

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Miracles, Session 5, Jesus' Miracles Over Natural Realm

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We're continuing our course, *The Miraculous and the Miracles of Jesus*. Our first four units, you might say, went under the bigger heading, *The Miraculous*, and looked at miracles in the Old Testament and New Testament, and then we looked at miracles in extra-biblical miracles in Christendom, if you like, since then, and then we looked at the rise of science and theological liberalism, and then we looked at objections to the miraculous. Now we turn to the second half, which is *The Miracles of Jesus*, and here we're going to look, first of all, at some introductory material about miracles, and then about nature miracles, and then we're going to look at Jesus' authority, if you like, over the human realm, and the third one, Jesus' authority over the spirit realm.

So that will be where we're heading here, Lord willing. Miracles. In an earlier lecture, we proposed this definition of a biblical miracle.

A biblical miracle is a striking or wonderful event displaying supernatural power and intended to carry a certain significance. We will now look at some of Jesus' miracles, categorized under three headings: miracles over the natural realm, miracles over the human realm, and miracles over the spirit realm. We will look at the supernatural power that each particular miracle displays, at the reaction it evokes from those who saw it, and the apparent significance of the miracle.

All of these will tell us something about who Jesus is and what he's come to do, that is, Jesus' person and work. So, miracles over the natural realm. We can categorize the following as belonging to the group of nature miracles.

The changing of water into wine. The miraculous catch of fish. Stilling a storm.

Feeding the 5,000, also feeding the 4,000. Walking on water. The coin in the fish's mouth.

We'll look at some of these that I've not covered in other PowerPoints that would be up on our IBRI website. So, let's look first of all at the miraculous catch found in Luke 5, verses 1-11. The passage looks like this in the NIV.

One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the Sea of Galilee, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, Simon Peter, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then, he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything, but because you say so, I will let down the nets. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

So, they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.

And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid. From now on, you'll catch men.

So, they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. Historicity of the event. After the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee, this took place.

So, early in Jesus' public ministry, he had done some teaching in synagogues and casting out demons and such. Already, great multitudes are flocking to Jesus at this point, and the inconvenience of this leads to using a boat as a speaking platform. Obviously, if you stand on the shore, people keep crowding around, and you've got to have some way to keep them away, but if you get in a boat and back off offshore, then the people at the front don't want to go into the water very far, and that stops that.

The disciples had been fishing all previous night without success, and now they had a great catch. Various liberal explanations. One, of course, is it was an allegory rather than a historical one.

And so, you know, now you'll be catching men rather than fish, and so that's what the allegory is about. Well, it obviously does have some kind of a symbolic interpretation, as Jesus himself gives it, huh? So, their suggestion is the first hint of the Gentiles receiving the gospel. The second catch, the large catch, is the Gentiles, and the first try overnight with catching nothing is the Jews.

So, a great catch, a great response versus the Jewish response. If historical, liberals will say that Jesus saw the fish and told the disciples. Well, here's where a little physics comes in.

How far from a boat can one see fish in the water? See fish a long way when they jump out of the water, okay? But that doesn't happen that often. There's a critical angle at the air-water interface that if you are more than this number of degrees from the vertical, then what you see is reflection from above the water rather than light coming up from under the water. That critical angle is 48:5 degrees.

So, Jesus, with his eyes, say, about six feet above the surface, standing in a boat, so actually his feet are probably below the surface of the water, can see in the water no further than about seven feet out from the boat. So, that really makes it rather difficult to do any seeing of a large number of fish in the water. So, natural eyesight is not a likely explanation.

Evidence of historicity, we don't have time machines. So, a skeptical person can deny anything after some time has elapsed. The particulars of persons, of number of boats, and the details of the fishing are interesting and may very well suggest an eyewitness view of the matter.

The flavor of the miracle is rather different than those in the Apocrypha and such that we looked at earlier. The reaction of the eyewitnesses is that it's not clear whether the crowd is still around by this point. But Peter is struck with his own sin when he realizes what this tells him about Jesus.

