



**MIRACLES
of the
DOMESTIC
KIND**

Deane Carter

New Creation Publications Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

'Holy love is not a detachable set of divine attributes operating in the abstract. It is the holy love of God acting within and through the finite, acting not by proxy, but in reality'.¹ And the given reality, John tells us, is the Incarnate Word, the glorious Son of God, 'full of grace and truth'. Jesus reveals God as He really is, in His words and works. This study will concern itself primarily with these works, as we observe Jesus acting in miracles, and fellowship with sinners.

At three places in John's Gospel, 14:10 and earlier at 4:34 and 5: 17–19, Jesus clearly teaches that He deliberately and voluntarily does His Father's works; that in fact, through Him, the Father continues His work. Jesus claims that the Father 'shows Him all that He Himself is doing', v. 20. We may legitimately ask, 'Where has He shown this?'

THE FATHER WORKS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Father's works are seen from Genesis 1 onwards. He it is who creates, and rejoices in its goodness, Gen. 1:31–2:3. This, to the Jew, was the miracle 'par excellence', as God then proceeded to maintain and direct His creation with providential care. There is no 'autonomous nature', rather a universe personally sustained by God's Word. Creation is a power structure rather than a merely physical structure, and its stability and reliability (its moral reliability) is clearly based on God's faithfulness.

¹ Aldwinckle, R.F., *More Than Man*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, page 194.

God has not created, and abandoned His dependents: He reveals His purposes and the destiny of creation. Amos 3:7, Jeremiah 31:35). Further, He deliberately intervenes to direct the fulfilment of His purposes. (Job 5: 9–11, Psalm 89:6). Often this intervention is called miracle² – under the titles of ‘signs and wonders’, and works’. They are expressions of God’s ‘invisible power’, as Paul discerns in Romans 1: 20. These miracles are experienced by all people, but are especially recognised by the people of God, Israel.

The reign of God is evidenced in many of the Psalms: see 136:4, 86:10, 26:7, 71:17, 75:2, 96:3,105:2, 65:6. This is particularly seen in the liberation of Israel in the Exodus event: II Samuel 7:22f, Jeremiah 32:20. Israel knows the redeeming action of God for His Covenant Firstborn Son, by wondrous signs and works: Deut. 13:1, 2 cf. 28:46 again Deuteronomy 4:34, 7:19, 26:8, 29:3, 34:11. These works reveal the nature of God to His people, who are thereby called and confirmed in Faith (Exodus 4: 5) and assured of electing grace (Exod. 7:5). These themes are underlined in Exodus 15: 11, Psalm 78: 12, 89: 6, 77:15 and Isaiah 25: 1. However, although God works to release His people, they may neither presume upon His grace, as shown in the temptations of the people in the Wilderness (Deuteronomy 4ff God’s son disciplined), nor depart from His directives (Deuteronomy 13: 1–5). The covenant people are not to demand signs or miracles from their God, and so bypass the necessity of faith, but faithfully care for each other. As they respond with trust and obedience, they will experience daily the mercies of the LORD. (Lamentations 3: 22 –23).

The God who clearly worked in history to purchase His people, praised by the liberated people in Exodus 15: 1–18, is acknowledged as Healer in Exodus 15: 26: He obviously cares for His people. And He expects His people to care for each other, especially those who are, or become underprivileged – the widows, orphans, and strangers. (Deuteronomy 10: 17–19, 26: 12–15). God will effect justice for these folk in His ‘typical’ people. (Numbers 11:1–3, Leviticus 10:2, Isaiah ch.1, Exodus

² ‘Miracle is an event of an extraordinary kind, brought about by a god, and of religious significance’, so, Swinburne, R., *The Concept of Miracle*, Macmillan, 1970, page 1.

19:5–6).

We turn to the Psalms, for an even clearer presentation of the ‘Works of God’. The Psalmist rejoices that God is the ‘Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in His holy habitation’, 68: 5. (Compare with Jesus’ ministry at the Temple in Jerusalem ‘His Father’s house’ in Matthew 21: 8ff in contrast to II Samuel 5:8!). The works are remembered in Psalm 106:7, 21, 22, and again in Psalm 146, especially verses 5–10. David blesses God in Psalm 145:

- v. 4 ‘thy works mighty acts ...’
- v. 5 ‘wondrous works’
- v. 6 ‘terrible acts’
- v. 7 ‘abundant goodness’
- v. 11 ‘glory of thy kingdom’
- v. 13 ‘gracious in all his deeds’
- v. 17 ‘just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings’.

