

The One Question I Would Ask God

Why Miracles?

July 22,2020

If I were to come at the question slightly differently I might ask: what is the purpose of miracles in our story? This could lead to many answers. In the first place, and if we take miracles at face value, as in they actually occurred, miracles could serve to establish the bona fides of our God, of Jesus, and of the Christian faith. In pre-modernity this is the most likely purpose they served. Indeed in pre-modernity just about every occurrence was seen to be of God, and so just about everything that happened had a miraculous component to it. The modern mindset is very different. On the one hand science has given us logical reasons for what was previously thought to be miraculous, and on the other the notion of the supernatural is viewed cynically by most people, including many Christians. As such the modern Christian may take 3 positions. One is to continue to believe in the reality and importance of miracles in our story. The second is to simply dismiss the miraculous as impossible and irrelevant. And the third is to try explain the so-called miracle in purely natural terms. Take the feeding of the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Some would say it happened, exactly as recorded. Some would say it didn't happen because it's just plain impossible. And others would say that when the little boy was willing to share his lunch his selflessness and generosity motivated the others in the crowd to take their food out of hiding and share it.

I want to suggest another way of coming at miracles and that is to see them as parables. Now one of the things we say about parables is that they are not about what they are about. That the parables of Jesus are stories he made up that were seemingly about everyday people and circumstances but were actually claims Jesus was making about God and himself. And so what if miracles too are not about what they are about but are about claims being made about God and Jesus? Indeed Jesus gave this viewpoint some credence in the aforementioned feeding of the 5000. In teaching after the 'miracle' Jesus noted that as impressive as the feeding may have been they would still all be hungry again in a matter of hours. And so, he said, 'I am the bread of life; whoever feeds on me will never be hungry'. The miracle then was a parable on what real food is; it is the spiritual

food that Jesus offers that will ultimately assuage our hunger and satisfy our cravings. Accordingly turning water into wine may be about the generosity and hospitality of a God who keeps providing. The healing miracles are about the compassion of a God who knows our deepest needs and offers healing which is so much more than a simple cure. The walking on water and stilling the storm is about a God who when the storms hit or we feel ourselves sinking is there with us through it all. And so on.

Which leads to another question: I wonder what other miracles that are parables could really be about?

But I would also suggest that another approach to miracles would be to expand our notion of what constitutes a miracle. If we think that a miracle is always and only a supernatural event then we confine, perhaps unfortunately, ourselves to the 3 positions articulated in the first paragraph. For instance to define miracles as supernatural is to miss out on the ways the natural can itself be miraculous. Jesus once said 'consider the lilies of the field'. Yes do consider the lilies of the field, and all other God's gifts of creation, and be astounded by how super the natural world is. Consider also events that we would call extraordinary and see the heart of God made manifest in those events. Or even that which we would call coincidental as God's grace bubbling through into everyday life. We may be able to explain away these things, but really, does it make them any less miraculous?!

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