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Moreover, these "signs" are recorded by John not simply because they are so wonderful, but because some of the profoundest spiritual discourses and conversations of Christ are actually related to them. So that whilst we may lift them out of their contexts for a moment, as already suggested, we must also view them *within* their contexts. For example, the healing of the paralytic at Bethesda (chap. 5:1-15) leads to a discourse by Jesus concerning Himself and His relation to the Father (vs. 19-27). The feeding of the five thousand in the next chapter leads on to the sublime utterance on Christ as the Bread of Life (vs. 26-59). The opening of the eyes of the man born blind in ch. 9:1-12 gives rise to the revelation of Christ as the Door and the Shepherd (9:39 to 10:21). Having regard to these points, we can turn to the synthetic study with all the clearer understanding of its purport.

In order to illustrate the synthetic method of study we give two different methods of grouping these miracles into a formal scheme, the first more detailed and explanatory, the second in bare outline. Note that the first omits all mention of the "personal" miracles in which Christ Himself partook directly; the second includes one only of the latter, the "walking on the water", so making eight, not seven. Then there is exhibited the particular connection between the respective miracles, which is different in each scheme. This does not make them self-contradictory, but the very differences serve to bring out aspects of truth which otherwise would elude us. There are one or two other ways of grouping these miracles which it may be possible to deal with on a later occasion.



A SYNTHETIC STUDY OF THE MIRACLES

I. By Geo. F. Trench, B.A.*

The seven miracles recorded by John are as follows:—

- (1) The conversion of water into wine—Chap. 2.
- (2) The recovery of the nobleman's son—Chap. 4.
- (3) The healing of the impotent man—Chap. 5.

* The late Geo. F. Trench was a well known Bible teacher and writer in England years ago; author of several works, including *The Life that is Life Indeed*, which had a considerable vogue for their spiritual insight and erudition. This article (somewhat abridged) has been in our MS files for some years apparently but just recently "discovered". It still has a message of real value for the Bible Student desirous of pursuing a study of the miracles.

- (4) The feeding of the multitude—Chap. 6.
- (5) The giving of sight to the blind man—Chap. 9.
- (6) The raising of Lazarus—Chap. 11.
- (7) The draught of 153 great fishes—Chap. 21.

It will be observed that the *personal* miracles of the *Incarnation*, the *Walking on the Sea*, and the *Resurrection*, are not included in the above, as belonging to another category.

The question arises, How may these miracles be connected with one another; in what grouping may they best be studied so as to extract the Divine instruction of each in its relation to the others?

It must be remarked, in view of the statement in ch. 20:30 that the apostle does not profess to give a complete consecutive narration of the Lord's miracles, but has been inspired to make a selection of those recorded as being germane to His purpose here set forth. If there has thus been disclosed a Divine design in the selection of this particular group of "signs," it is necessary to seek for the method or system that underlies that selection, and the reader will perceive, when the proper grouping is made, how rich a field of truth, and what otherwise undiscovered beauties, lie stored in these simple narratives of our Lord's gracious deeds.

If we examine a leafy twig from half-a-dozen different kinds of trees, we see how varied in their order are the arrangements of the leaves upon the stalk. Probably no two of them will be found exactly alike in this respect. For the purpose of this illustration, take any twig with leaves, from the Ash tree, for example, and notice the arrangement of the leaves on it.

The seven leaves on the stalk form *three pairs* with a central *single top one*. The first and seventh, the second and sixth, the third and fifth are the pairs; the fourth stands alone in the centre at the top of the twig.

It will be seen at once that, if this is the Divine order selected for the miracle narratives of John, we are to seek the connection not between the first and the second, but between the *first* and the *seventh*; not between the second and third, but between the *second* and the *sixth*, and so on. If this is done, the parallelism will be found to be complete and beautiful, in regard to the teaching of these seven miracles.

Let us now proceed with the examination under the light of this parable from Nature, and see if the key fits the lock.

I. The *first* pair of miracles to be compared are those of chapter 2 and chapter 21. The miraculous conversion of water into wine and the the miraculous capture of fishes. Are there any points of contact here? Yes.

(1) In both cases the company is gathered for a meal.

(2) In neither case was it a case of urgent demand or extreme need; in the one case there had been already a supply of wine, in the other the breakfast had been already prepared (21:9).

