

THE RATIONALE OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

THE miraculous element is an outstanding element in both the Old Testament and the New. There can be no doubt that the Biblical writers meant to call special attention to these supernatural occurrences as evidences that God has made a special revelation of Himself and of His purpose for the human race and the universe. Well, the Bible is of such a character, revelatory, ethical and spiritual, and has been so effective of good in the world, that its teaching cannot be lightly cast aside. It stands to reason that anything that is stressed in this marvellous Book must be of fundamental importance; must, indeed, pertain to the very structure of a physical and moral universe.

In this article we wish to examine the miracles attributed to Christ while He was here in the flesh, and see whether they can be rationally vindicated. What is the *rationale* of the miracles of our Lord as they are depicted in the New Testament ?

CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

We begin our argument with the statement that Christ claimed to be the Son of God in a unique sense. He called Himself "the only begotten Son". He frequently called God "my Father". He even declared His oneness with the Father, saying, "I and the Father are one". Again He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also". Still again: "I in the Father, and the Father in me." These are tremendous claims.

But more must be said. Our Lord claimed pre-existence: "Before Abraham was, I am", He averred. More than that, He claimed pre-existence with the Father: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father"; "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." When Peter made his great confession, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God", Christ approved the statement, and declared that the Father had revealed that important truth to him.

The testimony of the evangelists and apostles is concurrent. The prologue to John's Gospel is familiar to all of us: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. The same was in the beginning with God;

and all things were made by Him. . . . And the Logos became flesh, and dwelt among us." Here the Logos is identified with the "only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" of verse 18. Surely, surely this language means the incarnation of the divine Son of God. Also note: "He shall be called Jesus", which means, traced back to the Hebrew, Jehovah-Saviour. Moreover, "He shall be called Immanuel", which means in the Hebrew, Elohim with us. Paul teaches that He "was in the form of God" before He took on the "form of a servant". The same apostle makes this statement: "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." This statement has no meaning if it does not refer to the kenosis and self-sacrifice of the pre-existent Son of God.

OUR LORD'S CREDENTIALS

Now, if Christ was the eternally begotten Son of God, the miracles He performed are perfectly congruous and consistent with His person and divine character. It surely would be irrational to think that He, the Son of God, a supernatural being, became incarnate for the salvation of the world, never did anything but ordinary human works, such as any other good man might have done. On the other hand, if He was what He and His apostles declared Him to be, the incarnate Son of God, then it was perfectly consistent and logical for Him to perform miracles. Think the proposition through. If He had performed nothing but ordinary human deeds, how could He have proven that He was anything more than a human being?

Therefore we have a right to say that His miracles were a part, and a most important part, of His credentials as the incarnate Son of God. An envoy from one country to another must carry his credentials with him, or he will not be accepted as coming with proper authority. So our Lord proved His supernatural character by performing supernatural deeds. Nicodemus argued well when he said to Christ: "Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Only the noted visitor might have carried his argument further by saying: "No man can do these miracles except he be divine." Here we take the logic to be irrefragable. Christ proved Himself to be divine by performing supernatural acts. His works testified to and comported with His divine character. If He had never performed

such acts, He would have proved Himself to be only human, by that very token.

This logical situation involves very serious consequences. If Christ performed no miracles, He was not the divine Son of God become incarnate. What follows from that proposition? Then the world has no Saviour: then Christ was not what He professed to be: then He was not even a good and truthful man; then all His ethical and spiritual teaching becomes futile and even hypocritical; then He brought no divine revelation from heaven; then His statements about a future destiny for man and the universe have no authority. He was only guessing, or was deceiving His disciples; then, to put it in a brief sentence, the world of mankind is groping in darkness. Thus the Modernists who deny the miracles of our Lord put themselves into a very serious and distressing *cul-de-sac*.

On the other hand, the alternative view gleams with heavenly effulgence. If the miracles ascribed to Christ were genuine supernatural acts, they proved Him to be the incarnate Son of God who came to redeem the world; yes, then "the light which shineth neither upon the land nor upon the sea" illumines man's whole pathway from the cradle to the grave, and then on into an immortal and glorious futurity. In that case our Lord gave us blessed assurance that He has gone to prepare a place for us. Moreover, the way to obtain salvation for both this life and the life to come has been made plain enough for all the wayfaring children of the God.

