
Structure, Purpose and Meaning of Miracles of Jesus

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the structure, purpose and meaning of miracles of Jesus. As exposed in the gospels, the miracles of Jesus are not treated as if they were weird or irrational events. They are certainly extraordinary deeds of power, wrought through Jesus by God. These acts generated diverse thoughts, feelings and responses on the minds of the receptors and viewers. Some were filled with praise and thanksgiving to God, see the deeds as signs and wonders, reminded of the Old Testament stories, filled with hatred and jealousy calling it a blaspheme while to Jesus' disciples, the miracles helped them to believe the more. The miracles of Jesus therefore are expressions of God's power in the divinity of Christ, testified authoritatively to in the Bible, which signified the coming of that salvation that was associated with the kingdom of God. In contemporary societies, the belief in miracles had been attributed to the poor, low classed individuals, the sick and other minorities. This study has therefore pointed to the fact that the miracles of Jesus is a significant prove that God was and is here! Faith and obedience in God always bring blessings.

KEYWORDS: Miracles, Gospel, Healing, Exorcism, Resurrection, Dunamis, Stories, Terasa Semeion

Introduction

That Jesus was a miracle worker is central to the Christology of the New Testament Gospels and Acts. In Peter's Pentecost speech, he recalls Jesus' ministry by saying that Jesus was "a man designated by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him" (Acts 2:22) (Fossum, 1994). The Gospels do not treat the miracles of Jesus as if they were weird or irrational events. They are certainly extraordinary, but they make good sense as indicators of the character of Jesus' ministry as a whole (Vern, 2016). The people who saw Jesus' miracles interpreted what happened. For example, when Jesus raised from the dead a widow's son in Nain, fear seized all they that saw it, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" (Luke 7:16) The people saw that Jesus' miracle was analogous to those of the two Old Testament prophets. The miracles showed the power of God at work, and they attested to the authenticity of the prophet. So the people saw Jesus' miracle as a work of God: "God has visited his people!" And they saw Jesus as a prophet of God: "A great prophet has arisen among us!" The people did not yet realize that Jesus was God come in the flesh. But they did realize that God was at work through him (Craig, 2002).

What then is a miracle, miracle of Jesus? A miracle is an unusual and significant event (*terasa*) which requires the working of a supernatural agent (*dunamis*) and is performed for the purpose of authenticating the message or the messenger (*semeion*). *Terasa* in this context, speaks of the effect. Bruce (2003) opined that, a miracle is an unusual event. It also speaks of the wonderment of the event – as in signs and wonders. As a matter of fact, *terasa* is always used with *semeion*. The Greek word *semeion* means sign. A miracle is a significant event therefore, it has purpose. The word *dunamis* has the idea of a supernatural power. It speaks primarily of the agent of the act. That power may be delegated to a human agent. The question is where did Jesus' power to do the miracle come from. There are two options - either from God or from Satan. Obviously, Jesus' power came from God. So the idea from the word *dunamis* is that there is supernatural power involved (Vern 2012). The miracles of Jesus therefore are expressions of God's power in the divinity of Christ, testified authoritatively to in the Bible, which signified the coming of that salvation that was associated with the kingdom of God (Vern, 2020).

Concept of Miracles of Jesus

Each of the miracles of Jesus happened uniquely one place at a time. John, one of Jesus' disciples characteristically uses the word 'sign' rather than other words like miracle, and wonder which indicates that miracles have permanent meaning; they signify truths concerning Christ, and concerning the salvation he has brought. The majority of Jesus' miracles are faith healings, exorcisms, resurrection, control over nature and forgiveness of sins. In *The Miracles of Jesus*, Van der Loos describes two main categories of miracles attributed to Jesus: those that affected people, e.g., the Blind Man of Bethsaida and are called "healings", and those that "controlled nature", e.g., Walking on Water. The three types of healings are cures where an ailment is cured, exorcisms where demons are cast away and the resurrection of the dead. Karl Barth said that, among these miracles, the Transfiguration of Jesus is unique in that the miracle happens to Jesus himself. According to Craig Blomberg, one characteristic shared among all miracles of Jesus in the Gospel accounts is that he delivered benefits freely and never requested or accepted any form of payment for his healing miracles, unlike some high priests of his time who charged those who were healed (Craig, 1986).