Perhaps the clearest Old Testament evidence of the Father’s works is declared in the Restoration Psalm 107. Jesus discerns (so Mark) the LORD’s steadfast love, especially as He brings deliverance to His people. God provides for the hungry and thirsty in the wilderness, 107:4–9 (see Mark 6:30–44, 8:1–10, 14–21), release for darkened, distressed prisoners, 107:10–16 (see Mark 5: 1–20, 6: 13, 7: 24–30), heals the sick, 107:17–22 (see Mark 5:21–6:5, 13, 53–56, 7:31–37, 8:22–26), and saves from peril at sea, 107:23–32 (see Mark 4:35–41 and 6: 45–52). Mercy (love) is displayed in 107: 1, 15, 21, 31 and 43, so Jesus is portrayed as showing great compassion, in response to the heart cry of men, in Mark 5: 19, 6:34 and 8: 2. A call to give heed and discern the nature of these works concludes the Psalm at verse 43, paralleled in Mark 8: 14–21. Interestingly enough, Mark further stresses that the worker of these Gospel deeds is none other than ‘the Son’, in 3:11, 5:7, 9:7, 12:6–9, 13:32, 14:61 and 15:39. If Psalm 107 presents the works of the Father in the Old Testament, then Jesus, as Son, truly represents the Father and His works in the New.

Jesus was also aware of yet another Old Testament work – release of women from ‘barrenness’. Many of the ‘famous mothers’ of Israel were delivered from barren–

ness of, or closure of the womb. Sarah Genesis 17: 17–19, 18:10–15, 21:1–7, Rebekah Genesis 25:21, Rachel Genesis 30: 1, 22–24, all suffered, and were delivered. Another interesting case is noted with the women of Abimelech (Genesis 20:17–18 cf. Genesis 12: 17). An Exodus promise encourages Israel with a covering of this problem: see Exodus 23:25–26 and parallel with Psalm 113: 9. Later we see the response of God to Hannah's prayer (I Samuel 1: 1–20), and the gift of a son to the Shunammite woman (II Kings 4: 14–17). And Jesus would have been aware of His kinswoman Elizabeth, whose faith was rewarded in Luke 1:25 with her son, John the Baptist.

JESUS—‘THE PHYSICIAN OF THE SICK’

It is clear that Jesus knew that His words effected forgiveness and healing. Although John the Baptist worked no miracles (John 10: 41), and neither did his disciples, it is plainly attested that miracles were an integral part of Jesus' ministry. Much in the gospels is given over to narratives of the miracles, and they would not be the same without them. Jesus' public ministry could easily be confirmed, or contradicted, and there is strong evidence of controversy provoked by such acts. (Mark 3: 22–30). In fact, we would be hard pressed to explain the impact of Jesus apart from His works: the raising of Lazarus in John constitutes the basis for the decision to kill Jesus, for the anointing at Bethany, and the backdrop to the Messianic entry to Jerusalem.

Effective words, and works – that bring lost people into the saving reality of God. ‘The miracles are wonders performed by God, not because they are ‘supernatural events’ but because they are performed as a consequence of an unbroken relationship with God, i.e. a ‘natural’, childlike relationship of man to God, his creator, which is not destroyed by sin. Because they are in this sense ‘unusual’ (strange) human acts they constitute the ‘signs’ of the Kingdom of God which has already dawned and in which God lives with men in an

unbroken relationship of the creator to his creature. The miracles are human acts performed by the servant Son of Man by means of which he vicariously realises for all men man's ‘natural’ life with God’.³

‘For this reason, Jesus' miracles are human acts which make it possible and, if they are accepted in faith, true that lost men are permitted to live with God in His Kingdom through no merit of their own. The miracles of healing remove all the obstacles which sickness and death have placed in the way of an unbroken relationship of man to God. The raising of the dead and the healing of the sick essentially belong together. the fellowship of meals which Jesus has with the lost must also be described as a miracle. It is through the fellowship of eating that total solidarity is established between the Son of Man – high priest and all those whom he serves. They sit at table with him in God's kingdom. The fellowship of meals and the raising of the dead belong together as miracles of the Kingdom of God’.⁴ Jesus' opponents quickly sensed this, and readily and persistently fought against His healings (particularly those performed on the Sabbath), and His meals with tax collectors and sinners.

In Jesus then, we perceive that God is present among men in a way unknown since the Fall. And He is present in the man Jesus. In fact, God is actually present, in dynamic confrontation (John 14: 9)° It is His activity to do so, with signs, wonders, and powerful acts – which we call miracles. The Evangelists never use the designation ‘miracle’; rather ‘*semeia*’, ‘*terata*’, and ‘*dunameis*’. ‘*Semeion*’, especially in the LXX was any event that pointed to God, particularly His readiness to help; so a sign. ‘*Terata*’ was the name for a warning or encouraging act of God, especially something wonderful. ‘*Dunameis*’ was the power of God that shaped history (Exodus 6:26 and Deuteronomy 3: 24). The Synoptic Gospel writers use the term ‘sign’ in a negative manner – that which the unbelieving Jews demanded. John, however, uses the term freely and positively to describe the miracles of Jesus. Again, ‘*dunameis*’ is never used by John. Further, in the

³ What are the capacities/abilities of man? Could innocent Adam and the sinless Christ effect works listed in the Gospels (Mark 4:39-41 rebuke the wind on the sea, Mark 6: 48-50 walk on water, Matthew 17:20 move mountains, and Luke 19:30-35 ride untamed beasts) ?

⁴ Prenter, R., ‘The Works and Words of Jesus Christ’ in *The Gospel as History*, ed. Vajta, V., Fortress Press, 1975, page 17.

