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EXCERPT

Introduction

Why another book on the miracles of Jesus? You might be asking that as you start this book. It's important to understand the significance of the miracles. If we do not believe the miracles were authentic, we are denying the authority of the Bible and Jesus Christ's divinity. The goal of the gospel writers was to narrate the accomplishments of Jesus of Nazareth.

Modernist biblical criticism has tried to suggest that the miracles of Jesus did not really happen. For example, the multiplication of the bread and fish is changed into a hungry multitude that was convinced they were no longer hungry. Jesus' walking on the sea is described as an optical illusion. The young boy with a demon is modified into a recurrent hysterical reaction. The cures could have different explanations. But the fact is that many of the pages of the New Testament are dedicated to narrating the miracles performed by the Messiah. For the believer, this demonstrates that the Holy Spirit desires us to know these episodes.

The modern critic wonders, "How is it possible that Lazarus arose after being four days in the tomb?" We can ask this question and many more, but the answer is categorical: "Jesus of Nazareth is God manifested in the flesh; He is who He said He was, the only-begotten Son of God; and He can do all miracles."

The Bible tells us about Jesus in Colossians 1:16 that "by Him all things were created. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him." Since He is the Creator in the sense of cause and reason, then He who created the infinite universe can raise Lazarus from the dead on the fourth day. He who has the capacity, knowledge, and power to create a universe can, without any doubt, raise someone from the dead.

What We Can Gain from the Miracles?

When we study the miracles carefully, we realize they are not theatrical acts with the sole purpose of dazzling the multitudes. The miracles occur spontaneously. They sometimes happen before a multitude; at other times, they occur with very few people present. The miracles are natural and spontaneous. They appear in the simple daily routines as Jesus Christ and His disciples go to and fro. This, without a doubt, occurs by the Father's perfect design. The Son mentions it in John's Gospel: "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). The simplicity and economical shrewdness of the miracles show their authenticity. The words in the dialogues are minimal, but the few terms used are the brush strokes of a Great Teacher who quickly paints the whole situation for us.

Who has not felt the cold atmosphere in the gloomy room in which Jairus's daughter lies lifeless? Who has not listened to the demonic storm, with the strident noise and discord, when the Gadarene comes on the scene? Who has not been amazed at the scene of peace and tranquility when the one who had had a legion of demons sat down dressed and in his right mind? Who has not imagined the huge waves and the sound of strong winds whistling and blowing with the storm before Jesus calmed it?

These miracles show how Jesus of Nazareth reacts to people's needs in a beautiful and unique way. We are able to see Him not as a Master giving a speech to His class but as One human being having compassion for others and helping them in their needs.

Another amazing experience we can gain from the miracles is to see the attributes of God manifested in a natural way. Often we see divine attributes appearing as a rainbow whose colors can be presented with a greater or lesser intensity. For example, in Lazarus's resurrection, we see Jesus the Man weep for the loss of His friend; the omniscient Son of God says, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (John 11:11); the all-powerful Son of God says, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43). The miracles show the rainbow of Jesus in His divinity and His humanity. Similar to a symphonic orchestra when many instruments are played together, so are we able to appreciate the different attributes of God working in harmony and in wonderful coordination.

The Complexity of the Miracles

Some of you may think that the miracles of Jesus are simple. Someone had an illness, and he or she was healed. Nevertheless, after carefully reading about each miracle, you may realize that sometimes a miracle can have two, three, or even four or more "secondary wonder deeds" in order to accomplish full completion of the miracle.

Jesus Christ's miracles are very special compared with those mentioned in the Old Testament. They do not depend on one individual's faith. Although there are miracles where the sick person manifests faith, in others it is obvious that faith is not present at all. The miracle is granted by grace.

Further, Jesus Christ's miracles are complete and definite. The Bible does not describe relative improvements. The paralytic immediately walked without difficulty, with apparently no lingering consequences of the paralysis. There was no muscular atrophy; no deviations of the bones.

Jesus Christ's miracles are also selective. There were many sick people at the pond of Bethesda, but only one man was chosen. He had been sick for thirty-eight years. Although he did not ask to be healed, he was completely cured.

Another feature easily overlooked in the miracles is the fact that many times the miracles encompass different aspects of real life concerning social and family needs. For example, the death of Jairus's daughter would seem something sudden or acute in contrast with the woman who for fourteen years could not stand up straight.

The social aspect of miracles can be very different, as in the case of the lepers who lived separated from society and the case of the boy with the unclean spirit. When Jesus Christ asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" the answer was, "From a boy." In fact, the family's life may have revolved around protecting this young man from an illness that put him in danger. We are told he fell into water and fire.