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO HIS MIRACLES

Sometimes it is said that Christ made little reference to His miracles, but rather discounted them. This is far from the truth. Of course, He would not perform miracles at Satan's behest, or as mere exploits of a gymnastic character, or give a sign to please the captious and unbelieving Jews; but He did frequently appeal to His miraculous works as His credentials. At one place He said: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him." Again: "I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." Note again: "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father."

When John the Baptist sent his messengers to Christ to inquire about His Messiahship, our Lord cited to them some of His greatest miracles as proof that He was the Messiah. The miracles He listed were these : the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, and even the dead are raised up. Then remember the woes our Lord pronounced upon Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they repented not in spite of the "mighty works" which He had done in them.

Let us recall, too, that He appeared miraculously to His disciples a number of times after His resurrection ; and why ? To convince that He was the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. And they were convinced, too, by those Christophanies, and then, after the enduement of Pentecost, they proclaimed Him as the Prince of life. Note how boldly Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, appealed to Christ's miracles : "Ye men of Israel, hear these words : Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know : Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain : Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that He should be holden of it."

Thus we see that Christ and His apostles laid much emphasis on His miraculous works as proofs of His Messiahship. They were an important element of His credentials as the Son of God. His marvellous works, therefore, are not a barrier to faith, as some modern men have averred, but are an aid to faith ; yea, they place faith on a solid historical basis.

THE ALL-ROUND CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

A further evidence of our Lord's divinity is the comprehensive and varied nature of His miracles. If He was the divine Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, as the Bible teaches, He must prove that He is master in all realms ; indeed, He must furnish evidence that He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was the Creator of the cosmos. Did He supply such proof ? We will see.

If He was the Son of God, He must prove Himself to be the master of the natural world, or the realm of nature. Do you ask

why? Here is the reason: "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John i. 3). Also: "God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. i. 1, 2). Note again: "All things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things subsist" (Col. i. 16, 17).

Did Christ display His rulership over the realm of nature, and thus prove Himself to be the pre-existent Son of God who had a share in the creation? Yes; He gave such demonstration when, by a simple word of command, He calmed the storm on tempest-tossed Galilee. Only a being who had divine power and knowledge could have performed such a miracle. In order to achieve it He had to know all about the atomic and molecular composition and action of wind and wave; for He never could have stilled the storm by the blind exercise of power. But only the Creator of matter can know all about its essence and composition. If Christ was the Son of God and the co-Creator of the cosmos, this marvel was only to be expected at His hands.

Christ also proved that He could exercise sovereignty over the vegetable realm by turning water into wine. No one but the Creator and Preserver of nature could do by an accelerated process what God is doing by natural operations every day—namely, turning water into wine through the ripening grapes. The same proof is furnished of His divine knowledge and power when He cursed the barren fig-tree and caused it instantly to wither.

Further proof of our Lord's Deity is furnished by His complete mastery over the human body. It was Jehovah—Elohim—the Triune God—who fashioned—moulded (Hebrew, *yatsar*)—the human body originally from the finest material (*aphar*) of the soil, and breathed into it "the breath of lives" (plural in the Hebrew). Therefore He must have known all about the chemical and biological constitution of man's physical organism. So, if sin came and brought disease-germs into the human body, He would know how to deal with the bacteria. Christ established His creatorship by instantly curing all manner of corporeal diseases, just as we would expect Him to do if He was what He claimed to be.

But still another credential relative to the human body was needed to prove our Saviour to be the eternal Son of God. Could He who was the Creator of life restore it after the death of

the body? Yes, here He proved His divinity again, raising at least three persons from the dead: the widow's son, the daughter of Jairus, and His beloved friend, Lazarus. Nor was that all: He Himself arose from the dead after lying for a while in Joseph's new sepulchre, and thus, as Paul teaches, He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. i. 4).

If Christ was the Son of God, there was still one more domain over which He must display His sovereignty, and that was the domain of good and evil spirits. Here He certainly manifested His divine power. He could, if He desired, command a legion of angels to come to His rescue. Angels ministered unto Him. He spoke with the utmost familiarity of the angels of God.