Synoptics, two-thirds of the times where faith is re-counted as operative relate to the miracles. And all the healings listed are within the category of 'psychosomatic', ie. there are no broken bones mended, and no-one is healed of obesity!!

Jesus' Sonship Contested

Matthew 4:1–11, cf. Mark 1:12–13, Luke 4:1–13. Following the Messianic investiture at the Baptism, as the Son of God, Jesus was tempted in the Wilderness. At each point, His Sonship was contested, since Satan would not readily give up his claim to rule as false father-king. Any challenge must be crushed, either by effective temptation to deny the real Father-King, or by death. However, at no point did Jesus falter in His trust in God – He resisted every temptation to operate apart from faith. He demanded no sign for Himself, and so would give none to another; how would He interpret (by faith) such a sign anyway? Rather than submitting to Satan, He resisted and attacked his kingdom-family.

The Beelzebub Conflict

Mark 3:23–30, cf. Matthew 12:27ff and Luke 11:15ff. The Synoptic Evangelists record the accusation against Jesus that His activity is energised by Satan. He discounts this, by stating that the Spirit of God is actually present (the finger = the Spirit: compare Exod. 8:19 and 15:6 for God's hand), so the Kingdom rule of God is evident. The liberation of God's son (family) in Exodus is again portrayed, as Jesus penetrates Satan's household to emancipate 'his children' (compare with John 8:44, 48–55). It is at this point that the Pharisees demand a 'heavenly sign' from Jesus, but He consistently refuses to give such a 'proof'. Jesus is conscious, as is Satan, that this is no mere trifling 'test', but the combat joined is not the endless see-saw of history's long dualistic struggle, but the significant turning point, for God and man. Jesus knows that He must smash Satan's power in all spheres, and warns the Pharisees with both gentleness, but firmness. In Matthew 12:45 He unveils

the overwhelming nature of scribal and Pharisaic evil. These groups are linked with the 'evil generation' – they are cold, clannish, literalists, accusing Him of being possessed (v. 24), yet are themselves, with their followers, like a man inhabited by eight demons. They resemble the blind and dumb demoniac (Matthew 12: 22–23), neither seeing nor speaking the truth.

THE FUNCTION OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

–**Proof of Jesus as Messiah:** Some would argue that Jesus worked miracles as a proof of His identity. We may accept these works as witnesses of the Father to His Son (interpreted by Jesus by faith), but not to justify Him. Jesus emphasises that He will not act to point to Himself (see Mark 8:11 cf. Matthew 4: 3) – to do so would be to contradict His deliberate identification with man, as man (Philippians 2: 5–8). He acts as man, and praises those who recognise the revelatory character of this, as noted in John 11:45 and 2: 11. The works are the works of the man who is God's son, not a 'heavenly bell-ringer', nor God masked as man. In fact, as man, Jesus cannot help working them, simply because He knows God, and obeys Him.

We note further that Paul never suggests that Jesus is proven to be God's Son by reason of His miracles. Paul sees no great 'apologetic evidence' in the miracles.

– **Expressions of Mercy:** Jesus was seen as doing good, as Peter remarks in Acts 10:38 (cf. 4:9). The Synoptists recall, like a refrain, that 'he had compassion' on those He met: see Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, Mark 6: 34, 8: 2. He is acknowledged as the Son of God who is the servant of all.

–**Means of Faith-arousal:** In the Old Testament we have seen that miracles provoke, and set up faith. Likewise, Jesus anticipates this response: so see Matthew 11: 20–24 where Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are rebuked for refusal to respond (further note John 2: 11, 4:53, 6:14 and 7:31; Paul in Romans 15:18–19).

The ‘Significance’ of Miracles: The works of Jesus point to the eschatological salvation, with its effects. They signify the presence of the Kingdom, and more particularly (in John) the presence of the Sovereign Father. His rule can be known, experienced and realised now – in Jesus. God’s rule is not random, but focussed powerfully and creatively in Jesus, as He remakes man to relate to God as He is.

ASPECTS RELATED TO MIRACLES

Illness, Suffering and Moral Evil

Moses in Deuteronomy declares that God wounds, and heals (Deuteronomy 32: 39). The Psalmists acknowledge that man feels keenly the implications of his sins (Psalm 19:12ff, 90:8, 32:3–5 and 103:2–3). This may include both individuals, and men collectively as sin may be punished with disease and/or disaster. The prophets, particularly Jeremiah, show that Israel’s sin may be categorised as the sickness of failure to observe God’s law: Isaiah 1:5–6, Hosea 5:13, Jeremiah 14: 17, 29: 17, 30: 12–15. We may say that ‘whosoever does God’s will finds God’s pleasure, and whosoever does not do God’s will experiences God’s displeasure’.⁵ This may not, however, be interpreted in a mechanistic way: Job carefully demolishes this view. In him we learn that ‘faith must remain, even when understanding fails’ – see Psalm 38:2–5 and Job 36:15.

