us that sinners need to be washed to become clean. John wrote in Revelation 1:5 of Christ Jesus, “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” Peter wrote that we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, “as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). This washing regenerates the sinner from being unclean to clean, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). This washing is baptism, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the

flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21). God has required that one believe, repent of his sins, confess the name of Jesus, and be baptized to receive remission of sins, thus to be cleansed of his unrighteousness (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12-13, 35-39; 10:48; 16:15, 30-34; 18:8; Rom. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12).

Remember one of the ten leprous men returned to give thanks to Jesus for healing him. Jesus said his faith had made him whole, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.” This is the kind of faith and obedience Jesus is looking for from us. Paul wrote, By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name” (Rom. 1:5). Paul again commented on the obedience of faith at the end of Romans, “. . . made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). It is our faith that saves us, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). When we come to him in faith, we can be cleansed of our sins and made clean in his sight.

Another need that is addressed is the need to approach God through a clean, pure heart. The ten men who came to Jesus, approached him but stopped and stood afar from Jesus. Standing afar they showed respect to the law of Moses. We too cannot draw near to him because of iniquities. We need to recognize the terrible nature of sin. Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). In order to approach God we must be cleansed of our iniquities. As we have just studied, we must be cleansed the way God has specified. God is the One who drew up the terms of pardon, it our responsibility to obey his terms to become right with him, as Paul said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

One more need that is addressed is the power Jesus has to help his disciples. Jesus had power to cleanse leprosy, He also pardons the unclean sinner. In the process of cleansing he imparts strength to the one who has none. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Peter wrote, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10). He gives us the strength and courage to keep pressing on to the mark of the high calling that is found in Christ Jesus, to resist the wiles of the devil and to overcome the world.

### **Conclusion**

May we all give due consideration to the life of Christ. The signs and wonders he did proved he was the Son of God. They also proved his interest in man’s spiritual needs. He came to save man from his sins. We are eternally grateful for all the marvelous works our God has done regarding our salvation, just as the one leper returned to give thanks to

## “Miracles” continued from front page

... 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 non-scientific 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 have a knowledge base from which to comment regarding that which lies 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 counterproductive. 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.

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Jesus for healing him. He recognized the source of healing and gave thanks. May we return the thanksgiving to the One who has cleansed us and made us whole.

May we continue to read and study the word of God, Heaven’s divine will, so that when we read we may know “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:31).

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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 anesthetized 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 al-

most 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 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 book of Acts, though, 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.

### The Miraculous in the Book of Acts

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 was proven by the effect it had upon those first hearers.

The remainder of the New Testament is filled with apologetic elements, but nowhere is there a greater dependence upon the evidential power of the miracles of Christ than

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in the Fourth Gospel. John proclaims that his purpose in writing this work, and in particular recording seven “signs Jesus performed in the presence of his disciples,” is “in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30, 31, NEB). These words are recorded immediately after his recitation of the Lord’s miraculous appearance to Thomas, wherein that astonished apostle had proclaimed, “My Lord and my God.” Clearly this is one of the major themes of John’s Gospel.

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), by a 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 Elymus 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 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

**“Water to Wine”** continued from page 2  
family (John 2:6-10).

Now, before we look at what we can learn about Jesus from this marvelous miracle, let's quickly dismiss any notion that Jesus encouraged social drinking here. Some claim that Jesus put his stamp of approval on social drinking by turning water into wine. The question is, "Into what kind of wine did Jesus turn the water?" Was it fermented or unfermented? The word "wine" in John 2 is from the Greek word *oinos*. Vine says that it is the general word for wine. It can be used to denote fermented juice of the grape (Acts 2:13), freshly pressed juice from the grape (Matt. 9:17), or even to juice while still inside the grape (Rev. 19:15). One cannot simply assume by the word "wine" that fermented juice is under consideration. Where is the evidence in the text that shows that Jesus turned water into fermented drink that could get people drunk? If anything the text reveals

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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 ("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 explained 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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that the wine was unfermented by the word *good* found in verse 10. In the days of Jesus good wine was wine that was destitute of spirit. Listen to Barnes on this point:

[The good wine] This shows that this had all the qualities of real wine. We should not be deceived by the phrase "good wine." We often use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength and its power to intoxicate; but no such sense is to be attached to the word here. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace describe wine as "good," or mention that as "the best wine," which was harmless or "innocent." The most useful wine was that which had little strength, and the most wholesome wine was that which had not been adulterated by "the addition of anything to the 'must' or juice." Pliny expressly says that a good wine was one that was destitute of spirit (lib. Iv. C. 13). It should not be assumed, therefore, that the "good wine" was "stronger" than the other: it is rather to be presumed that it was milder (Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database).