Vern (2016) noted that the miracles of Jesus have at least three kinds of significance, corresponding roughly to three aspects of who Jesus is. (1) Jesus is God. (2) Jesus is fully human, and as a human being performed miracles in a way analogous to the miracles of Old Testament prophets. (3) Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the one mediator between God and man. From the first significance, the miracles as works of divine power confirm Christ's deity. In the minds of many Christians today, Jesus' deity is what stands out in the miracles. But the people who originally saw Jesus' miracles did not understand their full significance right away. We already observed that in Luke 7:16 the people identified Jesus as "a great prophet." He was indeed a prophet; but he was more. He was God come in the flesh (John 1:14). These miracles were works of divine power. God brought them about. When we understand the miracles of Jesus in the context of who he is, we see that they are works that Jesus did by his own divine power, not merely works of God done through a human prophet. A second kind of significance arises because of Jesus' full humanity. Beginning with the time of his incarnation, Jesus is fully man as well as fully God (Heb. 2:14–18). He is one person with two natures, the divine nature and a human nature. This is a deep mystery. As a man, Jesus performed works similar to those of Old Testament prophets. This is true

in addition to the truth that we just observed about Jesus doing works by his own divine power (Carson, 2010).

The miracles of Jesus are exercises of the power of God, which Christ wielded fully in his incarnation as the divine Son. The Bible testifies to these miracles, and the fact that the Bible is historically accurate and divinely authoritative should give us pause before rejecting miracles because they are in tension with current, naturalistic presuppositions. These miracles were a part of God's larger plan of salvation and testified that the kingdom of God, where God would bring about the climactic and definitive salvation of his people, had come in the person of Jesus, who was both divine Son and promised Messiah (Vern, 2020). A third significance concerns Jesus' unique role as the Messiah, the great deliverer in the line of David who is prophesied in the Old Testament. Thus, Jesus' miracles fulfill Old Testament prophecy. For example, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 has a symbolic significance beyond the fact that it displays divine power. Its significance goes beyond confirming and testifying to the fact that Jesus is an authentic messenger of God, like one of the Old Testament prophets. The miracle shows in symbolic form what Jesus is doing spiritually through his life, death, and resurrection—he is bringing eternal life, and giving lasting spiritual nourishment to everyone who comes to him in faith. (Vern, 2016). Considering as an example, the healing of the centurion's servant, recorded in Matt. 8:5–13. Jesus healed the servant from being paralyzed and from "suffering terribly" (8:5). The release from the bodily disability of paralysis foreshadows the final release from every bodily disability, which will come with bodily resurrection (Carson, 2010). Physical paralysis is also a suitable analog for the spiritual "paralysis" of sin, which keeps us from carrying out the will of God. Jesus in his death takes our sin on himself, and in his resurrection he enters new life that gives us the power to be free from sin and its guilt (Rom. 4:25). Instead of suffering in the body, in the resurrection of the body we enter a life entirely free from suffering (Rev. 21:4). Instead of spiritual suffering from sin, we enter the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:21, 23). In like manner, many of the miracles of Jesus during his earthly life are small-scale pictures, anticipations, or foreshadowings of the two stages of his definitive accomplishment: first his death and resurrection and the second coming (Clowney, 1961).