(3) The supply when given is in both cases far and away beyond the actual need of the occasions. In the one, six great waterpots of purification are filled with water by the Lord's command, to be turned into good wine. In the other, 153 great fishes are provided for twelve persons. That is, both exemplify the Kingly liberality of Him who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; the generous *super-abundance* of the gifts of God, whose promise is for the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

(4) Both miracles are wrought at the Lord's command by the hand of others.

(5) Both are followed by the declaration that the disciples discovered His glory. In the one (2:11) "He manifested forth His glory and the disciples believed in Him." In the other, "None of the disciples durst ask Him, 'Who art Thou?' knowing that it was the Lord. This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead."

I will not pause to enlarge on the *doctrinal* lessons to be learned from these comparisons, but point to the significance of the two miracles as illustrations of Salvation. The first was a *great conversion*. Natural water is converted into supernatural wine. It is the great truth that man must be regenerated if he is to see the Kingdom of God. Water of purification will do no good to him whose nature in its essence is corrupt. The change must be internal.

The second is a *great capture*. Out of the sea of this world's sin and selfishness souls must be captured for God. Not only converted, changed as to nature, but yielded up for *possession* by Christ. He spreads His fisher's net to catch men, to draw them in to God, to Himself and to heaven. They are henceforth, though regenerate, not their own. No longer free, but willing captives, and the treasured property of Christ. "For all Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in Thee."

II. With these brief suggestions let us pass on to the *second* pair of miracles, those of chapters 4 and 11—the raising up of the nobleman's son and the resurrection of Lazarus.

(1) In both cases the need arises in the absence of the Lord, and in both the news of it reaches Him by a message from the sick bed through the nearest relatives.

(2) In neither case did the Lord immediately respond by a visit to the sufferer, as His custom was. In the first He never went at all; in the case of Lazarus not for several days.

(3) In each case the sufferer is probably a young man, the disease is acute and dangerous, and the issue is a matter of life or death—the quickening of the dying into higher life and the resurrection of the dead.

(4) Contrast the implicit child-like faith of the nobleman, when he heard the words "Thy son liveth," with the doubts of Martha when she heard, "Thy brother shall rise again," and her further protest against the opening of the grave (11:24, 39).

(5) The result in both cases is the conversion of many.

The moral, so to speak, of this comparison or connection is suggested by the Lord's words to Martha (11:25, 26). "He that liveth (or is alive at My Coming) and believeth in Me shall never die," is exemplified in the recovery of the nobleman's son; "He that believeth in Me, though he should die, yet shall he live;" is shown forth in Lazarus' resurrection. The two men are representative. They are the quick and the dead. The living sufferer changed in a moment. The dead resurrected. In them the Lord reveals Himself as the Giver of Life: "Thy son *liveth*;" "Thy brother shall *rise again*." They have, therefore, a special character of suitability to the Gospel of John as the Gospel of Life.

Another and even more significant connection is found in the two men as types of the state of the *godless* soul. In one sense the natural man is a dying man, his life is but living death; he has intelligence, conscience, will, but for God and eternity these are perverted or inoperative. Doom is before him. To him Christ brings life through the operation of faith.

In the other sense the natural man is *dead*, "dead in trespasses and sins." He can neither see nor hear nor know anything. To him Christ comes in his sovereign life-giving almightiness, and quickens him instantly. Sometimes, therefore, we have to throw upon *man* the responsibility of believing. At others we see the

miracle of conversion wrought apart from all *visible* human means. Both are true aspects of the Divine operation. This connection teaches that to discern the one is not to exclude the other.

III. We come now to the *third*, the last, and in some respects the most remarkable, of the pairs of miracles recorded in John's Gospel.

They are those of the 5th and 9th chapters—the impotent man and the blind. Let us trace the links which unite them.

(1) Both events took place on the Sabbath (5:9, 10, and 9:14, 16), and in both the Jews find fault on this ground, and are met by our Lord's declarations that the works of God must still be wrought; that since sin has destroyed his Sabbath, *redemption work* has taken the place of *creative rest* (see 5:17 and 9:4).

(2) In both the Lord's action was spontaneous—that is, neither of the sufferers sought His help. Contrast this fact with the previous earnest entreaties.

(3) In both cases the malady or defect was of long standing. Unlike the previous cases, it was not an acute but a chronic and permanent malady—*life-long* in the one case, of *thirty-eight years'* standing in the other.

(4) In neither case was the Lord fully known to the restored men at first, and in both cases He seeks, finds, and reveals Himself afterwards (chs. 5:14; 9:35-38).