In light of what the Bible says about intoxicating drink (Prov. 23:31-33), it is hard for me to believe that Jesus produced wine of such a nature. In fact, one might argue, according to Habakkuk 2:15, that if Jesus produce such a large amount of intoxicating drink, he violated the law and therefore sinned. But we are not in any way forced into such a conclusion for there is no evidence from the text that Jesus did any such thing. It should also be noted that, even if Jesus turned the water into the kind of fermented wine that was common in Palestine in that day, wine would be something completely different from anything one could buy today. J.W. Shepard notes:

Jesus made real wine out of water. But there was a great difference between the Palestinian wine of that time and the alcoholic mixtures which today go under the name of wine. Their simple vintage was taken with three parts of water and would correspond more or less to our grape juice.

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It would be worse than blasphemy to suppose, because Jesus made wine, that he justifies the drinking usages of modern society with its bars, strong drinks, and resulting evils (J.W. Shepard, *The Christ* 90).

### What Does This Miracle Teach Us About Who Jesus Is?

Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary man. Ordinary men do not have power over material substance. Only divine Beings have such power and Jesus is divine. Jesus is deity and this miracle proves it. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and master of Israel, came to Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Nicodemus was right. Jesus indeed came from God and God was with him (John 1:1-2). Evidence of this truth is found, not just in the incomparable teachings of Christ, but in the works he performed. Jesus reminded the Jews of this when he said to them, "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). These works that Jesus refers to have reference to the miracles he performed. The miracles performed by Christ will always be a testimony of his true identity as the Son of God. This beginning of miracles is no exception. It instilled faith in the hearts of his disciples (v. 11), and it, along with all the recorded miracles of Christ, should fully convince us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God (John 20:30-31). And if Jesus is the Son of God, he is deity for the Son must of necessity be of the same nature as the Father. Whenever Jesus claimed God as his Father, he was affirming his deity and equality with the Father, not in authority, but in nature.

This is why the Jews sought to kill him whenever he made such a claim (John 5:17-18; 10:30-33). Notwithstanding the objections of the Jews in the first century, nor the objections of some in the religious world today, Jesus is God. How can we be so sure? We can be sure because only God can turn water into wine.

### The Ability of Jesus to Meet Our Spiritual Needs

Jesus is no longer turning water into wine but the ability of Christ to come to our rescue and help us in times of need remains. This is most importantly true when it comes to our spiritual needs. Just like Jesus transformed the water into wine in John 2, he has the ability to transform us into the kind of disciples with whom God wants to spend an eternity. Jesus can change wishy-washy disciples into steadfast and reliable disciples. Jesus can change bad husbands into great husbands. Jesus can change worldly-minded sinners into God-fearing Christians. How does he do it? He does it through the power of his word. Jesus has given us his word and that word has the ability to reshape and reform the greatest sinners. The Christians at Corinth were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards, homosexuals and more, but Jesus changed them by the power of the gospel (1 Cor. 6:10-11). The Christians at Thessalonica were idolaters, but, by his indestructible and incorruptible truth (1 Pet. 1:22-25), Jesus changed them into servants of the living God (1 Thess. 1:9). Paul was a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious (1 Tim. 2:13), but Jesus, again by the power of his Word, changed him into one of the greatest Christians of all time. Jesus may never change water into wine again, but he is still in the changing business. He is in the business of changing lives.

When Jesus makes a change, it is always for the better. The wine that Jesus produced was better than the water

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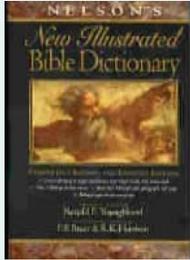
that was poured into pots. Will you let Jesus, through the power of the gospel, change your life for the better? If you are not a Christian, will you let Jesus change you into a child of God? If you are a child of God who is uncommitted and apathetic, will you let Jesus transform you into someone who seeks first the kingdom of God? If you are a strong Christian, will you let Jesus continue to change you into an even stronger Christian by the power of that same Word? Jesus wants to help all of us, but we have to do something. Just like the servants at the wedding had to fill the pots with water, Jesus demands that we fill our hearts with his Word and live by it. If we are willing to do that, he will transform our ordinary lives into the abundant life He promises his true disciples (John 10:10).

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