He had kind of tended to dismiss it early on when Jesus said to do it because they'd already done it, and the middle of the day is not a time to catch fish. They had been out all night, which is a better time to catch fish. But now, when he realizes what his attitude was then, he sees what Jesus has done.

This somewhat compares to the Old Testament theophanies, in which people in contact with God suddenly recognize their sin. The disciples, in their reaction, leave everything to follow Jesus. So, they realize that this was not some clever stunt but that Jesus is.

They obviously don't have the whole Trinitarian thing together at this point, but they realize that Jesus is at least a major prophet and that a good way to spend a hunk of their life is to become disciples of his. Old Testament background. I usually suggest to my students that when they're looking at the miracles of Jesus, they take a look at the Old Testament background.

Why is that? That's the background the audience would have had. Jesus' disciples, the other people standing around. They haven't read the New Testament, okay? They've got the Old Testament background.

So, what do we do? This would be a very likely source also for any symbolic significance the miracles might have. This is going to be the background. These are the things that these guys growing up have heard about what God did in history.

And if these incidents have symbolic significance, this is going to be the likely source for it as well. And similar miracles. Well, there's a Jonah account of moving a fish.

So, getting a fish to the right place so it's there waiting for Jonah when he goes overboard. Moving a multitude of animals. That shows up in several places.

The Egyptian plagues. You've got the gnats and the frogs and all of that sort of thing. And such.

The quail in the wilderness that God brings up to feed the Israelites. Moving a multitude of animals. Other parallels, not miracles.

Fish in the Old Testament. Genesis 1.28 and Psalm 8.8 tell us that humans were made to rule the fish, among other things. So, that's interesting.

We're not terribly able to rule fish these days. But maybe this is telling us something about Jesus, then. Come back and think about that.

Instead, in Genesis 9:2, the fish fear and flee humans. A result, presumably, of the fall or post-fall situation. Yet, Job 12:7-10 tells us that fish are in the hand of God.

So, God controls fish. So, Genesis 1.28. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it.

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Genesis 9:2. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air. Upon every creature that moves along the ground.

Upon all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hands. Job 12.7-10. Ask the animals, and they will teach you.

Or the birds of the air, and they will tell you. Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you. Let the fish of the sea inform you.

Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. What's the significance of the miracle? Well, immediate effect. The fishermen get a spectacular haul.

And they're shown something about Jesus. What about the place in salvation history? That's often a thing to think about. Instead of just taking all of these events that occur in the book of Judges, the Kings, the Chronicles, the Gospels, and the Acts.

It's just kind of individual interesting stories. But how do they fit into what God is doing in history? Well, Jesus is the second Adam. He comes to restore what Adam has lost.

Adam has lost, in one sense, perhaps his willing dominion over the fish, if you like. But now, Jesus has restored that. So, Jesus is able to bring these fish into the net.

We don't know how he does it, okay? But that's what he does. Symbolic elements. Well, Jesus gives us that already, huh? The disciples will be to other humans as fishermen are to fish.

I'm going to make you fishers of men. You're going to gather humans into the kingdom if you like. That is basically what Jesus says at the end of us.

So, this is an encouragement to them that if working with Jesus, they can make a great catch like this of fish. So, working with Jesus, many people will come into the kingdom. As God controls our success in fishing, so in saving people.

We move on to a second miracle over nature, and that's feeding the 5,000. That's found in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, John 6. Let's look at John 6. Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias. And a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.

Then Jesus went up to a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy food for these people to eat? He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him that eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. Here's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish.

But how far will they go among so many? Jesus said, Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about 5,000 of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed as much of those who were seated as they wanted.

He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he told his disciples to gather the pieces that were left over. Let nothing be wasted.

So, they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Presumably referring to the passage in Deuteronomy 18.

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. Well, think a little bit about the historicity of the event, the occasion. This is the latter part of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

The twelve have just returned from their mission. We see that sketched for us in Luke. Jesus has just heard of John the Baptist's execution.

That's mentioned for us in Matthew. Jesus takes disciples off by themselves to rest, as mentioned explicitly in Mark. The crowds follow.

Jesus teaches them all day and then feeds them in the evening: liberal explanations, a lesson in sharing. Many have food hidden away, but they're afraid to share.