Also interesting are the different subspecialties in medicine that we can observe at work in the miracles. In many countries, those with leprosy (now called Hansen's disease) would be diagnosed and treated by specialists in infectious diseases. Those who were called paralytics, a term describing the person's deficits in movement, might be treated today by neurologists (for example, those suffering from what is technically called acute anterior paralysis). Other types of infirmities would be considered severe traumas. In the case of the centurion's servant, he probably had an acute infectious neurological illness. Those who were blind would today be handed over to an ophthalmologist. We also have the specific case of a woman with a gynecological disease who came up behind Jesus. Doubtless, in the hundreds of people healed, there must have been many women with that kind of pathology who were not singled out in detail.

Spiritual Disease or Medical Problem?

Were all the miracles related to physical disease? When we look at the story in Matthew 17 of the man whose son was possessed by a demon, we might wonder about the relationship between this illness and demonic possession. This young man's symptoms were characteristic of a type of epilepsy known by the name of "grand mal." Epilepsy is a medical illness. Nevertheless, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus cast out a demon from him. So, was it epilepsy or demon possession?

The Bible makes no connection between demonic possession and illnesses such as leprosy, blindness, or paralysis. I believe that when the Holy Scripture uses the phrase *demonic possession*, it refers to a reality wherein an individual is controlled by a demon. Jesus refers to demons as individuals with a will, and He gives them orders to leave, as in the case of the Gadarene. Yet some have suggested that demon possession is simply the first-century way of explaining psychiatric illnesses.

I believe that demons can cause symptoms of medical or psychiatric disorders. However, it is incorrect to say that demon possession is actually a case of medical or psychiatric illness. The Scriptures make it clear that some of Jesus' miracles related to cases of demon possession.

It concerns me when believers today try to convince a sick person that his or her suffering is due to demonic possession. This is highly dangerous and harmful, especially when attempted in a superficial way. It adds anguish and pain to the patient's illness in a moment when faith is vulnerable.

Personally, I am convinced that a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who is filled with the Holy Spirit cannot be “possessed” because “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). I also believe that this refers to the Holy Spirit of God, who is in the believer. However, it is possible for a believer to be influenced by demonic forces when they abuse drugs or participate in practices that the Bible condemns, such as consulting the spirits of the dead or engaging in the occult.

So, did Jesus misdiagnose the boy with epilepsy? Was he demon possessed or epileptic? I believe that Jesus saw the cause of his illness, and that was the demon within him. For the believer it is inadmissible to think that Jesus Christ made errors in diagnosing what people needed. It was the people, not Jesus, who misunderstood the boy’s problem. We must remember that even just a century ago a large number of medical diagnoses were incorrect. In another hundred years medical professionals will undoubtedly say that the doctors of the twenty-first century committed many mistakes because they did not know enough.

As a cardiologist, I feel competent in my specialty. Nevertheless, having all this knowledge for only a limited area of medical science allows me to know my limitations when I have a case outside the area of my specialty. But the Lord Jesus Christ never had to say that a patient’s problem was outside of His specialty. He could always identify the disease and cure it, including demon possession. The Son of God walked among the sick “healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

What is demon possession, and how does it relate to illness? We don’t know. We think that because of the technological advances of this century we have the capacity to understand all components of our lives. But we do not have all the answers. We do know that on the cross of Calvary, Satan was conquered. The destination of the prince of darkness is eternal condemnation as we read in Revelation 20:14. It is important to emphasize that believers do not have to live in fear of being attacked or possessed by a demon. The words of the apostle Paul give us confidence: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Jesus’ Bedside Manner

Finally, an important attribute of the Lord Jesus’ character is that He moved naturally among impaired people and His timing was perfect. In the case of Jairus’s daughter, He was slowed down due to a sick woman’s interruption. Nevertheless, He arrived in God’s time. In none of the cases did He arrive late, even in the case of Lazarus, because His timing was in God’s perfect plan.

The Lord Jesus also never said that some cases were too difficult or complicated for Him. He healed the leper immediately. However, He ordered the blind man in John chapter 9 to do something before he could be healed. In addition, the Lord Jesus Christ did not work in an insensitive, cold, and indifferent way. The Scriptures tell us in Isaiah 53:4 that “He has borne our griefs,” which is to say that He felt each sick person’s suffering; He knew the internal pain that characterized so many illnesses. Most illnesses not only have some physical pain but also emotional pain, especially when the sick person faces the limitations inflicted by the illness. In

certain cases the illness will harm not only organs and systems but also emotions. For example, imagine the desolation and rejection of the lepers. They experienced their leprosy as isolation, and so He sympathized with them in that isolation. Jesus Christ doesn't act like a computerized robot, taking our input and responding in an impersonal manner. Healing is the result of Jesus' seeing the human being's misery and feeling an intense and genuine compassion.

All we have in Christ is by grace. The words of Jude verse 24 fill our hearts with joy:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen.