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NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 1: JESUS AS A WORKER OF WONDERS IN AGES OF SKEPTICISM
Dr. Mark Scott

-Welcome to these 10 lessons on the “Miracles of Jesus” as given to us in the Gospels.

-In this first lesson, we want to develop the theme, “Jesus as a Worker of Wonders in Ages of Skepticism.” In other words, we probably have to deal with the *apologetic* issue right up front. Can we know that these miracles actually happened?

-Well, listen to what the Gospels claim about Jesus’ miracles:

-Lk. 11:20, “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”

-Lk. 23:8, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased...he hoped to see him perform some miracles.”

-Jn. 3:2, “For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

-Jn. 7:31, “When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?”

-Jn. 10:25, “The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me.”

-Ac. 2:22, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs...”

-Ac. 10:38, “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.”

-So let the record show, as far as the testimony of the earliest disciples was concerned, “Jesus Christ was no mere slight-of-hand magician. He was, in the truest sense, a *worker of wonders*.”

-Therefore we could probably say at least three things:

1. The Gospel writers **claimed** that Jesus worked miracles. These stories are not written as fiction.
2. These miracles were **part** of Jesus’ **saving work**. They were not unattached to the cross.
3. These miracles were **incorporated into stories** in the Gospels that we call *miracle stories*. Sometimes the miracle itself only takes a verse or two. But the story can sometimes be whole chapters.

-So can believe this testimony? Did the Gospel writers get this right? Or were they biased due to their belief in Jesus? Can someone who is inclined toward a perspective write accurate history?

-There are lots of questions—not the least of which are the following:

- 1) What constitutes a miracle? What is it? How is it defined?

2) Where is the line between God's daily providential watch-care and something that could be truly said to be miraculous or supernatural? And what about God's non-interventions? If he is God and can act, why does he sometimes chose not to act (Jn. 5; 2 Tim. 4:20; Dr. George Wood's sermon on Ac. 27).

3) Are miracles welcomed or resisted given the climate of the philosophy of the culture?

4) Are some miracles more foundational to faith than others? Do some stir more faith than others? The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead seems more fundamental to faith than catching a fish with a coin in its mouth. Both may be miracles, but one seems to matter more. They aren't all created equal.

-There are certainly more specific questions than even these to ask. So I would like to ask three, what I call *fundamental* questions. These are more primal in nature. They are:

1) **Does God exist?** If he doesn't exist then the universe runs by natural causes and probably doesn't vary from those causes.

2) **Is God really God?** If he is all powerful, then could anything be beyond his ability to do? And do the miracles teach me anything about the kind of God I have?

3) Do people **reject** miracles because of **evidence** and eyewitness testimony or due to a **philosophical possibility**? Does their paradigm or system preclude the belief that miracles could happen? If you have determined that miracles cannot exist (David Hume) then no matter how much collaborative evidence you have, you won't entertain then possibility.

-Think about the ages in Western Christian Civilization and miracles:

1) Pre-modern: A warm embrace (If God says it...). But does this mean that the people in the ancient world were stupid? Were they easier to fool? They might have had a pre-modern worldview but don't write them as naïve nor believe that skepticism didn't exist in their world because neither of those things would be true (e.g. Jn. 9).

2) Modern: A distaining frown (The Bible is messy)—reality only from what we can see.

3) Post-Modern (Late Modern): An exuberant joy (It could happen)—reality beyond what we can see.

-The apologetic issue is really beyond the emphases of these lessons. But it never goes away. So, don't be surprised if you have to do some apologetic spadework when studying or teaching the miracles of Jesus.

-Maybe a few tools will help:

1) Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas, edited *In Defense of Miracles*.

2) Craig Keener, *Miracles*, 2 vols.

3) C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*.

4) "The Reality of Miracles" in *A Humble Defense* edited by Mark Moore and Mark Scott.

-Make no mistake: The Gospels affirm that Jesus Christ was a working of wonders.

-Next, we will turn our attention to Jesus' love/hate relationship with miracles and the clusters of miracles we find in the Bible.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 2: JESUS' LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH MIRACLES
AND THE CLUSTERS OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE
Dr. Mark Scott

-In this second lesson, we want to develop how Jesus felt about miracles and discover where we find the miracles in the Bible at large. The big word that occurs to me when we raise these subjects is *irony*.

-One would think that Jesus is all about miracles since they demonstrate his power and underline his identity. But the truth is rather ironic. Jesus had a love/hate relationship with these acts of power. And, while it might seem at first that we would find miracles on every page of the Bible that is not actually the case. See what I mean? Ironic.

Jesus' Love/Hate Relationship with Miracles:

1) **Love Side:**

- a. Christianity by its nature is *supernatural*. The whole incarnation idea underlines that God is not unwilling to work miracles to accomplish his purpose in this stained planet.
- b. And, miracles can be partially responsible for engendering belief (Jn. 20:30-31). Faith is often (though not always) attached to miracles.
- c. Almost one third of Christ's ministry consisted of miracles. In fact, about 31% of the Gospel of Mark is miracles.

2) **Hate Side** (maybe *hate* is too strong)—maybe we should say it this way: The Bible does not have an unhealthy interest in miracles. It actually is possible to have an unhealthy interest in miracles. Often miracles go hand in hand with faith, but sometimes miracles actually derail faith and get in the way of faith.

- a. They can distort faith (Jn. 6:26-27).
- b. They can exasperate Jesus (Matt. 16:4; Mk. 9:19; Jn. 12:37).
- c. Sometimes Jesus just flat refused to do them (Matt. 4:1ff; Mk. 6:5-6).

3) Some of this **irony** is partly resolved by recognizing the connection between *suffering* in a fallen world and *healing*. God chooses to suffer in order to redeem. Sometimes healing can only come through suffering. Don't rush healing. God wants to heal it at just the right time. So, while Jesus begins healing the world in his first coming, he gets frustrated with us if we just want a quick fix that bypasses his person. Bob Lowery says, "Miracles are a means for directing history until God's reign is fully established" (138).

The Clusters of Miracles in the Bible:

-This surprises people. Miracles in the Bible may not be exactly *rare*, but neither are they on every page. In fact, I'm convinced that many people who lived during the years that the Bible was produced (1,500 years) may have never seen a miracle. Whole generations of people were born, lived, and died without witnessing an honest-to-goodness miracle.

-I'll mention where these *miracle clusters* are in a minute, but first let me say three things:

1) The mere presence of a miracle is not proof of divine intervention. Miracles can reveal the presence of God, but the enemy can also counterfeit them. And, there is such a thing as false signs and wonders.

2) Miracles are never isolated facts. They are linked with other events (137).

3) Miracles tend to come in decisive moments in history when big things are at stake (138).

-That being the case let me list the main clusters of where miracles occur in the Bible:

1) **Creation**—Spirit, water, and word.

2) **Exodus**—Plagues (battle with Egyptian's gods), deliverance in the wilderness. How did their "eyes see this" (cf. Gal. 3:1)?

3) **Conquest** of Holy Land—Jericho; Sun standing still, Gideon, Samson, etc.

4) **Elijah and Elisha** Ministries—kings, Israel, and nations (i.e, Assyrian invasion).

5) **Intertestamental** period (Lowery, 138).

6) **Ministry of Jesus in the Gospels**—almost every page here.

7) **Earliest Church in Acts**—many of them mirror Jesus'.

8) Some evidence in **Epistles and Revelation** (Heb. 2:1-4; Rev. 13:1-10).

-The Bible is full of miracles but not *overly full*. And since the Bible is not flat, they come to us in clusters.

-In the next lesson, we will look at some of the antecedents to Jesus' miracles in the OT and notice their continuity while noticing the contrasts with his miracles against the Greco-Roman backdrop of his day.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 3: JESUS' MIRACLES AND MIRACLES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
(OT AND GRECO-ROMAN)
Dr. Mark Scott

-We are soon to look at the actual Gospel material concerning the miracles of Jesus. But in this third lesson, I want us to consider the historical backdrop to those miracles.

-If we are to understand the miracles of Jesus we will need to see them in *concert* with the miracles of the OT and in *contrast* with the miracles in the Greco-Roman world of which he was a part.

The Miracles of the OT and Jesus' **Continuity** with Those:

- 1) The OT has many more "nature" miracles than the NT:
 - a. Exo. 3:2—Bush that wouldn't burn up.
 - b. Exo. 4:3-4—Rod that became a serpent.
 - c. Exo. 7:17—Nile River turning to blood.
 - d. Exo. 16:4-6—Manna from heaven.
 - e. 1 Ki. 18:33-38—Elijah and fire from heaven on altar.
 - f. 2 Ki. 20:8-11—Hezekiah's shadow goes back to steps.
- 2) But the Gospels have enough "nature" miracles to undergird that Jesus is like the God of the OT who walks on the seas and rains down blessings on high.
- 3) Another thing about OT miracles is that they can't be imitated (Exo. 8:16-19). The magicians were able to imitate some of Moses' miracles. But when they got to the gnats Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim. 3:8) couldn't do it. There comes a point when the power of heaven can't be matched. In the Gospels, we read that things like, "Nothing in Israel like this had been seen."
- 4) Finally one more thing about OT miracles. The heaviest concentration of them was in the ministries of Moses (32) and Elijah/Elisha (23). In fact, Exo. 34:10 and Judg. 6:13 underline this—even in the OT. The significance of this is that Jesus is the New Moses, and he comes as "The Prophet."
- 5) So...most of the miracles in the OT were over nature, came to the aid of people, or showed the power of God over the other powers. Jesus' miracles are right in sync with those ideas.

The Miracles of Jesus in **Contrast** with the Miracles in the Greco-Roman World:

-It may sound odd but Jesus admits that miracles exist outside of his own ministry: Matt. 12:27, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?" And the only event in the Gospels that features John by himself (Mk. 9:38-41), Jesus seems to endorse the man who is casting out demons but not following Jesus as being "for Jesus."

-So...Jesus acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is at work in universal ways.

-However, does this mean that Jesus endorses every miraculous claim in the ancient world? Every incantation? Every exorcism? Every supposed healing or miracle?

-Well, hardly. The miracles of Jesus stand in contrast to most of the miraculous claims in the ancient world. Wendy Cotter has traced these supposed miracles in her book, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. When you read these accounts and compare them to the Gospel miracles you note the following *contrasts*:

- 1) Absence of salvation language.
- 2) Length.
- 3) Context of dreams.
- 4) Incantations (formulas).
- 5) Weird offerings.
- 6) Cosmic phenomena.
- 7) Language approaches poetry.
- 8) Weird antics—e.g. stomping on spleen.
- 9) Disposition of narrator as opposed to theological bent of the biblical writer.
- 10) No distinction of good and evil. Moral factor seems absent.
- 11) Some apocalyptic language.
- 12) More creation examples are reserved for biblical ones.

-Probably one huge exception is the Roman writer, Philostratus, as he tells the story of Appolonius of Tyana. Philostratus lived (170-244). He told of Appolonius who lived in Cappadocia during the early Christian era. He supposed raised the dead, healed the sick, and ascended bodily into heaven. He was also a bit of a nonconformist. There is an account of him raising a boy from the dead that is a dead ringer for Lk. 7 (widow's boy at Nain). But there are huge differences, too:

- 1) Lack of consensus on important events.
- 2) Characterized by polytheism and deception.
- 3) Believed in the transmigration of the soul.
- 4) Devoted to philosophy.
- 5) Involved in politics.
- 6) Hated enemies.

-Jesus, on the other hand, was characterized by monotheism, innocence of wrong-doing, emphasis on the new birth, devotion to Scripture, aloofness from political intrigue, belief in eternal life for the whole person, love for enemies, sacrificial death, and the founding of the church.

-Fortunately, skepticism was alive and well in Jesus' day, too. So other healers got the same critique that Jesus got, and we can compare the two. Jesus' miracles have continuity to the OT but stand in contrast to many of the miracles in the ancient world.

-Next we will turn to the terminology and purposes of Jesus' miracles. Recognizing those varied terms and purposes should equip us for seeing the miracles as acts of war against the enemy.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 4: THE TERMINOLOGY AND PURPOSES
OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
Dr. Mark Scott

-In this fourth lesson on the miracles of Jesus, we are getting down to more of the actual study. We want now to consider the terminology and purposes of the miracles of Jesus.

The Terminology of the Miracles of Jesus:

-There are four words that we have to unpack understand the miracles of Jesus. They are:

- 1) Miracle (dunamis) = work of power (only used in Synoptics).
- 2) Wonder (teras) = the sensation that the miracle creates (onomatopoeia). More of a reaction to dunamis (only Synoptics use—except one use in Jn. 4:48—Jesus said to the nobleman from Capernaum, “Unless you see signs and *wonders* you won’t believe.”
- 3) Signs (semeion) = that which points beyond itself to a greater spiritual reality. All four Gospels use this word, but John’s use of it seems special (Jn. 20:30-31).
- 4) Work (ergon) = metonymy for some aspect of his ministry. Occurs 27 times in Jn. Can apply to more than miracles but can refer specifically to miracles at times.

NOTE: The difference between the Synoptics and John is the reaction that the miracle receives—Wow vs. Hmmm.

-These four terms do overlap. R.C. Trench says, “The terms do overlap, but a sign is a miracle that points to a greater spiritual reality” (*Synonyms of the NT*, 317). The “sign” part is discerned by faith. It matches the *double talk* of John’s Gospel. Sometimes people were drawn to the sign but not the reality it pointed to (6:2, 14, 26; 12:18, 37).

-Lynn Gardner says, “A miracle is an event in the external world worked by the direct power of God intended as a sign” (*Christianity Stands True*, 65).

-Graham Twelftree says, “A miracle performed by Jesus is an astonishing event, exciting wonder in the observers, which carries the signature of God, who, for those with the eye of faith, can be seen to be expressing his powerful eschatological presence” (*Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 350).

-But maybe more important that the definition of miracle is the *varied purposes* for which Jesus worked them. It is to that we now turn:

The Purposes of the Miracles of Jesus:

-I will mention seven (a good number) purposes of miracles and then fold them all into one all-embracing purpose.

- 1) **To prove his identity**—this is his messianic calling card.
 - a. Mk. 2:10, “But that you might know...”
 - b. Mk. 4:41, “Who then is this...?”

- c. Mk. 6:50, "Take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid."
 - d. Jn. 10:38, "Believe the miracles...they bear witness of me."
 - e. "Jesus used physical miracles, visible to the senses, to demonstrate His spiritual authority" (*Christianity Stands True*, 65).
- 2) **To demonstrate his mission/government.**
- a. Matt. 12:28, "If I cast out demons..."
 - b. Mk. 3:27, "No one can enter a strong man's house unless he bind him..."
 - c. Lk. 13:11, "Satan bound this woman..."
- 3) **To stir controversy**—at least that often results.
- a. Mk. 3:5—withered hand.
 - b. Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25—cursed fig tree.
 - c. Jn. 5:1-18; 9:1-41—lame man and blind man.
- 4) **To show compassion**
- a. Matt. 8:1-4, "I am willing."
 - b. Matt. 14:14; 15:32 to crowds of 5,000 and 4,000.
 - c. Mk. 5:21-43—Jairus and woman.
 - d. Lk. 7:11-15—widow's boy at Nain.
 - e. Lk. 22:50-51—Malchus' ear.
 - f. Jn. 11:1-44—Lazarus.
- 5) **To reward faithfulness**
- a. Mk. 7:24-30—Canaanite woman.
 - b. Mk. 2:1-12—lame man through roof.
 - c. Matt. 14:28-32—saved Peter from drowning.
 - d. Matt. 8:5-13—centurion.
- 6) **To fulfill prophecy**
- a. Matt. 8:16-17 (Isa. 53:4).
 - b. Matt. 11:5—Go back and tell JB.
 - c. Isa. 35:10.
- 7) **To display the glory and work of God**
- a. Jn. 2:11, "Thus revealed his glory."
 - b. Jn. 9:1ff, "Who sinned...?"
 - c. Jn. 11:4, "This sickness is not unto death..."

-If we recognize these varied purposes, we won't try to teach all the miracle stories from an apologetic angle only. This then should prepare us to deal with the salvation talk of the miracle stories and an all-embracing view of what the miracles are really doing in the Gospel record.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 5: SALVATION TALK IN THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
AND PREVIEWS OF GOD'S REDEPTIVE FUTURE
Dr. Mark Scott

-This may be the most important lesson in this series of lessons. I want to give the thesis of my understanding of the miracles of Jesus. Here's why: in the miracles of Jesus I think we begin to see *previews of God's redemptive future*. Jesus is at war with the devil to get the world back and set the world right!

-I didn't always think this way. I used to think that the miracles of Jesus were primarily to prove that he was the Son of God. I mean he could do those things recorded in the Gospels, and we can't. Now that is *one* of the purposes of the miracles. It is an important one, but it is only one. When viewed with a wider lens we see how the miracles of Jesus played into his larger salvific work.

-Let me show you what began to change my view. I noticed what I call "salvation talk" in the miracle stories. Language that was typically reserved for forgiveness or eternal life was creeping into the miracle stories. Examples:

"Destroy us before the *time*?" (Mk.1: 24).

"How he has had *mercy* on you" (Mk. 5:19).

"Your faith has *healed* you" (Mk. 5:43).

"Don't be afraid, just *believe*" (Mk. 5:36).

"The child is not dead but *asleep*" (Mk. 5:39).

"Jesus, Son of David, have *mercy* on me!" (Mk. 10:47 & 48)

"Go away from me, Lord; I am a *sinful* man" (Lk. 5:8).

"Whom Satan has *kept bound* for 18 years" (Lk. 13:16).

-So, let's go on a bit of a journey with this:

1) We're not trying to denigrate Jesus' preaching, teaching, and discipling, but in the miracles of Jesus **we see the beginning of the end of the devil** and the beginning of the saving of the world—even before he gets to the cross.

2) The miracles of Jesus become **cameos of the not yet redemption** of the world.

3) The miracles of Jesus then function like **previews of coming attractions**—much like in a movie theater.

4) Therefore all the miracles of Jesus should be **viewed eschatologically**.

5) All the miracles of Jesus therefore were **only quick fixes**. Everyone that he healed got sick again. Even the demon-possessed, whom Jesus released, could be inhabited again (Lk. 11:24-26).

6) When a miracle takes place it is a **brief glimpse** into a future world totally controlled by God where there is no sickness, death, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

-You see part of our problem to understand this is that we have a puny view of salvation. I rejoice that God is in the forgiveness business, but that is not his only business. One of my co-workers talks about the idolatry of salvation, where salvation is only defined in terms of personal forgiveness. It can become an idol when viewed only that way.

-Salvation is huge. I would argue it has six nuances:

1) **The lost are found** (Lk. 15).

2) **The guilty are forgiven** (Ac. 2:38)

3) **The sick are made well**—a true state of shalom (many of the references we have already given).

4) **The outsider is brought into community** (Matt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16)—half of the story emphasizes this.

5) **The world is set right** (injustice is eradicated).

6) **The curse is removed and therefore the environment is cleansed.**

-All of these flow into a larger definition of salvation for me. I call salvation—in its larger sense—**the healing of all creation**. If we don't have a puny view of salvation, then it will be easier to see the salvific purpose behind the miracles of Jesus.

-Let me close with three quotes that might help us:

- 1) Philip Yancey (Lowery, 142), "Why then, any miracles? Did they make any difference? It was in Jesus' nature to counteract the effects of the fallen world during his time on earth. As he strode through life, Jesus used supernatural power to set right what was wrong. Every physical healing pointed back to a time in Eden when physical bodies did not go blind, get crippled, or bleed nonstop for twelve years—and also pointed forward to a time of re-generation to come. The miracles he did perform, breaking as they did the charms or sickness and death, give me a glimpse of what the world was meant to be and instill hope that one day God will right its wrongs. To put it mildly, God is no more satisfied with this earth than we are: Jesus' miracles offer a hint of what God intends to do about it."

- 2) Gregory Boyd (*God at War*, 192), “Jesus’ miracles over nature, as well as his healings, exorcisms and especially his resurrection, were definite acts of war that accomplished and demonstrated his victory over Satan. These acts routed demonic forces and...established the kingdom of God and the restoration of a new humanity in the midst of this war zone. In doing this, Jesus set in motion forces that will eventually overthrow the whole of this already fatally-damaged Satan assault upon God’s earth and upon humanity.”
- 3) Lowery, (*Humble Defense*, 138), “Miracles are thus a means which God employs for directing history until the time he has established his rule over the whole universe.”

-If this makes sense, next we will speak about miracles as going to war with compassion and why then attributing Jesus’ power to the devil is such a lethal sin.

NEXT LEVEL
SESSION 6: GOING TO WAR WITH COMPASSION
AND THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Dr. Mark Scott

-In our last lesson we suggested that the miracles of Jesus were previews of coming attractions. That is, miracles preview a perfect world that right now only exists in hope above us. Jesus started saving the world previous to the cross experience to set the world right and recreate it. In the miracles, Jesus was going to war against the devil.

-I mean after all, **1 Jn. 3:8** says, “The reason that the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” The miracles were one way he was doing that.

-But Jesus’ method of war and our methods of war are not like that of the world. **2 Cor. 10:4-5** say, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

-Jesus went to war with compassion—thus in most of the miracles (especially the healings ones) we see Jesus at his most tender moments. This was so much the case that it caused John the Baptist real problems—see **Matt. 11:2-6**. John predicted a messiah that would clean up this lousy town, and Jesus was out there healing people. Something didn’t fit for John. Now...Jesus went ahead and honored JB in his ongoing remarks.

-As an example of this I would like to look at one miracle when we see this tenderness and compassion of Jesus—**Lk. 5:12-16**, “The *Cleansing* of the Leper.” AND...as a sidebar we probably ought to get our language right. Our heritage has been rather famous for saying, “Call Bible things by Bible names.” Well...technically speaking then...

- 1) You *raise* a lame person.
- 2) You *unstop* deaf ears.
- 3) You *open* blind eyes.
- 4) You *loose* dumb tongues.
- 5) You *resurrect* dead bodies.
- 6) You *calm* troubled waters.
- 7) You *call out* or *exorcise* demons.
- 8) And, you *cleanse* a leper.

-So, how do we see this compassion in this miracle story?

- 1) Jesus’ touching him is mentioned (13).
- 2) Jesus’ willingness is mentioned (13).
- 3) Jesus’ sent him to the priest (14). Why is that an act of compassion? I used to think it was so Jesus could free press. The priest would ask him how he got well and...Reality is that by going to the priest and getting his official word, the man can go home to his family. In other words Jesus not only cleanses him; he also restores him to community—which fits one of the nuances of salvation that we mentioned in the last lesson. Jesus’ desire for him not to speak of this got violated, but others spread the news too.

-This is not to say that Jesus cannot be seemingly *harsh* in his compassion. When he speaks to demons or troubled waters or to death he speaks strongly. But it is like an NFL player holding his small baby.

-Now...that brings me to say a word about a strong teaching that Jesus gave once concerning these miracles that he did, and that is about the unforgivable sin—the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

-You might think at first pass that the blasphemy against the HS has nothing to do with our topic (The Miracles of Jesus), but I contend that it does. To reject these miracles is equal to rejecting Jesus. Let's look...

-The blasphemy against the HS is located in three Gospel texts (Matt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 11). The context is different in each case so I have to assume that Jesus gave this teaching in a few different settings. For Matthew the context had to do with a miracle—healing of the blind and mute man (perhaps also deaf); for Mark it had to do with his family coming to take him away; for Luke it came following the teaching on how to pray. The differing contexts show that the Gospel writers were given some freedom to arrange their material as led by the HS and portray Jesus as an itinerant preacher.

-We'll consider Mark's account (3:22-30):

1) The charge has a historical context (Philistine deity) and a theological context (what the Pharisees wanted to do).

2) Jesus' answer shows their charge to be absurd, inconsistent, obscuring of the real situation, and exposing of them.

3) Jesus answers with parables.

4) What is lexically? Historically (divine name)? Eschatologically (OT, Gospels, and Acts forward)?

5) But theologically?

-Attributed Christ's power to Satan.

-But Christ worked by the power of God.

-The Spirit led him to the cross, where he atoned for world.

-To cut off from miracles = cutting off from the cross = cutting off from salvation.

-It is a **verbal sin that simply reveals the heart. So it is the *progression of a hardened heart***. Deliberate rejection of his miraculous power. Not same as apostasy but result is the same.

-So these miracles are **acts of war done through compassion**. We dare not blow them off. Next we will consider the number of miracles, the categories of them, and the elements that make up miracle stories.

NEXT LEVEL
SESSION 7: NUMBERS, CATEGORIES, AND ELEMENTS
OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Dr. Mark Scott

-In this lesson we want to group three different concerns that relate to the miracles of Jesus. They are: discerning the *numbers* of miracles (how many are there?), the *categories* of those miracles (which might be a Western construct anyway), and the *elements* of the miracles (how do they come to us?).

The **Numbers** of Miracles:

-Don't want to make this harder than it is. But it can be a bit tricky. For instance:

- 1) Do you count things like "Jesus walking through their midst" (Lk. 4:30) as one or Jesus riding a donkey in the Triumphal Entry "on which no one had ever sat" (Mk. 11:2)? Maybe not miraculous but...close maybe.
- 2) Do you count generic statements (Matt. 8:16; Lk. 4:40-41)?
- 3) And what "knowing" the human heart (Mk. 2:8).

-Similar to parables there seems to be about 40-50 or so. Here is my own breakdown. I might say if you look at Blackburn's article in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 551, you will see some other numbers. These are the result of my own inductive study:

- 1) **Matthew: 31 with 4 unique ones.**
- 2) **Mark: 22 with 2 unique ones.**
- 3) **Luke: 33 with 11 unique ones.**
- 4) **John: 12 with 9 unique ones.**

-As stated earlier some suggest that Mark's Gospel is about 31% miracles. I think you can see that miracles occupied a large portion of Jesus' ministry.

The **Categories** of Miracles:

-Again the very desire to categorize them may be a Western construct. But for pedagogical purposes there may still be cause to think about them this way.

-Here are some categories:

1) **Power Over Creation (Nature):**

- Walking on water.
- Coin in fish's mouth.
- Catches of fish.
- Feeding multitudes.
- Calming seas.
- Transfiguration.
- Resurrection—though we will want to look at that one on its own since it is so special.

2) **Power Over the Spirit World:**

- Exorcisms—most famous would be Mk. 5:1-20 and Mk. 9:14-29.

- Jesus talked to demons, granted their requests, and hushed them.
- They most often spoke of his identity.
- One thing that Jesus' exorcisms prove is that he believed that the spirit world was real.

3) **Power Over Illness:**

- Leprosy.
- Paralyzed.
- Withered hands.
- Blind eyes.
- Lame feet.
- Deaf ears.
- Dumb tongues.
- Flow of blood.
- Fever.

4) **Power Over Death:**

- Widow's boy at Nain (Lk. 7).
- Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5).
- Lazarus (Jn. 11).

-Michael Graves (*Sermon as Symphony*) has different categories:

- 1) Exorcism Story—conflict is the key.
- 2) Controversy Story—authority is the key.
- 3) Petition Story—encounter is the key.
- 4) Provision Story—hope is the key (Jn. 2 & 6).
- 5) Rescue Story—victory is key (overcoming hostile forces).
- 6) Epiphany Story—entrance of Christ is the key (Transfiguration).

The Elements of the Miracles:

- These are actually rather simple.
- 1) The **setting**—something brought it about. Perhaps it happened more generically in the ministry of Jesus and the inspired Gospel writer gave it a context.
- 2) The **miracle itself**—often told in tremendous brevity. That's why we may never figure out how some of the miracles actually were performed (e.g. feeding of the thousands). Maybe God intended that these be kept in mystery. Do you suppose that we might get more interested in the miracle than the miracle worker?
- 3) **Lesson**—there is usually at least one—sometimes more. It's often a lesson in faith. Sometimes this pattern is broken (Mk. 3:1-5).

-One caution might be not to let the form override the content—Craddock with Jn. 9.

-Next we want to turn to watching for *intensifications* and *distinctives* in miracle stories.

NEXT LEVEL
SESSION 8: THE INTENSIFICATION AND DISTINCTIVES
OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Dr. Mark Scott

-In this lesson we want to develop the themes of *intensification* and *distinctives* of the miracles of Jesus.

-We mentioned in an earlier lesson that the miracles of the Bible often come to us in *clusters*—creation, the exodus, etc. The same is often true when they are presented to us in the Gospel record. When that happens we might look for...

Intensification:

-This could be an intensification of theme, of conflict, or of identity.

-In parable study the scholars speak of ***end stress***. This means that the accent of an individual parable is on the last part OR it can refer to a series of parables with the accent following on the last one (e.g. Lk. 15).

-This may be easier to illustrate than to define. Matthew is especially prominent in this regard (Matt. 8-9, 21-22). But I would like to consider Mark's Gospel:

- 1) **Mk. 4:35-41 (Power Over Creation)**
- 2) **Mk. 5:1-20 (Power Over the Spirit World)**
- 3) **Mk. 5:21-43 (Power Over Illness and Death)**

-The accent falls on the last one. If he can handle storms and the spirit world, he can probably handle my biggest issue, i.e. illness and death.

Distinctives:

-This matters more than one thinks at first pass. Why do certain Gospels contain certain miracles? Why are some miracles unique to that Gospel? How does the literary context of the Gospel writer play into this?

-Let me give the hints or clues to look for behind some of this and move to a few examples.