They each think, I'm the only one that's got it, and if I get it out, I'll be mobbed by five thousand people, etc. But the little boy shares his, and all are shamed, and they share. That's one liberal explanation.

Another is an invented story to compare with Elijah and Elisha. Elijah, 1 Kings 17, 13, Elijah said to her, a woman of Zarephath, Don't be afraid, go home and do as you said, but first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have, and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, The jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry, until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.

Or Elisha, 2 Kings 4, 42, A man came from Baal Shelisha, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread, baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. Give it to the people to eat, Elisha said. How can I set this before a hundred men, his servant asked.

But Elisha answered, Give it to the people to eat, for this is what the Lord says, They will eat and have some left over. Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some leftover, according to the word of the Lord. So, an invented story was created to compare these two miracles and the accounts of Elijah and Elisha.

Well, evidence of historicity, all four of the Gospels record this with considerable variety. They don't appear to be copying from one another. The details of place, territory Bethsaida and Julias, even the green grass, something which is in the climate of Israel, is rather rare, it's basically a spring phenomenon.

Give us some information, if you like, about the events. The reference to the kophinoi, the standard food baskets of the Jews. And, very strange, Jesus has leftovers gathered up.

You'd never see something like that, an apocryphal miracle, where, you know, they spread the tablecloth and command, and food appears on it, and all those sorts of things. Jesus has leftovers gathered up. This is an indication that Jesus does not take miracles for granted and uses them in unnecessary situations.

The reaction of the eyewitnesses is only reported by John. This is the prophet! Deuteronomy 18.15, there'll be a prophet that'll rise after you, like you, etc. So, one of the eschatological figures, if you like, of the intertestamental period, besides the messiah, the Davidic messiah, and a messiah of Aaron, a possible priestly messiah, and was the prophet.

They were about to force him to become king. They were obviously looking for someone to deliver them from the Romans, and if you had someone who could supply food all the time, that would solve a huge logistic problem in fighting battles against the Romans, huh? So, Jesus sends the twelve disciples off in the boat, in parallel passages, dismisses the crowd, and goes off into the hills to pray. Old Testament background.

Similar miracles besides the turning of water into wine at Cana, and feeding the four thousand. There's the manna in the wilderness, Exodus 16, Numbers 11, Deuteronomy 8, Joshua 5, Nehemiah 9, Psalm 78. A major feature of wilderness wandering.

There's the provision of the quail in the wilderness, Exodus 16, Number 11, Psalm 78, Psalm 105 in the wilderness. There's Elijah and the widow of Zarephath we just mentioned, 1 Kings 17. The oil multiplied to rescue another widow from having to sell her sons into slavery, 2 Kings 4. And the loaves and grain multiplied, 2 Kings 4. Those are both under Elisha, actually.

Other parallels. God feeds. A couple of passages.

Psalm 104:27 and following. Psalm 132:15. Look at those.

Psalm 104:27 and following. These animals all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up.

When you open your hand, they're satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they're terrified. When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

And Psalm 132:15. I will bless her, Zion, with abundant provisions. For the poor, I will be satisfied with food.

You also have the ravenic views on Leviathan and Behemoth. God will provide them as food for Israel in the end times. What's the significance of the miracle? Immediate effect.

A crowd of over 5,008 had all they wanted with more left over than originally existed. They want to make Jesus king. A place in salvation history.

Comparable to Moses with Israel in the wilderness. See also the Deuteronomy 18:15 prophets like Moses passage. One of the things that happened in Jesus' miracles is that it called the attention of the people to previous times in salvation history when God had done things like that.

Those times are Moses, Elisha, and Elijah. But Jesus' connection with the miracle is much more direct than Moses. For the manna, God tells Moses.

Moses announces it's going to happen. And it begins to happen. Jesus takes the bread and the fish and begins to break them.

And it begins to multiply. And we don't know what it looked like. We're not there.

So, does Jesus handle all of it quite a bit? Or does it continue to multiply as the disciples carry it around in the basket or something? I don't know. But neither do we know from the case with the 20 loaves of barley bread feeding the hundred. We don't know exactly how that worked either.