Jesus liberated the disease/retribution schema from the rigidity of causality, and directed man’s gaze to God Himself. This is indicated in Luke 13:1–5, John 9:3 [cf. Exodus 20:5, Numbers 14: 18, Deuteronomy 5:9, Jeremiah 31:29, Ezekiel 18:2] and John 5:14. Suffering in the New Testament is linked to future glory, as in II Corinthians 4:17 and Romans 8: 18. We discern that the end time has spilled over into the present: the good news promise of Luke 2:10 will be finalised in Revelation 21:lff.

⁵ Brouwer, A.M., DeBergrede, Zeist, 1930, page 105, cited in van der Loos, H., *The Miracles of Jesus*, Brill. 1968, page 257.

‘Which is easier?’: Forgiveness or Healing

To the Jew, the Messiah could do much, but only God could forgive. The Old Testament is replete with the forgiveness of God, often linked with healing.⁶ But Jesus does forgive, as the startled Pharisees witness in Mark 2:1–8 and Matthew 9: 1–8. Jesus’ words are not merely declarative, but effective. On other occasions, Jesus grants salvation (Luke 7:47–48 and 19:1–10). In so doing, He indicates man’s real distress – his alienation from God, and his resultant life in sin and guilt.

It is from this that Jesus redeems him. And the redemption depends on, is the expression of grace.

The reality of Jesus’ victory is perceived in forgiveness, where He conquers the Prince of Darkness in man’s heart, and healing, as He defeats the power of evil in man’s body. Deliverance from all evil, and the restoration of all life are affected by Jesus.

‘Jesus saw their faith’

Both in the Old and New Testaments, most people do not believe in miracles. However, Jesus often sensed that people believed prior to miracles, so came to the aid of these folk: Matthew 9:2– see further Mark 5:36, 9:24 and Matthew 15: 28. He praises the faith of others, commenting on its salvific nature (Luke 17: 19, Mark 10: 52 and 5:34). Lack of faith was an impediment to this saving activity (Mark 6:5 and Matthew 13: 58). Even pagans are praised, as in Matthew 8:13 and 15: 28. Others believe after witnessing the events. Jesus is pleased to see helpless men turning unconditionally to the helping Lord.

‘Thou hearest me always’

Jesus often prayed to the Father, but never with His disciples as one of them. He knew that His Father always answered His prayers. The miracles are those answers, of God to the prayers of His Ideal Son. Jesus acknowledges dependence on God in Matthew 11: 25ff, and here has received ‘all things’ – including authority to speak and act in a Father-pleasing manner. He was

⁶ II Chron. 7:14, Psalm 103:3, 147:3, Isaiah 19:22, 38:17, 57:18-19, Jeremiah 3:22, 6:14, 8:11, 33:6, Hosea 7:1, 11:3, Isaiah 30:26, 33:24.

always open to His Father, by Word and prayer.

He further encouraged His disciples to pray, both simply and sincerely. They were not to believe in prayer as a 'self acting means' – 'for medicinal purposes only!' Rather they were to pray that God's will be done, in surrender to His providential care. The lack of miracle would not necessarily signify 'no faith' or 'weak faith', or even 'unconfessed sins'.

The Word of Salvation

The miracles of Jesus may not be seen as an adjunct, or subsumed within the overall proclamation of the Living Word. Both the Words and works are coincidental, interdependent and revelatory. On occasions, neither words nor works are believed, even though effective (Luke 17: 17–19 – where 9 out of 10 healed lepers make no open response).

The Word/Work of Jesus given to man acts in the realms of Creation/Providence, Redemption/Recreation and Eschatological Intrusion. Some scholars would question whether this action is really a collision between the 'miraculous and nature', or rather a head on confrontation between the Kingdom of God and Satan's Kingdom of guilt, darkness, and death, i.e. miracles are *contra naturam* or *contra peccatum*? It would appear that miracles are only 'contra naturam' in so far as creation is subject to bondage in hope of human liberation (Rom. 8: 19–23). The anticipated harmony promised by the Living Word of God is given now – this word and work, i.e. miracle, is a salutary encouragement and warning to us all.

THE JOHANNINE UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS' SIGN-WORKS

If anyone does not see the miracles of Jesus as 'signs' they do not see their meaning – they don't see at all. What Jesus calls for is not empirical vision, but faith perception. That faith perceives that only in Jesus do we see the Way, Truth and Life of the Father.

Only in Jesus do we see the Father: He is in the Father, and the Father in Him (John 14:6, 10, 11 and John 10:38). This reciprocal relationship is unique, and highlights perfect solidarity (John 10: 15). The works of Jesus reveal not just the Father, and that He is reliable, but the intimate closeness of Father to Son.

The Father has disclosed His words and works to His Son, as in John 5: 17ff – that is, He gives life, and judges. The Son works and speaks since He deliberately and freely imitates His Father. In so doing, all He says or does expresses this truth: each event may be interpreted by this principle. In the immediate contexts, Jesus has given life to the paralytic, see v. 8 'Rise' (raises to life in v. 21) and has given life in chapter 4: 46–54. These works have been granted to the Son by the Father (5: 36) – He does the Father's work (John 10:18 and 9:3–5). As Son, He has committed Himself to this mission: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work' (John 4: 34, see 17:4 and compare with Matthew 4: 3).

In 1:14 John states that we have seen the glory of the Son (so Father) 'full of grace and truth'. This glory is the revelation of grace and truth. 'Grace' is God's generous love, and what man receives from it, whilst 'truth' here is divine reality revealed in Jesus. Beholding this glory is to perceive with faith the unity of the Son (Jesus) with His Father. Each sign then is a revelation of this glory, a miracle with deep yet simple meaning – in each work grace and truth are concretely disclosed. And the interpretations given, are to show simply that the sign, is the reality. What had appeared as insignificant is indeed significant – the deed is all that it symbolises.

To put it another way, the Word, the Light of the world has come in human form. The visibleness of this flesh shows the visibleness of God's glory – it is brilliantly clear, to faith. The rejection of this is then obviously Satanic, not attributable to any divine hiddenness; men are blind, during the midday brightness! So men dispute or refuse to accept Jesus' sign-works, not because of any problem with the sign itself, but the

observers (6: 26). Jesus is denounced as a sacrilegious blasphemer (5: 18), the Pharisees refuse the 'open eyed sign' in chapter 9 (cf. Nicodemus in John 3: 2), and wouldn't see the sign of the Resurrection and the life in chapter 11. This rejection of Lazarus is the rejection of the Father's glory, and work (John 11:4, 45–53, 12:9–11).

Jesus takes the initiative to call people to see the Father (14:9), and will not deviate from this charge of His Father. He is an open audio visual, as He represents to Israel again the fact that God had released Israel, a rejected, bound, only son, and blessed with His presence, and kingdom inheritance. The strangers, orphans and widows were graciously catered for, by God in the Old Testament, and now by Jesus. To many this was scandalous. Others responded with faith – so Nathaniel, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, Nicodemus, Thomas and even certain Pharisees (see John 12:37ff, esp. v.42).

If a man can believe it, says Jesus, he will not be left as an orphan (John 14:18 – compare Matthew 12: 43–44??). Rather the Holy Spirit (the Old Testament kingdom inheritance) will come to be with(in) him, and the Son and His Father are permanently present with him: 'We will come to him and make our home with him' (14:23). [This takes up the Old Testament motif of God with His covenant servant sons. Genesis 17:7–8, 28:21, Exodus 6:7, 19:5–6, 29:45–46, Leviticus 11:45, 22:33 et. al. Deuteronomy 4:20, 29:12–13 et.al., Jeremiah 7:23, 11:4, 31:1, 33 et.al., Ezekiel 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:27, Zechariah 8: 8, 13: 9, and in the New Testament in the Oath form in II Corinthians 6:16 and Revelation 21:3–7.]

SIGNS OF THE FATHER—

THE OBEDIENT SON'S WORKS

We turn now to an overview of certain of the miracles – to see their 'domestic' elements. This survey is obviously cursory, as it presupposes the reader's familiarity with the events mentioned.

1. The Face saving wine

John 2: 1–11.

Jesus' first sign, which manifested His glory. The family reputation and community status were maintained, with this 'luxury miracle'. Jesus knows that it is not like His Father to withhold good wine simply because men abuse it. He will have no enforced virtue. The Son, who refused to turn stones into bread, turns water into wine, for others. It is, however, totally lacking in outward display – it is an anonymous gift.

2. 'Your son will live'

John 4: 46– 53.

The Fatherhood of God created fatherhood in man; God's love man's love. There is then, a natural concern of this father for his only son. The nobleman believes Jesus' word, and later he and his family believe. The son has been saved from death, alive now to hear the witness of his own father (see Psalm 145:4) to Jesus.

3. 'He commands even the unclean spirits'

Mark 1: 21–28.

This Sabbath exorcism occurred in a Capernaum synagogue, as Jesus taught with authority. The demon sensed danger, as Satan's reign was shaken, and God's kingdom was being established. Here in the first exorcism Jesus attacks Satan's right to the kingdom. This event may well be included in Matthew 4:23 cf. 9: 35, and one of the 'mighty works' listed in Matthew 11: 23.

4. 'My Mother-in-law'

Mark 1:29–31, and parallels.

Like most of the Sabbath healings, as far as we can discern, no life was in danger. At home with Peter, Andrew, James and John, Jesus was made aware 'immediately' of the plight of Peter's mother-in-law. Healing was immediate, restoring family harmony, and joyful service. Peter was learning how Jesus cared for (his) loved ones.

Peter later sees numerous healings and exorcisms,

which we assume occur in or near his home. Following Jesus, he sees a leper healed, who, after having confirmed his purification, becomes a witness to Jesus (Mark 1: 40–45).

5. 'He was at home'

Mark 2: 1–12.

Mark records that Jesus, again at Capernaum, was 'at home'. Does this mean merely back in Capernaum, or at Simon and Andrew's home, or at Jesus' (Mary's) home? Lenski is sure that it is Jesus' own home, and that this shows that Jesus doesn't mind risking the partial destruction of a house since a person is healed. [But compare Luke 9:58 with Matthew 4: 13]. Evidently many Pharisees and doctors of the law, from 'everywhere', were present. They were scandalised by Jesus' effective word of forgiveness. The healed man is sent 'home', restored with his family and friends.

