

MIRACLES (3)

Proof of a Saviour and pictures of His salvation

A. Introduction

1. To believe in miracles is both reasonable and vital.

It is reasonable if God exists (these are exactly the kinds of things you would expect God to be able to do) and if the Bible the true (if the Bible is true, then the miracles it tells us about must be true as well).

It is vital because if the miracles of the Bible did not happen it means that we cannot trust what the Bible says about anything; what we believe about who Jesus is and what He has done for us is a lie; and there is no salvation because if the natural realm is fallen it needs to come from outside of it.

2. What do we mean by 'miracles'?

A miracle is an unusual or less common event (not only in being rare, but also in how it happened), brought about by God, which is recorded for us in the Bible.

The Bible uses three terms to describes these events: Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Works.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles [mighty works], wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22)

Signs are something which points to or that indicates something else.

Wonders are events that are extraordinary and cause people to be amazed or astonished.

Mighty works are acts of great power – God's power.

So a miracle is a mighty act of God, that is unusual, causing amazement, and which has a specific purpose.

3. The four Gospels describe a whole range of miracles that Jesus performed.

Of those Jesus did, there are four major categories.

Miracles that show Christ's control over nature.

Miracles that show Christ's control over sickness and disease.

Miracles that show Christ's control over Satan and demons.

Miracles that show Christ's control over death.

4. The four Gospels also describe the response of people to the miracles that Jesus performed.

The most frequent response was amazement.

"The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel." (Matthew 15:31)

There were three other responses too.

There was indifference as people only saw the wonder. However, when people saw past the wonder to the wonder worker, the response was either opposition or faith.

5. But why did Jesus do these miracles?

Were they just random acts of kindness or did Jesus have particular reason for performing them when He did?

The following verses hint that the miracles He did were more than demonstrations of His power and compassion.

"This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." (John 2:11)

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." (John 3:1-2)

So what purpose did they have? What do these signs point to?

They point us to who Jesus is and what He had come to do.

B. They are proof of His identity

1. The miracles are proof that Jesus is God.

Jesus in His own power does things that God did in the Old Testament.

"He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed." (Psalm 107:29)

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." (Mark 4:39)

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." (Exodus 16:4)

"Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." (1 Kings 17:2-4)

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied." (Mark 6:41-42)

So what is the answer to the questions the disciples asked each other?

"They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41)

2. The miracles are proof that Jesus is a prophet.

Jesus performed miracles that were similar to those done by the Old Testament prophets.

"The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said." (Luke 7:15-16)

The miracles the Old Testament prophets did were proof that they were God's messengers who were speaking God's Word.

"Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?' Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has appeared to you." (Exodus 4:1-5)

"Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth." (1 Kings 17:24)

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles [mighty works], wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22)

"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:3-4)

The miracles Jesus did testify to the truthfulness of the message He spoke.

3. The miracles are proof that Jesus is the Messiah.

In the Old Testament, God promised His people that a King like David would come to save His people.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1)

How would God's people recognise this King?

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." (Isaiah 35:5-6)

When John the Baptist sent men to Jesus to find out whether He was this King, Jesus response was to point to the miracles that He had been doing as evidence that He was.

"At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Luke 7:22)

4. But the miracles don't just reveal Jesus' identity as God, as a prophet, and as the Messiah.

C. They are pictures of His salvation

1. In the first miracle Jesus performed, something happens which indicates that there might be more to the miracles than we might initially think there is.

"When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you... They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine." (John 2:3-5, 8-9)

Jesus says His time (that is, the time for His death) has not yet come, but then as a preview of what His death and resurrection will achieve He performed this miracle.

This becomes more explicit in the way John records some of the subsequent miracles Jesus did.

After feeding the five thousand, we see how Jesus uses the miracle to teach His disciples about why He came.

"Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believe in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

"Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:53-54)

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is used by Jesus to show His ability to give eternal life.

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

The clearest indication in the Synoptic Gospels that there is more to the miracles than the actual miracle comes in the account of the healing of the paralytic, where Jesus heals the man to show that He can heal (forgive) sin.

The individual miracles are pictures, or even foretastes of the salvation He will give to those who put their faith in Him.

2. A picture of His work.¹

Every miracle Jesus does meets a particular need, but also points to a greater need Jesus will meet through His death and resurrection (the reason why He came) for those who trust in Him.

For the miracles that show Christ's control over nature:

<i>The original need Jesus meets</i>	<i>The greater need Jesus will meet</i>
Jesus calmed a storm	Jesus will deliver us from the waters of death
Jesus fed 5000 people bread and fish	Jesus will provide us with the food of eternal life
Jesus rescued Peter from water	Jesus will rescue us from sin and death
Jesus fed 4000 people bread and fish	Jesus will provide us with the food of eternal life
Jesus told Peter to get a coin from a fish	Jesus will provide for all our needs
Jesus caused the fig tree to wither	Jesus will bear the curse for our fruitlessness
Jesus provided a huge catch of fish	Jesus will provide for all our needs
Jesus turned water into wine	Jesus will provide for us the wine at another wedding (marriage supper of the Lamb)
Jesus provided a second huge catch of fish	Jesus will provide for all our needs

For the miracles that show Christ's control over sickness and disease:

<i>The original need Jesus meets</i>	<i>The greater need Jesus will meet</i>
Jesus healed many	Jesus will deliver us from sin

For the miracles that show Christ's control over Satan and demons:

<i>The original need Jesus meets</i>	<i>The greater need Jesus will meet</i>
Jesus delivered the demon-possessed	Jesus will deliver us from Satan's power

For the miracles that show Christ's control over death:

<i>The original need Jesus meets</i>	<i>The greater need Jesus will meet</i>
Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, the widow's son at Nain, Lazarus from the dead	Jesus will give us new spiritual life and that one day will resurrect our bodies

3. A picture of His kingdom.

The miracles as well as being a foretaste of the saving work that Jesus would achieve by dying on the cross and being raised to life, also show us what life with Him in His kingdom will be like.

They give us a glimpse of what heaven is like. In fact, when Jesus performed these miracles it was as if heaven for a moment had invaded this world, and the world was how it was meant to be.

¹ See Vern Poythress' The Miracles of Jesus for more on how the miracles picture Jesus' work

"The signs which accompanied His ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven, which is His home." (B.B. Warfield)

The miracles that show Christ's control over nature tell us that in heaven all the effects of the Fall will be undone and it will be a place where every need will be fully met and we will be completely satisfied and provided for.

The miracles that show Christ's control over sickness and disease tell us that in heaven there will be no sickness or suffering.

The miracles that show Christ's control over Satan and demons tell us that in heaven there will be no sin and evil and darkness.

The miracles that show Christ's control over death tell us that in heaven there will be no death only life.

4. So these mighty works that Jesus did which showed His control over nature, disease, demons and death, were wonders that caused people to respond in amazement, and signs pointing to who He is (God, a prophet, the Messiah) and what He came to do.

But as well as proving His identity and picturing His saving work, when we study the people Jesus did miracles for, we learn that each miracle has something important to tell us about ourselves.