(5) In both cases, unlike the previous miracles, the connection of *sin* with suffering is raised. "Neither hath this man sinned," etc. (ch. 9:3), tells us that some afflictions are traceable rather to the common lot of the fallen race than to any immediate offence of the sufferers. "Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee," tells us that sometimes our diseases are the direct effect of our own sins, and that even to believers they are sent in chastisement for sanctification.

(6) The principal lesson of this connection seems to be that the power of Christ *alone* overcame the impotence in walk and the blindness in the soul which afflict the human race. It is especially applicable, therefore, to believers, who realise their defects, and justly connect their failures in conduct with the want of the vision of God in the habitual life of their souls.

(7) An interesting link remains. The one, the cripple, lay by the *Pool of Bethesda*. The other, the blind man, is sent to the *Pool of Siloam*. These Pools are never mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.

I shall not attempt to elaborate the lessons of the above points of contact, for to the student no doubt these will suggest themselves, but merely remind the reader that without making the investigation under the guidance of the true key, these lessons would probably be overlooked, or, if noticed, lightly passed. The artistic balance of circumstance and doctrine reveal the mind of the Divine Author.

IV. The last of the miracles—that is, *the central one*, according to the plan, remains to be considered.

It is the feeding of 5,000 men. The place of honour given to this miracle is accounted for by its magnitude. With majestic bounty the King spreads a table in the wilderness for 5,000 men—for all comers, that is to say. For as to means or adequacy of previous provision, if they had numbered 50,000 or 500,000 the result would have been the same.

Both in the action and the doctrine which follows it, the Lord reveals Himself as the same who had fed the armies of Israel in the wilderness with angels' food.

It is the Saviour *of the world* who is here presented (see vs. 33, 51, and chap. 4:42) by contrast with the blessing of individuals and the supply of food and wine to smaller groups in the miracles already considered.

The Bread of God was Himself (vs. 33). It was free to every comer, to every believer. And the life that He gave was life everlasting.

For magnitude of the benefit given, and importance of the *doctrine* to which it led up, the miracle stands out the chief.

In this case alone of all the selected signs in John is a doctrinal use made, at so much length and fulness, of the miracle that had taken place. The Saviour of the world (no Jewish limitation now) is presented thus in the centre of the exquisite framework of the surrounding revelations in which, as in a setting of perfect fitness, He is revealed. The Saviour of the world is He who first discovered Himself as the bountiful Giver of every joy on earth, in sympathy with human needs and relationships. It is He who quickens the living and raises the dead. It is He who strengthens the weak and enlightens the blind.

Thus, by the wonderful design of this Gospel the revelation of the Son of God is brought out in all its perfections of harmony, symmetry, balance and beauty: features, (as those who *seek* them will find) that are common to many, perhaps to all parts of the Scriptures of God.

THE SECOND SCHEME*

This scheme demonstrates how the same subject can be profitably dealt with from an entirely different angle. It is suggestive and illuminating, and will repay careful study in detail in spite of the differences.

THE INAUGURAL SIGN, chap. 2: 1-11.

The water made wine at Cana, illustrating our Lord's glory in the transforming and ennobling influences of His kingdom.

FIRST PAIR OF SIGNS, chap. 4: 43-54, and chap. 5: 1-18.

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|---|--|
| (a) The healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum. | The blessings of our Lord's Kingdom realised by faith. |
| (b) The healing of the impotent man at Bethesda. | These blessings realised in restored sanctification. |

These signs depict our Lord's glory in relation to *the individual soul*.

SECOND PAIR OF SIGNS, chap. 6: 1-14 and 15-21.

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| (a) The feeding of the five thousand. | Our Lord the Divine Giver of sustenance to His people. |
| (b) The walking on the sea of Galilee. | Our Lord the Divine Giver of protection to His people. |

These signs depict His glory in relation to His *Church on earth*.

THIRD PAIR OF SIGNS, chaps. 9 and 11.

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| (a) The healing of the man born blind. | Our Lord the Light of the world lying in darkness. |
| (b) The raising of Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. | Our Lord the Life of the world lying in death. |

These signs depict His glory in relation to *the world*.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL, POST-RESURRECTION SIGN, chap. 21: 1-14.

The second miraculous draught of fishes.	The final fulfilment of the blessings of our Lord's kingdom.
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* This Scheme is by the late Dr. John Hutchison of Scotland, taken from his substantial book on the subject of the Miracles of John (probably now out of print).