It is thrilling to observe His complete control over evil spirits. By a simple mandate He was able to cast out a legion of devils from one demoniac. They recognized Him, too, as the Son of God and their master, which implies their acquaintance with Him in His pre-existent state. Note the implications in the language of the demons in this instance: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt. viii. 29.) Another demon exclaimed in the presence of Christ: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God." This language implies the doctrine of our Lord's pre-existence. There certainly is unity in the teaching of the Bible. Jesus proved Himself to be master of all realms by His miracles, thus furnishing ample credentials that He was what He claimed to be—the Son of God in a unique sense.

THE DOCTRINE OF DEMONIACS

The representations of demoniacal possessions in the New Testament have puzzled many persons. They have been a veritable *bête noir* with the Modernists. However, such appearances need to make no trouble for the evangelical believer. What is the *rationale* of these peculiar manifestations of the evil spirits?

It was perfectly consistent and reasonable that, when the Son of God became incarnate and came out into the visible realm, the evil spirits should also be permitted to come out into the same visible arena by becoming in a manner incarnate in

human beings, so that He could meet them in that realm and display His mastery over them. If two opposing forces are to meet each other in a contest, they must both come out upon the same stadium. So with our Lord and the demons. It is all consistent and unified when we take the whole Biblical account as our guide.

Now, when Christ had finished His redeeming work here in the flesh, and through His exaltation went back into the invisible realm, and at Pentecost inaugurated the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, who operates in the minds of men, it was consistent again that the evil spirits should also retire into the invisible realm. For this reason we do not to-day have such outward and palpable manifestations of demoniacal possessions as appeared in the days of Christ's visible presence on the earth, just as we do not see Christ Himself with the eyes of the flesh in this dispensation.

A few words more, however, must be added to the foregoing. Some years ago Dr. Hugh W. White, a well-known and scholarly missionary in China, published a book entitled *Demonism Verified and Analysed*, in which he cited many cases in China and other lands of actual demoniacal possession. These cases could not be cured by the use of medicine. Many of the evil spirits, however, were exorcised by prayer in the name of Jesus. The book reads almost like a section from the gospels of the New Testament. Dr. White says that in Christian lands, where the gospel is well-known, such outward manifestations of demon possession are seldom seen; but they are more or less evident in heathen lands. His book is published by the Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A.

THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

A word more regarding the peculiar nature of our Lord's miracles will be in order. According to the Synoptics, He performed these wonders by His own power. The impression made on the mind is that He "spake and it was done". His connection with these manifestations was different from that of the apostles with the miracles wrought through them. They never claimed that they did the mighty works by their own power or authority, but that they were wrought by the power of God, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the lame man in the temple was healed of his infirmity, Peter protested that the

miracle was not wrought by himself, but only through faith in the name of Jesus, whom the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob had glorified (Acts iii. 12-16).

Yet in the gospel of St. John, Christ attributed these miracles, not to His own power, but to the Father. It is important to note what He said: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works" (John xiv. 10); "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not" (John x. 37); "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for whatsoever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19); "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (xiv. 24).

How shall this apparent paradox between the Synoptics and John's Gospel be resolved? It is not difficult when we understand the true doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God. During His humiliation the Son did not relinquish His divine nature. He was still one person with two natures, divine and human. But for the most part He did not employ and display His divine qualities, but lived a normal human life. In this way He did not overwhelm the minds and coerce the wills of the people with whom He mingled and to whom He taught the way of salvation.

However (correlating the teaching in John and the Synoptics) whenever it was the Father's will that He should manifest His glory and power as the divine Son of God, His (Christ's) consciousness and will could function in and through His divine nature; so He could perform miracles and yet be subject to the will of the Father.

Thus there is no discrepancy between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John; they are not contradictory, but complementary; and the miracles which Jesus wrought were His proper and necessary credentials to prove that He was the divine Son of God manifested in human form. This, we hold, is the *rationale* of the miracles which our divine-human Redeemer wrought "in the days of His flesh". Besides, all His miracles had an immediate benevolent purpose, proving Him to be a God of Love.

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