Structure of Miracles of Jesus

The accounts of the miracles Jesus performed are contained in stories, and stories have context, characters, plot, climax, etc. Stories are literature, and in order to understand them, miracles must be examined literarily (Collins, 2000). It had been observed that different gospel writers stressed certain things because they were writing to different audiences or have different theological points to make. Jesus' miracle caused different reactions in the healed person, the bystanders, the Pharisees and his disciples. Culturally, it affects the people's understanding and interpretation of certain event. For example: in the healing of the lepers, it helps us to know how awful leprosy was, how it was viewed spiritually and as far as we can tell, that nobody had ever been cured of leprosy – except for Miriam, Moses' sister and Namaan the Syrian who was healed by Elisha. If lepers are being healed now, then something out of the ordinary is going on! It should have been a clear sign that God was and is here! (Vern, 2020). The structure of a miracle is reflected in the event of the miracle, the truth or salient lesson it teaches and how it could be applied. For instance, in the miracle of the cursed fig tree (Mark 11:12-26), which had been identified as the only miracle of destruction, the event of the miracle is as it is narrated in the scripture; the lesson it teaches is that grace was and is always extended to give a chance for the fruit of repentance before judgment is

metered. The fig tree was likened to Jerusalem then (but to Christians now), and Jesus coming into Jerusalem looked for the fruit of repentance but there was no fruit – what happens next is destruction. If there are no figs on the tree, it will be destroyed as proclaimed by Jesus in John chapter 15.

Furthermore, in the miracle of turning water into wine, conceptually, Jesus is presented as the creator; he creates wine. Lewis noted that each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of nature.” That is what Jesus is doing: he is overleaping the elements of time, of growth, gathering, crushing and fermenting. He takes water which is an inorganic, non-living, commonplace substance, and without a word, without a gesture, without any laying on of hands, in utter simplicity, the water becomes wine, an organic liquid, a product of fermentation, belonging to the realm of life (Lewis, 2006). Thus he demonstrated his marvelous ability to master the processes of nature and also demonstrating that He is superior to the rituals and traditions of the Pharisees. The miracle confirms his disciples’ faith in him. The disciples believed, therefore, the right response to seeing the glorious person and work of Christ is to believe. Notice that even the first miracle has the purpose of building faith. Jesus starts off by pointing out that it is not the hour and then performs a miracle anyway. This miracle was glorious, but it was not the hour of glory. All the miracles build up to what is most important - the most glorious work of Christ – the resurrection (Fant, 2010).

Other scholars see miracles of Jesus as paradoxical, at first sight the Gospels’ teaching about miracles seem to be intended as straightforward shows of Jesus’ divine power and evidence of the in-breaking of God’s kingdom. In answer to the Pharisees who charge him with casting out demons with the power of Beelzebub, Jesus says: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). Jesus condemns the cities of Galilee and even his own disciples for their lack of response and “hardness of heart” in face of the miracles (Matthew 11:21; Mark 8:17-21). When John the Baptist asks for proof of his identity as Messiah, Jesus offers the miracles as evidence, pointing out how they fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah about him (Matthew 11:2-5; Isaiah 61:1; 35:5). In John’s Gospel especially, the miracles are said to be the very reason why the disciples believed in him in the first place (John 2:11,23).

Considering some miracles for example, feeding of the 5,000 and the discourse on the bread of life. The feeding of the 5,000 is the miracle. The provision of redemptive food through Jesus’ bodily death is the climactic fulfillment. And believers’ feeding on Christ is the application. Praising God and giving glory to God complete the application. Also, in the healing of the blind man, in John 9, the healing of the man is the miracle. The provision of redemptive light through the revelation of the glory of God in the crucifixion and the resurrection is the climactic fulfillment. The giving of light to believers is the application (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). This giving of light results in praise and glory to God (Vern, 2020). Sometimes scholars complain about the use of stories in the Gospels to address modern hearers in an immediate way. They worry that the modern application is overlooking history. Scholars want to make sure that people understand that the miracles happened back then and there in history. The miracles are not merely pictorial lessons that we could use without worrying about whether they ever happened, or whether they are part of God’s word. These concerns are legitimate, they are still valid even as at today.

Purpose of Miracles of Jesus

Miracles derive from divine power and involve divine intervention, it is designed to be observable and open to inspection. It provides new revelation and proves something through its discernible evidence. The purpose of Jesus' miracles is concisely stated in Mark 16:20, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Miracles proved the Gospel message to be true. Anything else accomplished by miracles was incidental and a byproduct (e.g., healing) to the true purpose of miracles. The miracles of Jesus were relevant to the people back then and now. The Gospels record the miracles in order to indicate what happened and for a religious purpose. Through understanding who Jesus is and what he did, we are invited to place our faith in him (Vern, 2016).

It is necessary to note that besides proving God's power, the miracles were done as a testimony to the identity of Jesus which would create beliefs in Him (Leithart, 2009). These signs that Jesus performed convinced many that He was the Messiah. And although the sign convince many, there were others who still doubted as evidenced in John 12:28,29 - 'Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'an angel has spoken to him.' Though it was the voice of the Father who spoke, many believed they only heard thunder. Till today, there are skeptics about the existence and authenticity of miracles (Vern, 2016). As further proof of Jesus' identity through miracles, he healed a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus chose this occasion to give another discourse, John 5:19–47, which indicates the close relationship between the works of the Father and the works of the Son. The fact that Jesus performed the healing on the Sabbath day corresponds to the fact that God continues to work on the Sabbath day: "my Father is working until now" (v. 17). Jesus was thus inviting people to see his work of healing as a sign of his identity—he was performing the works of God, which the Father had given him to do. His works revealed his union with the Father: "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (14:10).

In summation, the purpose of miracle could be for:

The larger plan of God for history: The miracles occur within the overall unfolding plan of God for all of history, and especially for the history in which he works out the redemption of the world. Christ and his coming are at the center of that redemption. The works he accomplished—above all his suffering, his death, and his resurrection—are the all-important foundation for the entire plan of God for redemption. The Old Testament anticipated the coming of Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God. In the Gospels we see that coming actually taking place. In the rest of the New Testament we see the outflowing consequences, both in the historical events in Acts and in the explanations and exhortations and warnings in the New Testament letters. The letters show the New Testament people of God the meaning of Christ's salvation and the way in which it comes to bear on their lives (Vern, 2020).

Jesus as Messiah: The miracles of Christ demonstrate and confirm some truths about Christ himself. They show that he is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises that predict the coming of the Messiah, the great king in the line of David, the one who will rule forever (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Jesus as Divine Son of God: The miracles show Christ's divine power. It is true that some of the prophets in the Old Testament, like Moses and Elijah, worked miracles. But it is clear from the contexts that these prophets did not work miracles by their own power and might. They were merely servants of God. By contrast, Jesus' religious opponents were offended by him because he

behaved as someone who was more than just a prophet. He had innate authority. In connection with healing the paralytic, he claims authority to forgive sins, which belongs only to God (Matt. 9:1–8). After the stilling of the storm, the disciples ask each other, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” (Matt. 8:27). After the incident when he walks on water, “Those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (Matt. 14:33). The miracles of Jesus display divine power. God is present in them. God shows that his kingdom is arriving. God the Father is doing his works in the Son: “the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10).

Miracles as Signs of Redemption: The arrival of the kingdom has another side to it. God is not merely present to display who he is. He is present to work out the accomplishment of the salvation that he promised all the way through the Old Testament. The expression “the kingdom of God” in the Gospels does not focus on the fact, true though it is, that God rules all the world and all of history (Ps. 103:19). It focuses on the new exercise of his divine power in the course of bringing about climactic and definitive salvation. Jesus, in whom God the Father dwells, is the Savior. The miracles are miracles of the kingdom. Therefore, they are also miracles of salvation. That does not mean that every person whom Jesus healed was eternally saved. Saving faith came to some but not necessarily to all those who were physically healed (Fame, 2010). The physical healing was a good thing. But in itself it was not ultimate. The people who were healed would eventually die a physical death.