- 1) Watch how embedded structures fold into a Gospel's larger purpose (the miracles of Jn. and 20:30-31; Mk. 8:22-26, "Seeing Double" as the "blind" narratives follow the boat and bread narratives.
- 2) Read vertically and horizontally when reading the Gospels. Sometimes the distinctives are found when comparing accounts.
- 3) Watch for intensification—already mentioned.
- 4) Pay attention to keywords—"immediately" in Mk.
- 5) Since the genre is narrative watch for normal narrative things, e.g. plot, people, places, dialogue, disequilibrium and denouement.

-Three examples:

1) Calming of the Storm (Mk. 4:35-41; Matt. 8:23-27; Lk. 8:22-25).

2) Healing of Centurion's Servant (Matt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10).

3) Cleansing of the 10 Lepers (Lk. 17:11-19).

-Now I would like to help you with miracles in each Gospel:

1) **Matthew:**

- They tend to be grouped.
- They portray Jesus as New Moses.
- Jesus is more likely to be addressed as *Lord*.
- Jesus works them to *fulfill Scripture*.
- Faith and discipleship are often sub themes.
- Authority* is often part of the miracle or set up to the miracle.
- The connection between miracle and message.

2) **Mark:**

- More expanded when parallel.
- 31% of Gospel is miracle.
- Messianic Secret is actually part of this. Miracles are actually parabolic.
- Jesus is portrayed as *Mighty One*. Power encounter.
- Titles for Jesus are suppressed on lips of recipients to build for climax of 15:39.
- Miracles don't guarantee faith.
- Miracles do guarantee fear and amazement.

3) **Luke:**

- Angelophanies and Christophanies are common.
- Certain vocabulary—Master, healed.
- Emphasis on Spirit and power.
- Salvation talk is prominent.
- Ethnicity and gender are emphasized.
- Miracles tied to mission (4:16-30).
- Some medical terminology.

4) **John:**

- Place of incarnation (1:1-18).
- Only 7 miracles actually narrated. High profile but few.
- Several unique ones, especially surrounding resurrection.
- No exorcisms.
- Reach a crescendo in Lazarus and Jesus.
- The place of faith.
- OT backdrop for some miracles—Jn. 2 ad 6.
- Best testimony—9:25.
- Future has invaded present.
- Response of crowd.
- Closeness of Father and Son as opposed to miracles being work of the Spirit.
- Now in the next lesson we will take the ultimate miracle, i.e. resurrection and discuss that.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLES OF JESUS
SESSION 9: THE ULTIMATE MIRACLE: THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS
Dr. Mark Scott

-In this lesson we want to discuss the *ultimate miracle*. Of course it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It would be impossible to overstate the significance of this miracle.

-B.L. Blackburn wrote the article on the miracles of Jesus in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, and he said, “Of this fact...all historians are confident that very shortly after Jesus was crucified, his disciples became convinced...that God had restored his life and ushered him into the heavenly world. Thus, the resurrection belongs to the bedrock of Christian belief” (557).

-In lesson 4 we marked out several *purposes* of Jesus’ miracles. When we talk about the miracle of the resurrection we could add to that list. The *purposes* of the resurrection could include:

- 1) To show himself really alive—he wasn’t a ghost; he was a resurrected body.
- 2) To convince doubters and challenge unbelievers—Thomas.
- 3) To commission followers.
- 4) To comfort believers.
- 5) To cook breakfast and reinstate Peter.
- 6) To promise the Holy Spirit.
- 7) To ascend to heaven.

-Let’s connect some **doctrinal dots with the miracle of the resurrection**. With what does the resurrection connect?

- 1) **Identity of Christ.**
- 2) **Validity of the cross.**
- 3) **Prelude to exaltation of Christ in the ascension.**
- 4) **Our sanctification.**
- 5) **The return of Christ.**
- 6) **Our conversion—particularly baptism.**
- 7) **Our imperishable bodies.**
- 8) **Impetus for witness.**
- 9) **Promise of eternal life.**
- 10) **Lord’s Supper.**

-There are some *unique* items from each of the Gospels to notice about this ultimate miracle:

- 1) Matthew (28:1-15)—earthquake, angel’s appearance, meet in Galilee, worship of women, bribe of soldiers.
- 2) Mark (16:1-8)—Salome, anoint body, young man as angel, tell Peter, Jesus never appears.

- 3) Luke (24:1-12)—Spices, reminder of death details by angels, Joanna, disbelief of apostles, Peter checked it out.
- 4) John (20:1-9)—Feature of Mary Magdalene, Peter and John at tomb, burial clothes, ignorant.

-Not all the miracles of Jesus are necessarily intended to *apologetic* in nature. But the miracle of the resurrection seems to invite this kind of investigation. So probably when we teach and preach on the resurrection our preaching and teaching will take on a certain apologetic flavor. And, that's okay. Judge Casteel in *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* talked about this collaborative eyewitness testimony. Think of these things:

- 1) Come and see—Matt. 28:6; Mk. 16:6.
- 2) Look, at my hands and feet. Touch me—Mk. 24:39ff; Jn. 20:20, 27.
- 3) Eats fish—Mk. 24:42-43.

-In addition to this think of 1 Cor. 15—a whole chapter devoted to the significance of this event.