The Capernaum home is mentioned again in Mark 3:20, 9:33 and Matthew 17:25. We may not be certain of its ownership, but van der Loos comments that if it is Peter's home ' . . . the question of the loss suffered by the owner of the house is not so important'.⁷ Would Peter be so convinced?!

Those who witnessed the sign were amazed and 'glorified' God, since He had given authority 'to men' (Matthew 9: 8 and 5: 16).

6. 'God has visited His people'

Luke 7:11–17.

Apart from answering John the Baptist's question (cf. Luke 7:22), Jesus shows care for a widow, dependent for her well being upon an only child, her son. Obviously, the disciples and townsfolk from Nain saw the links with Elijah and Elisha's ministries, as recorded in I Kings 17, and II Kings 4. The young man is given new life, and deliberately given back to his mother. God had indeed visited His people (see Psalm 8:4 and Luke 1: 68), seen in Jesus consistent compassion for bereaved parents.

7. 'The Gerasene demoniac'

Mark 5:1–20 and parallels.

This poor man, the possessed cemetery dweller, was released from the 'Legion' of unclean spirits. What had been a pagan country, where Satan assumed free reign, was now to hear the clear proclamation of this man.

Sent home, he was free to share 'how much the Lord had done' for him (v. 19– 20).

The demons had readily understood that their existence was under threat (cf. Zechariah 3:2 and Jude 9), and that in Jesus the restoration of creation was being effected [see also Mark 4:39, John 12:31, I John 3:8 and Romans 8: 19].

The released man would remember well Psalm 68:6, and be convinced that it is better to heal demoniacs than to retain pigs!

8. 'The only child of Jairus'

Matthew 9:18 and parallels.

Once again in Capernaum, a synagogue ruler named Jairus approaches Jesus. He is concerned for his only child, his daughter who is at the 'point of death'. On the way to his home, Jesus is interrupted by another 'daughter', the woman with the haemorrhage. Jairus must learn patience, as Jesus, following the 'time' or 'hour' of His Father, deals with each person's needs before moving on to the next. Arriving at Jairus' home, the party find the little girl dead. Jesus encourages the father (and so us) that death is not to be feared. This family is restored to its intimate and joyous harmony, as the twelve year old girl is raised.

9. 'Crumbs for the dogs'

Mark 7:24–30 and parallels.

In the region of Tyre and Sidon (cf. Matthew 11:21–22), Jesus is confronted by the Syrophenician woman. Her daughter, again an only child, was possessed by an unclean spirit. Impressed by her faith, and wit, Jesus speaks the Word of release. turning home, the woman finds her daughter well

⁷ van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, page 442.

free at last.

10. 'Be opened!'

Mark 7:31–37.

Now in the Decapolis region (cf. Mark 5: 20), Jesus receives a deaf and dumb man. Privately Jesus speaks the effective word, and the man hears and speaks. The response is that 'He has done all things well'. Isaiah 35:5–6 predict such healings, and the LXX text of Gen. 1:31 sees God declaring this joyous response at the conclusion of His creative acts.

11. 'A man blind from his birth'

John 9.

Jesus answers the question of parental sin causing blindness, dismissing such mechanical views. Rather, His Father, the Father of Lights (James 1: 17), acts through His Son to grant the gift of sight. God enlightens every man, but the Pharisees, seeking to disrupt this re-established family, are blind to the work of grace.

12. 'Help my unbelief'

Mark 9:16–29 and parallels.

How can the father express his anguish for his only son? This only child is tormented terribly by an unclean spirit, and has been 'since a child'. We are not aware of the pain borne by the family, and perhaps the uncertainty and frustration of the father. Everyone else had failed them – would Jesus too? After a frightful convulsion (yet another for the father to watch!), the boy was released. What relief for the family (and the disciples too?) – embarrassment is over, normalcy at last.

13. 'If you had been here'

John 11: 1–47.

This event, the raising of Lazarus, is a major component of John's Gospel: it is the climax of Jesus' public ministry, and the prelude to His Passion. The sisters are deeply distressed that Jesus had not responded

to their request for help (v.3). Strangely, He had refused to come, so that the disciples 'may believe' (v. 15). Both Martha and Mary are certain that 'my brother' would not have died had Jesus been present.

Jesus consoles this bereaved family and having called for faith, speaks the commanding Word of release. Lazarus [= 'El 'azar God has helped, cf. Luke 16: 19–31] is raised, to be freed from his grave cloths (cf. Jesus freedom from these in John 20: 7). Jesus has already declared that He will stand before all tombs and call men to the Resurrection (John 5:28–29).

Lazarus has been freed to show that Jesus (the Son) has been sent by the Father, for this act. No wonder Mary happily 'spent' 300 pence of ointment to anoint the feet of the Raiser of the Dead!

14. 'A Man under authority'

Matthew 8:5–13 and parallel.