Meaning of Miracles of Jesus

Different people have presented the meaning of miracles of Jesus based on their level of understanding of the subject. Buswell's definition of a Biblical miracle is concise but comprehensive: A miracle is (1) an extraordinary event, inexplicable in terms of ordinary natural forces, (2) an event which causes the observers to postulate a super-human personal cause, and (3) an event which constitutes evidence (a "sign") of implications much wider than the event itself (Buswell, 1962 in Heichhorst). Easton's Bible Dictionary, in part, says a miracle is "an event in the external world brought about by the immediate agency or the simple volition of God, operating without the use of means capable of being discerned by the senses, and designed to authenticate the divine commission of a religious teacher and the truth of his message (John 2:18; Matt. 12:38)." Rushmore (2001) noted that, the first definition in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary likewise represents the biblical sense in which the word miracle is used: "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." Both of these definitions note that a miracle involves (1) divine intervention in the affairs of men, and (2) not the effect but the affect of the miracle is clearly discernible to mortal observers.

A miracle "is an unusual and significant event (*terasa*) which requires the working of a supernatural agent (*dunamis*) and is performed for the purpose of authenticating the message or the messenger (*semeion*)." A miracle is a significant event. It has purpose. Matthew, Mark and Luke uses *terasa* and *dunamis* more. John uses the word *semeion*, because he is focused on the purpose of Jesus in performing the miracles. Importantly, Easton's also (3) denotes that a miracle has a purpose, namely to: (a) bring forth new revelation from God and (b) validate that message and its messenger. Vern (2016) view the miracles of Jesus as expressions of God's power in the divinity of Christ, testified authoritatively to in the Bible, which signified the coming of that salvation that was associated with the kingdom of God. While there are many explanations for what a miracle is, it can probably be agreed that the word "miracle" describes an event that occurs outside the

bounds of natural law, and which is beneficial in its result. During the course of His three-year public ministry, Jesus performed miracles that demonstrated His ability to heal, to master the elements of nature, to affect the outcome of our endeavors, and even to raise the dead. Every one of His miracles occurred outside the bounds of natural law, and all of them had a beneficial result (France, 2007).

Prevalence of Jesus Miracles

The account of Jesus' miracles is as recorded in the gospels. Matthew has 21 miracles of Jesus, two of which are unique to Matthew; Mark's Gospel recorded 18 miracles of Jesus with one peculiar miracle not recorded in the other gospels; Luke has 18 miracles of Jesus, five of which are unique to Luke; John has seven miracles of Jesus, five of which are unique to John. Altogether, the gospels record at least 35 miracles of Jesus. The miracles of Jesus and their corresponding scriptures are as follows:

- Jesus changed water into wine at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11): This was the first of the signs through which Jesus revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him;
- Healing of the Official's son at Capernaum (Jn. 4:46-47);
- The great catch of fishes (Luke 5:1-11);
- Jesus cast out an unclean spirit (Mark 1:23-28);
- Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:30-31).
- Jesus healed a leper (Mark 1:40-45);
- Jesus healed the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13);
- Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11-18);
- Jesus stilled the storm (Matthew 8:23-27);
- Jesus cured two demoniacs (Matthew 8:28-34);
- Jesus cured the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8);
- Jesus raised the ruler's daughter from the dead (Matthew 9:18-26);
- Jesus cured a woman of hemorrhage (Luke 8:43-48);
- Jesus opened the eyes of two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31);
- Jesus loosened the tongue of a man who could not speak (Matthew 9:32-33);
- Jesus healed an invalid man at the pool called Bethesda (John 5:1-9);
- Jesus restored a withered hand (Matthew 12:10-13);
- Jesus cured a demon-possessed man (Matthew 12:22);
- Jesus fed five thousand people (Matthew 14:15-21);
- Jesus walked on water (14:22-23);
- Jesus healed a Canaanite woman's daughter (Matthew 15:22-28);
- Jesus cured a deaf and mute man (Mark 7:31-37);
- Jesus fed four thousand people (Matthew 15:32-39);
- Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26);
- Jesus cured a boy who was plagued by a demon (Matthew 17:14-21);
- Jesus removes coin from a fish's mouth (Matt 17:24-27);
- Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:1-38);
- Jesus cured a woman who had been afflicted eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17);
- Jesus cured a man of dropsy (Luke 14:1-4);

