

PRESUPPOSITIONS THAT PRECLUDE MIRACLES

Many people deny miracles on the basis of their presuppositions. People who believe there is no God, that God doesn't intervene in the natural order of the universe or that He is incapable of doing so, draw their conclusions about miracles before ever examining the evidence. They have concluded that a miracle can't exist, so there is nothing to be examined.

Another presupposition is that only those things that are scientifically verifiable can be believed. Miracles are not scientific and therefore cannot be believed as true. However, no historical event can be scientifically verified since history is neither repeatable nor do the events therein happen in a controlled environment. Before the miracles of Christ can be considered we need to ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What are my presuppositions?
2. Do I have a right to hold such presuppositions?
3. Do they conform to reality?
4. Do I draw my conclusions from the facts at my disposal, or do I make the facts fit my presuppositions?

THE MIRACLE OF NATURE

In a sense, all of creation is a miracle, since it is a display of the presence and power of God (Ro. 1:20). The sun rising, grass growing, and seeds sprouting are all a result of the sustaining hand of God (Col. 1:17; Ps. 104:10-30; Amos 4:13; 5:8). Therefore, for example, where men would normally say, "It thundered", the Bible doesn't hesitate to say, "The God of glory thundered." (Ps. 29:3).

Through the miracle of creation God has made it possible for all men, in every land to see a manifestation of His power every moment of the day or night (Ps. 19:1-6). However, the wonder of nature is taken away because of its continual reoccurrence. Men look at it with dull eyes and consider its repetition sufficient to excuse their admiration. Many even imagine that because its processes are so dependable there are ample explanations for them apart from the existence of God.

Therefore, it can be said that the miracle of nature is limited in its revelation of God since it cannot speak to one man's conscience above another.

THE NATURE OF MIRACLES

A miracle is not a *greater* manifestation of God's power than the miracle of nature though it is a *different* manifestation. For example, many of the plagues of Egypt (spoken of in Ex.) were natural plagues of the land. In itself, there is nothing miraculous about swarms of flies infesting Egyptian houses, or locust devouring crops (Ex. 8:16-24). Neither of these plagues were or are unknown. But their intensity, their rapid succession, their connection with the word of Moses, and the subsequent release of Israel from slavery are sufficient to call them miracles.

Likewise there is nothing miraculous about finding a coin in a fish's mouth (Matt. 17:24-27), a fig tree withering (Matt. 21:18-22), a storm suddenly stopping (Matt. 8:23-27) or catching an unusually large draught of fish (Lk. 5:1-11). But when such events are associated with the Word of Christ, they can truly be considered as miraculous.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF MIRACLES TO THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

The miracles performed by Christ substantiated His claims about Himself (Acts. 2:22). To those who doubted His claim to be God, Jesus challenged them to examine His works as verifying evidence (Jn. 10:37,38 Mk. 2:10-11). It would indeed be strange if Christ claimed to be Life (Jn. 14:6; 11:25; cf. Jn. 1:4), yet was helpless in His encounter with death. Or if He claimed to be God (Jn. 8:58; 10:30) and yet was subject to His own creation. Without Christ's miracles the skeptic would have every right to ask, "If He was indeed different from any other man, why didn't He do anything to show it?" Surely one would expect to see something that connected Him to the invisible world.

Consider Jesus healing the sick. Due to the daily reoccurrence of healing that takes place through gradual processes, men have lost any sense of associating such a miracle with God. Had Christ healed men by the same gradual processes no one would believe the claim that He was Lord and author of all healing powers that ever existed. In a sense, by healing men suddenly, He was saying, "I will prove to you that fact that in Me lies the power that you see displayed daily."

Consider also His turning the water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11). The purpose of such a miracle was intended to manifest Christ's glory (Jn. 2:11) as the Creator of the world (Jn. 1:3,14). Wine is the end product of a long series of complex natural processes involving the drawing of water from the soil into the fruit of the grapevine, and the gradual transforming of this water into the juice of the grapes. Even then, the ripened grapes must be picked, the juice squeezed, and the sediments allowed to settle down. The same God who performs this unnoticed miracle year after year now concentrates His creative work into a moment of time. This doesn't help explain *how* He does it, but reveals that it is *He* who does it. The miracles of Christ, therefore, confirmed Him as the source of the powers that lie behind the miracles of nature.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES IN RELATION TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Another purpose of miracles was to link Christ to the prophesied coming Kingdom. The miracles were in a sense a foretaste of the conditions in the Kingdom of God in which Christ will be King. For example the Kingdom would have beneficial climatic changes (Isa. 30:23-26; 35:6,7), sickness and death will cease (Isa. 35:5,6), Satan will be bound and evil punished (Isa. 24:21,22; 2:11; Rev. 20:1-3). Jesus' miracles in calming the storm, healing the sick, and casting out demons gave the people a glimpse of the glory of the Kingdom yet to come.

When asked by the disciples of John the Baptist if Jesus was Messiah, Jesus replied by pointing to His miracles. "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the leper are cleansed, and the deaf hear and the dead are

raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." (Matt. 11:4-6; Isa. 35:4-6) Jesus used His miraculous works as proof of the nearness of the Kingdom (Lk. 11:20). Because the King was present, the Kingdom was in the midst of men (Lk. 17:21) and with it some of the attending characteristics.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES IN RELATION TO OBSERVER

The miracle of nature lacks personal significance, but a miracle performed in the sight of certain men gains their attention and speaks to them in particular. The unrelenting activity of God working in creation which is normally concealed behind what we term natural laws, unveils itself so that the One who works such wonders is seen. However, this is not to say that all who saw miracles believed them and recognized the hand that performed them. To those who sincerely desire to believe, but are unwillingly disturbed by doubts, a miracle can be the evidence needed to compel them to believe. Thus a miracle of Christ in the sight of the believer bolsters his faith as it provides empirical evidence to the claims He made (as did the miracles by Moses in Egypt - Ex. 4:1-9; 14:31). Yet those who have determined that a miracle is impossible will take refuge in whatever manner is possible in order to deny it. For example, in Jesus' day many of the Jews refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore refused to believe in any of the miracles that attested to that fact. When He cast out demons they accused Him of doing it by the power of Satan (Matt. 12:22-24). When He raised the dead, some believed but some just ran off to tell the Pharisees (Jn. 11:45, 46). When a voice came from heaven, some thought it only to be thunder (Jn. 12:28-30). Thus the same miracles produced different reactions in different spectators. To those who are determined to disbelieve, no amount of evidence will change their mind. Jesus said that if people refuse to believe in the prophets and Moses, they can't be persuaded to believe even if someone rises from the dead (Lk. 16:19-31). And so it is today.

NOTE: FOR MORE ON MIRACLES SEE APPENDIX 1 IN HEBREWS COMMENTARY