We weren't there to see it, and the narrator didn't tell us. But Jesus' connection with the miracle is much more direct than Moses. Another feature of the miracles of Jesus is that they not only compare with those of Moses and Elijah, say, but they also are typical—Jesus' connection is more direct.

Significance of the miracle, some symbolic elements. Jesus' discourse the next day, John 6:22 to 71, which comes back to, I'm the bread of life, and it wasn't Moses that fed you with man and the wilderness was God, et cetera, that draw the attention of the people to what the significance of this is. He also connects this with giving his own life to sustain man, and this is going to be a picture of Jesus' death.

And we see that more directly today in connection with the Lord's Supper. This is my body, which is broken for you. If you like, it looks back at it.

Well, here's this looking forward at it. So, the significance is something like the Lord's Supper. We turn to a third nature miracle, the coin in the fish's mouth, Matthew 17.

Here's the passage, Matthew 17:24, 27. After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, they'd been out on a preaching tour, you might say; the collectors of the

two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax? Yes, he does, he replied. When Jesus came into the house when Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak.

What do you think, Simon, he asked. From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes? From their own sons or from others? From others, Peter answered. Then the sons are exempt, Jesus said to him.

But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake, throw out your line, take the first fish you catch, open its mouth, and you'll find a four drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours. The historicity of the event, the occasion, late in Galilean ministry.

Jesus just returned to Capernaum, keeping a low profile, Mark 9.30. Peter's questioned by those collecting the half-shekel tax, and a half-shekel and a tetradrachm are basically the same size, so it's a two-drachma tax. Does Jesus pay? And Peter, knowing Jesus is pious and all that, says, sure, yeah. Jesus anticipates Peter's question when he comes in the room, though, and responds with his own question and with his miracle.

Evidence of historicity? Well, a detail of the tax. It's called the double drachma tax here in the account rather than half a shekel. The term used is not that of the Septuagint, but it fits the contemporary usage.

The term actually in the thing here is stator, which is one of the terms for a tetradram. Jesus' peculiar answer is very important in terms of significance. That is, he isn't just indicating his own sonship, but he's indicating something of Peter's sonship in this as well.

Reaction of the eyewitnesses? Well, this is an interesting miracle. The occurrence is not even reported. We just have Jesus telling Peter what to do, and it's assumed that it took place, much less the reactions of any eyewitnesses.

Old Testament background? Similar miracles. Well, there's the movement of animals, miracles we saw before, and, of course, this presumably involves the movement of a fish, getting the right fish to Peter's hook to get it there. So, the Jonah incident, the quail incident, the plagues incident, etc.

Financial provision? Well, there's the oil for the widow to allow her to sell that and then pay off the debts of her husband, who had died, so that the sons don't need to be sold into slavery. Pre-knowledge? Samuel knows what Saul is going to have happen to him and what he's going to do the next day, 1 Samuel 10. The significance? In this immediate effect, the temple tax is paid.

Jesus makes a point with Peter regarding its obligatory nature. For somehow now, for Jesus and Peter, it's no longer obligatory. And he seals this point with the miraculous catch.

Place in salvation history? The one who controls fish has come to earth, okay? His relation to the Father is different than that of the others. The temple tax was for the atonement of your souls, an interesting remark. And Jesus doesn't need atonement if you like, but he brings others into a similar relationship, okay? It did not work out, okay, just hinted at in the miracle.

Symbolic elements? The half-shekel tax and atonement, here it is in Exodus 30, verses 13 through 16. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is doing this taxation by having a crowd over here, and then each comes out, pays a half-shekel, and moves over and forms another crowd. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half-shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel which weighs 20 gerahs.

This half-shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those 20 years old or older, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half-shekel. The poor are not to give less when they make the offering for the Lord to atone for their lives.

Here's the NIV translation; it could also be souls. It's atonement, anyway. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting.

It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for your lives. Relation of the Christian to the law. It is a very controversial area.

Here's one of the passages that relate to that. Well, that's the end of our tour of Jesus and miracles, and particularly his power, if you like, over nature.