Again in Capernaum, where this centurion had reputedly built the synagogue, Jesus is asked to come on a 'house-call', to a Gentile. The 'dear slave' was at the point of death, as the elders of the Jews reported to Jesus (was Jairus amongst them?). The centurion does not approach Jesus on the basis of vicarious religious power, rather he requests on the basis of personal faith. And like the prodigal son of Luke 15, claims that he is unworthy of grace. Nevertheless, he receives.

15. 'A leading woman'

Luke 8: 2.

Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been expelled, became a leader of the women disciples. A beautifully healed invalid, this woman of obvious means liberally provided for the itinerant ministry of Jesus and the disciples. She is given prominence by the Evangelists in that when mentioned, more often than other women, she is usually first. Mary observed the crucifixion of her Lord, and was the first to be privileged to glimpse the Risen Christ.

16. 'Give them something to eat'

Mark 6:30–44, 8:1–10 and parallels.

The miraculous gift of God, to so many people, underlines the fact that man is continually blind to the activity of God. Bread and fish constituted the basic foods of the common folk in Galilee. Jesus provides adequate food for 5,000 [20,000] and 4,000 [16,000] people on each of the occasions. Here the disciples are clearly encouraged to trust the heavenly Father, who knows the needs of each of His children (Matthew 6: 31–33). In the same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had declared to them that if they as ‘evil fathers’ gave good gifts to their children, how much more would the Father supply them with good things – even bread and fish!! (Matthew 7: 9–11). He had already done so in the Old Testament (see Exodus 16:14ff, I Kings 17:8–16, II Kings 4:1–7, 42–44 with Mark 6:42).

17. ‘You will be catching men’

Luke 5: 1–11.

Along with the dramatic call of Simon Peter, with his brother Andrew, and associates James and John, Jesus taught a wonderful lesson of provision. May it not be that the ‘great shoal of fish’ was sold, to help provide for these fishermen’s families whilst they followed Jesus?

As obedient Son, Jesus shows that man is delivered from fear of sickness, and even death. Further, man is freed from the fear of creation, which he is supposed to bring under subjection, and groans for the revelation of man’s sonship (Romans 8:19ff).

JESUS—‘A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD’

Another aspect of Jesus’ ministry by which men were granted the renewal of heart which Jesus demanded was Jesus’ fellowship with sinners and His forgiveness of their sins. We have already noted that this action may properly be included in the miraculous or sign work of Jesus.

Jesus shared table fellowship with sinners, at home and abroad. Admittedly this led to resentment and

scandal within the religious (Mark 2: 16, Matthew 11: 19) but met with the sheer delight of the irreligious (Luke 19: 9, Mark 2: 19). Common dining set up a special bond: it symbolised unity of mind, and demonstrated brotherhood. To be invited to a meal was indeed an honour, to participate in life together. Exclusion signified the repudiation of social ties with the excepted person. Shared meals had had a long tradition in sacrificial ceremonies (Exodus 18:12, 24:11 and I Kings 3: 15), and this sacred character was expressed in everyday life, with the opening blessing uniting the participants in intimate communion, and the concluding responsive ‘amen’.

Concern for cleanliness is noted in John 4: 9b, where Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Religious elitism grew up, as the ‘right sort of associates’ were invited to share meals. Obviously the unclean, or sinners were excluded from joining with the ‘righteous’. We see that the ritualistic and moral basis of community were closely linked. Hence publicans, prostitutes, the greedy, dishonest, and adulterers were ‘without the group’.

This social order or structure, Jesus deliberately challenged. This was no mere breach of religious etiquette. Jesus attacked both questions – of the unclean (Mark 7: 17–20) and sinners (Luke 19: 5). He flaunted the most elementary considerations of morality (the Law) as well as purity: contempt(?) for the Law as He breached the directive of Psalm 1: 1, and ritual purity as taught in Proverbs 28: 7, ‘He who keeps the law is a wise son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father’. Surely the God of the Old Testament would not tolerate such action, since ‘he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD’ (Prov. 17: 15). But Paul saw that God ‘justifies the ungodly’ (Romans 4: 5), and Jesus’ ministry is the concrete expression of this.

John the Baptist had already prepared for this novel activity by declaring the bankruptcy of Mosaic religion, as he called the nation to repentance. He used the classic formula of repentance – conversion, then

communion (Luke 3: 10–14). Jesus' novelty consisted in the reversal of this: communion then conversion. The reign of God had not reduced any of its demands, but now it appeared that contact triggered off deep, dynamic repentance, that conversion blossomed from fresh communion. Whereas the Pharisees chided 'the sinners' with the Law, Jesus appeared to place no conditions on these same people.

When pressed, Jesus explained that this activity was an essential and integral part of His ministry. He was convinced that since these needy folk were 'sick', they needed the 'physician', so He went to assist them. Jesus had no hesitation: perhaps some of His disciples were, and were relieved when Jesus defended them (Mark 2:15ff). In this simple activity Jesus saw that the forgiveness and conversion of sinners was at stake (Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 7:41–43), and that men were reconciled to God, and restored to the family of Israel (so Luke 19: 9). And all this was effected without any real undermining of the moral order.

