

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

In the synoptic Gospels the word for Jesus' miracles was, literally, "powers", or "mighty works." From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus gave great demonstrations of the power of God that He could apply in miraculous ways. He performed a wide range of miracles. He freed people from demon-possession (Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20, cf Mt 8:28; 7:24-30). He healed fever (Mk 1:29-31), leprosy (Mk 1:40-45; Lk 17:12-19), lameness (Mk 2:1-12; Mt 8:5-13; Jn 5:1-18); consumption (Mk 3:1-6); haemorrhage (Mk 5:25-34); deafness and dumbness (Mt 9:32-34; Lk 11:14; Mt 12:22), blindness (Mk 8:22-26; 10:46-52, cf Mt 20:30; Mt 9:27-31; Jn 9:1-34; Mt 12:22); epilepsy (Mk 9:14-29); deformation (Lk 13:10-17); dropsy (Mk 14:1-6); a sword wound (Mk 22:51); and severe sickness (in the nobleman's son Jn 4:48-50; and in the centurion's servant, Mt 8:13). Most of Jesus' healings were instantaneous, but there is an exception in Mk 8:22-26.

He raised three people from the dead (Mk 5:35; Lk 7:12-13; Jn 11:39). These restoration to this present earthly life were following by His own resurrection with a glorified body.

There were seven kinds of miracles in nature: the changing of water into wine (Jn 2:1-11), His walking on water (Mk 6:45-52), the cursing the fig tree (Mk 11:12-14, 20), the coin in the fish's mouth (Mt 17:24-27), Peter's two catches of fish (early in His ministry Lk 5:11; and after His resurrection Jn 21:6), the stilling of the storm (Mk 4:35-41), and the two feedings in the wilderness (the five thousand, Mk 6:34-44; and the four thousand 8:1-9).

In addition, the Gospels include summaries of what must have been many more, as He healed every disease and sickness (Mk 1:32-34; 1:39; 3:7-12; 6:55-56; Mt 4:23; 9:35; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14). Both Jesus' healings and His teaching led large crowds to come to Him.

Jesus did not use His divine power for His own benefit (Mt 4: 3-4). If He had thrown Himself down from the ledge of the temple, that might have drawn great attention to Himself, but He refused such a display as a testing of God (Mt 4:5-7). He performed many of these miracles because He was filled with compassion for people's suffering (Mt 9:35-38). His miracles pointed to Himself as the promised Messiah, who would bring happiness to God's redeemed people (Mt 11:4-6). Isaiah had written, referring to the time of the Messiah, "Then the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of the deaf people will be opened. Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy. For water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (35:5-6).

The active presence of the Holy Spirit in God's Anointed One demonstrated that the kingdom of God had come with power (Mt 12:28). Soon after His ministry began, Jesus read Isaiah 61:1-3 with reference to Himself. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me because the LORD has anointed Me to tell good news to poor people. He has sent Me to bandage up broken-hearted people, to announce freedom to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to announce the year of the favour of the LORD, and the day of the vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion, to give them a splendid head-dress instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit." His miracles and His preaching of the Gospel summed up His ministry.

His miracles illumined His teachings. He came to be a Friend of poor and outcast people. In the Gospel of John Jesus' miracles were regularly called "signs", and there were alternations of signs and Jesus' teachings about Himself. The healing of a blind man pointed to Himself as the Light of the world. Jesus did not heal all the sick people whom He encountered. Many other sick people lay at the pool at Bethesda (Jn 5:3).

There was no stereotype. Sometimes Jesus healed by touch, sometimes away from public view, sometimes with a word from a distance, sometimes by using spittle and clay. The use of such material means may have been aids to awaken expectation and faith, and may also have demonstrated that God's power to heal does not exclude the use of means.

In the area of Galilee, where His Messiahship could not be properly understood until after His death and resurrection, He often told people not to tell about their healing, but there was less danger of that in predominantly Gentile areas. He told the man who had been demon-possessed east of the Sea of Galilee to tell his people at home what great things the Lord had done for him (Mk 5:19).

An important aspect is the relationship of faith to the person miraculously healed. Sometimes there was faith in Jesus before a healing (Matt. 8:10; Luke 7:9; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 5:36; 9:23; 10:52). It is wrong to say that faith was always a prerequisite. The man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years and the man who had been born blind did not know that Jesus was the promised Saviour when they were healed (Jn 5:13; 9:35-36). When Jesus told the Syro-Phoenician woman, "Your faith is great", the person made well was not the woman, but her daughter. However, in His words "Your faith has saved you" on a number of occasions "saved" meant more than "healed." His purpose was to lead the people who had been healed to faith in Himself as the Saviour from sin. His miracles authenticated and illustrated His message (Jn 5:36; 10:37-38). His healing of the paralysed man demonstrated that He had the power to forgive sins (Mt 9:1-8). Lepers, lame people, and people with a discharge, as ceremonially unclean people, could not enter the temple. However, their healings meant that they could go to the priests, and join the men and women of Israel in worship in the temple (Compare Acts 3:8).

Jesus often deplored a refusal to believe unless there were signs. When unbelieving people demanded miracles from Him as signs, He refused (Mark 8:11-13). He replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation demands a miraculous sign, and a miraculous sign will not be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Mt 12:39). When there were miracles, it was crucial to see their significance. As healed people no longer needed their crutches, Jesus looked for faith in Himself without miracles as crutches. Later, the apostle Paul was denied deliverance from his "thorn in the flesh" because the Lord's grace was enough for Paul, and the Lord's power was made complete when Paul was weak (2 Cor 12:9). Jacob's

lameness after his successful wrestling with God was a similar case.

Jewish leaders opposed Jesus because He did not keep the Sabbath as they interpreted it. To them, healing was work. When Jesus was condemned for blasphemy, His miraculous healings on the Sabbath had contributed to their rejection of Him as the promised Messiah.

A full account of Jesus' miracles must include the ones that were done to Him rather than by Him. The Spirit of God descended on Him at His baptism (Mk 1:9-13). He was transformed in glory and spoke with Moses and Elijah (Mk 9:2-9). His own resurrection was at the very centre of His ministry, and it is at the heart of our faith in Jesus (1 Cor 15:14-24). From the very beginnings of his public ministry the Son of God made the miraculous power of God manifest in Himself.

Charismatic gifts of healing were special signs of the apostolic ministry of the early church (2 Cor 12:12). However, there is danger in hankering after miracles for their own sake, or as proofs. Jesus warned that some people who performed miracles in His name would themselves be rejected at Judgment Day (Mt 7:22-23). He also warned of the coming of false prophets with impressive "miraculous signs and wonderful proofs to deceive, if possible, even those whom God has chosen" (Mt 24:24). Many Christians may live their whole lives without being able to point to anything like a miraculous healing in themselves. However, our faith in Christ is the result of the miraculous power of the Gospel at work in us, and, at the last day, those who have died in faith will hear the powerful voice of the Son of God calling the dead to rise and glorifying their bodies. We live in anticipation of that great miracle.