- Jesus cleansed ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19);
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46);
- Jesus opened the eyes of two blind men (Matthew 20:30-34);
- Jesus caused the fig tree to wither (Matthew 21:18-22);
- Jesus restored the ear of the high priest's servant (Luke 22:50-51);
- The second catch of fishes (John 21:1-14).

The above list is incomplete because according to John 21:25: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them was written down, according to him, even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written"

A great majority of people in some parts of the world believe in miracles. A study conducted in modern Western societies to find out the extent of belief in miracles showed that a substantial number (including physicians) share a belief in miracles. According to Mansfield, it may be as much as 80% of the Western population. The faith in miraculous healing is strongly among women, African-Americans, evangelical protestants, the poorer, sicker, and less educated and majority of respondents understand that God acts through the hands of the physician (Mansfield, et al. 2002). Beliefs in miraculous healings are part of beliefs in miracles, and miraculous healings are the most popular examples of miracles. Emphatically, Jesus' works of healing address the various kinds of physical consequences that exist in an imperfect world, a world affected by the fall. In this world, human beings get sick. And sickness is a forerunner for death, the complete destruction of the functions of the body. Keener (2011) noted that, the restoration of a man from sickness points to the greater restoration, the restoration of full bodily health in a resurrection body. And the foundation for this fuller restoration lies in Christ's resurrection. Healing is also a kind of metaphor for healing from sin. Christ forgives our sins; through the Holy Spirit he gives us the power to live new lives that are free from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:7, 14). The passage about the raising of Lazarus calls on us to praise God and to praise Christ who worked the miracle and for his compassion and kindness to Martha and Mary, to whom Lazarus was restored. It is striking that the passage in John 11 includes a place where Christ praised the Father for the communion he enjoyed with him and for the work that he was about to do. This miracle, like other miracles, displays the glory of God.

Conclusion

So the cases of Jesus' miracles pointed to something more; they were signs that pointed beyond themselves. The miracles dealt with people being saved from physical ills. Or they depicted being delivered from demonic power. Both of these deliverances were real in themselves. But they also signified the whole structure of salvation as a whole. Jesus came not simply to accomplish something temporary in the lives of various individuals, but to bring lasting and permanent salvation. This salvation includes, centrally, deliverance from spiritual death—deliverance from sin, from guilt, from the power of the kingdom of Satan. These deliverances Jesus brought about climactically through his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. His resurrection means for us permanent deliverance from sin and condemnation. It also guarantees the resurrection of our bodies. We will in the future be perfectly delivered from every bodily sickness and ailment, and even from death itself. The miracles that Jesus worked were foretastes of this two-stage deliverance, in his resurrection from the dead, and then, finally, in our resurrection of the body, in union with and by the power of his resurrection.

Recommendations

From the review, the following recommendations are submitted:

1. The miracles of healing by Jesus imply that redemption can be applied to us in this age therefore we are encouraged to exercise explicit faith in God for the healing miracle.
2. In the study, we are admonished to listen. By taking to heart the significance of the signs and miracles performed by Jesus, we hear what God himself is saying to us; and by hearing we may be transformed, both now and in the future.
3. We are enjoined to believe in miracles because they are not only biblically authentic but also surpass naturalistic suppositions.
4. The study, from the miracle of the cursed fig tree admonishes us to be fruitful Christians to avoid being cursed. If we have been saved by the grace of God, God expects that we should lead others, guide them and show them just the right way to live and if we fail in that obligation, we might be judged but not without a warning.

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