The problem Jesus faced was how to win over the good, the pious Jews. What He gave was no embattled defence, nor superior 'put down', but a genuine appeal, seeking to win these folk over. It was a persistent effort to win 'the righteous', not humiliate them. This was prophesied in Isaiah 49:6 and Malachi 4:6.

Jesus knew that forgiveness effected responsive love. When reproached for such ease of forgiveness and acceptance, He responded that forgiveness produced love, not a renewed hardening and guilt. The sinner found acceptance guaranteed, without any conditions, only by returning home. This is clearly seen in the Parable of the Prodigal in Luke 15:12ff (an opportunity for Pharisees to repent and so rejoin the festive family) where Jesus appeals in response to His condemned activities (Luke 15:1–2). Although Jesus had obvious success – Zacchaeus evidenced a character change in his spontaneous giving, the 'justified sinful woman' demonstrated her love with service, and Matthew followed as a disciple – His presence with these people did not guarantee automatic renewal. Jesus ate with

Pharisees (Luke 7:30ff and 11:37ff), but since forgiveness is an act of grace, not all desired to accept it. In Luke 15:25ff it means giving up any boasting in self-achievement, any slavish attitude of wage earner before God. Neither of the sons in this parable had lived as sons; they had denied their sonship in Israel, and the elder son rejected (finally?!) the fellowship of the father, together with the forgiveness of his brother.

Jesus then, by eating at table with any men, welcomed all to fellowship with the Father, and His brothers.

THE DISCIPLES' MINISTRY OF MIRACLES AND FELLOWSHIP

(a) Miracles

In Matthew 10, Luke 10 and John 14:10ff, Jesus instructs His disciples to work the works (signs) of the Kingdom. They are sent on mission, and are obviously effective (Luke 10:17ff – did they remember Genesis 3:15 then? cf. Romans 16:20). However, they are reminded that what is important for them is that they are included in the people of God, not that they are 'miraculous healers'. Like us, they were tempted to see these as self-authenticating signs. How often do we seek to compel belief by miracles (Matthew 4: 5–7), or provide security from problems miraculously (Matthew 4: 1–4)? Do we demand signs (not just for others) to bypass the call and necessity of faith?

One problem that the disciples recognised was the question of exclusivity. In Mark 9:38–40 and Luke 9: 49–50, (in Galilee), the disciples are disturbed by the presence of another, obviously not a disciple, casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus is not concerned, since this exorcist had probably been released from possession, by Jesus Himself(?).

Jesus taught that as His people worked the works given them (Ephesians 2:8–10 cf. John 5:36). His Father would be glorified (Matthew 5: 16). The temptation before them, and us, is to not show quiet filial trust (that

the Father *will* glorify us), but seek church power and influence. Works (signs) effected in the name of Jesus are evident in Acts 2:43, 3:6, 4:30, 5:12ff, 6:8, 14:3, 15:2, 28:7–10 (even punitive, contra Jesus). The same are recorded in I Corinthians 12: 9–10, II Corinthians 12: 12, Hebrews 2:4 and Romans 15: 19.

(b) Table Fellowship

Matthew established this pattern early in his life as a disciple – Mark 2:15ff par. Matthew 9:10ff, Luke 5:29ff. (But note that Matthew never mentions Jesus eating with Pharisees, whereas Luke does.) Obviously the Early Church accepted all comers (I Corinthians 6:9ff) but not totally without discrimination. It would appear that Paul endorsed strict discipline within the church, but complete freedom of association outside (I Corinthians 5: 11). Paul asserted the principles enumerated in Luke 15:11ff when he rebuked Peter for failing (refusing) to fellowship with Gentile Christians: see Galatians 2:11 where Cephas is opposed by Paul for his ‘behaviour was a contradiction of the truth of the Gospel’ (Galatians 2:14 Phillips).

Jesus worked the works of His Father. His Father is working still. Together we are called to share in these ‘miracles of the domestic kind’, and so reveal and glorify our Father. May we do so.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Aldwinckle, R.F., *More Than Man*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, page 194.
- 2 ‘Miracle is an event of an extraordinary kind, brought about by a god, and of religious significance’, so, Swinburne, R., *The Concept of Miracle*, Macmillan, 1970, page 1.
- 3 What are the capacities/abilities of man? Could innocent Adam and the sinless Christ effect works listed in the Gospels (Mark 4:39–41 rebuke the wind on the sea, Mark 6: 48–50 walk on water, Matthew 17:20 move mountains, and Luke 19:30–35 ride untamed beasts) ?
- 4 Prenter, R., ‘The Works and Words of Jesus Christ’ in *The Gospel as History*, ed. Vajta, V., Fortress Press, 1975, page 17.
- 5 Brouwer, A.M., DeBergrede, Zeist, 1930, page 105, cited in van der Loos, H., *The Miracles of Jesus*, Brill. 1968, page 257.
- 6 II Chron. 7:14, Psalm 103:3, 147:3, Isaiah 19:22, 38:17, 57:18–19, Jeremiah 3:22, 6:14, 8:11, 33:6, Hosea 7:1, 11:3, Isaiah 30:26, 33:24.
- 7 van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, page 442.

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