-Scholars differ about how many resurrection appearances there were—some might have overlapped. There could be as few as 7 or as many as 13. I can give 10:

- 1) Women returning from tomb (Matt. 28:1-10).
- 2) Mary Magdalene at tomb (Jn. 20:11-18).
- 3) Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
- 4) Cleopas and other disciple (Lk. 24:13-35).
- 5) Ten apostles (Lk. 24:36-40; Jn. 20:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:5).
- 6) Eleven apostles (Jn. 20:26-28).
- 7) Disciples at Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-23).
- 8) Apostles, 500 brethren (Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6).
- 9) James (1 Cor. 15:7).
- 10) Apostles (Lk. 24:50-52; Ac. 1:6-8).

-Again, we cannot overstate the significance of the ultimate miracle. Because Jesus moved out of the cemetery so shall we—Students serving at Fort Street Church in Omaha and living in the cemetery.

NEXT LEVEL
THE MIRACLE OF JESUS
SESSION 10: CURRENT MIRACLES AND MIRACLE STORIES
Dr. Mark Scott

-Since we have spent time in these nine lessons discussing the miracles of Jesus, it seemed appropriate to end this series of lessons talking about *current miracles and miracle stories* in our world today. We need to apply our best thinking/study to this as well as a heart-felt sensitivity to this—it is really hard for any of us to stand in judgment of someone else's experience after all.

-There are several considerations that we would need to make to adequately discuss this:

1) Consider the miracles of Acts:

- a. There are many of them—35 at least (and some of these are summary statements).
- b. They mirror the ones of Jesus in the Gospels, and yet go beyond some of what we see in the Gospels. In fact, God is consistent but rarely does things exactly the same. He is no creature of habit. He is a Creator. He can do *new* things.
- c. They vary in kind—ascension, tongues, lame people, shaking of a house, deaths (Ananias and Sapphira and Herod), resurrections (Tabitha and Eutychus), deliverances from prison, bodily transportation, eyes healed and blinded, visions, famines predicted, HS speaking, and shaking snakes off into fire pits.
- d. They can come in clusters albeit that the clusters are compressed.
- e. Usually something dynamic is going on in the context to show that a geographical and ethnic expanse of the gospel is taking place.
- f. They tend to come around conversions—goes with above.
- g. They tend to be showing more of the war with the enemy.

2) Consider that miracles were very much part of the NT era: Jn. 14:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3b-4.

3) Consider the caution about miracles being false or counterfeiting or mocking real Christian faith: Matt. 7:22-23; 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Jn. 4:1; Rev. 13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20. Miracles are not self-authenticating and are not the only test that God is in it.

4) Consider the understanding about miraculous gifts and their on-going nature or completion:

- a. What about the *sign gifts*? Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
- b. What about one's understanding of 1 Cor. 13:10 and the *perfect* (or perfection)? Openness vs. Cessationism?

- c. What about the testimony about these in the **history of the church**?
 - i. On the one hand—John Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407), “But now occur no longer.”
 - ii. On the other hand—larger testimony of the church world-wide (Keener’s book and Roman Catholic thinking about sainthood).

- 5) Consider the fact that **Christianity and medical science have not been competitors but have complemented each other**—Luke as a doctor and there were medical schools in Cos and Pergamum. Think of the clinics and hospitals that Christians have built through the years. Christians have generally understood that part of setting the world right as to relieve suffering where it is found. Think of Js. 5:14.

- 6) Consider some final principles that might help guide you and critique miraculous claims. These come in the form of questions:
 - a. Does the supposed miracle line up with the kind of miracles we see in the Bible?
 - b. Does the miracle clearly point people to God and his glory?
 - c. Is the miracle worker’s life consistent with the nature of the gospel and the holiness expected on the part of Christians?
 - d. Does the miracle need shared publically?

-So, we come to the end of our study. The miracles of Jesus were outstanding supernatural acts of salvation, compassion, and war to get the world back that so rightfully belongs to God.

-James S. Stewart said it best, “With Jesus, it’s wonder after wonder, and every wonder true.”

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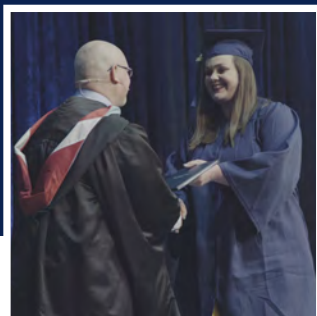
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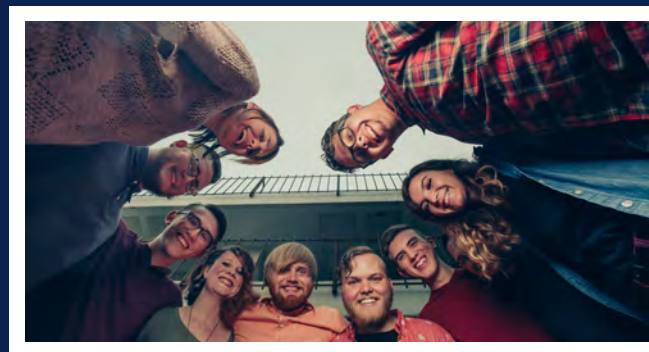


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