

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

December 24 - 28, 2007



December 24, **Miracles: 'Extraordinary'**

"An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."¹

God usually accomplishes his will through 'means'. He uses natural events, human agents, 'circumstances, etc., in strict accordance with the laws of nature, to guide, direct and bring about his purposes. In the operation of 'ordinary providence', God uses different combinations of 'ordinary' events to produce various results.

However, God may also use 'extraordinary providences' or 'miracles' to accomplish his will immediately, without secondary causes. "God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet he is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."²

So, in 'ordinary providence', God might choose to heal a person using doctors and medical procedures. With 'extraordinary providence, God could choose to heal directly and instantly, without any natural means. Miracles, in the Biblical sense, operate above or apart from natural laws or means, so they are by definition 'supernatural' events.

At times God also works miraculously by using 'means', but in a way that is contrary to the ordinary established patterns of nature – and to produce a different result from the ordinary. The virgin birth might be considered an example of this. God used an ordinary woman to carry a child in what seemed to be a 'natural' fashion. However, the means of the pregnancy and the Child that resulted were 'supernatural' – far above the ordinary!

¹ Luke 2:9 (TNIV)

² Westminster Confession of Faith, 5:3

December 25, 2007

Miracles: Credibility

“How will this be, Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin.”¹

During the Enlightenment, the possibility of miracles was rejected out of hand because they were held to ‘violate’ the laws of nature. This was partly due to the human tendency to make judgments based upon our own limited experience and partly due to a dogmatic insistence that God, as the Creator of the laws of nature, could not violate his own laws. Most miracles, such as the virgin birth, were simply dismissed as myths created by simple, gullible people with overactive imaginations. Some were given ‘natural explanations, such as the crossing of the Red Sea being made possible by strong winds.

On the other hand, recent renewed openness to the spiritual and the supernatural has swung the pendulum for some in the opposite direction. We are told that miracles abound on a daily basis and we can experience them in this way if we have the faith and/or the eyes to see them.

Either extreme can be an obstacle to mature faith. While it is God’s good pleasure to usually work in an orderly way through secondary causes, he is not limited by the laws of nature. God can supersede natural law to accomplish his will. We can and should ask God to work in this way.

On the other hand, we cheapen the currency of miracles by claiming, without discernment, that they occur all around us. This robs the miraculous of its extraordinary character and power to testify to the reality of God. Instead, God would have us acknowledge the glory of his grace when he truly does act in an obviously special way in our lives.

¹ Luke 1:34 (TNIV)

December 26, 2007

Miracles – Truly Significant

“The Angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”¹

In Scripture, miracles are ‘signs’, performed with a definite purpose to highlight or reveal something about God. “They are not mere wonders, exhibitions of power, destined to excite amazement, but have revelational significance.”²

In the ‘modern’ era, debates over the historicity of miracles often overshadowed their meaning. Creation, the virgin birth, Christ’s resurrection and other events were ‘hot button’ issues that people became weary of discussing because the spotlight was on whether or not they actually took place. In the process of ‘scoring points’, we may have missed the point. The significance of the virgin birth was not that it was supernatural, but that it pointed to the uniqueness of Jesus divine/human nature. God was once again walking the earth!

On the other hand, the postmodern tendency to focus on the meaning of stories, regardless of their historicity, does not really work for Biblical miracles either. Scripture is not just an ancient edition of ‘Chicken Soup for the Soul’. It matters that the miraculous events actually took place. If God did not step into time-space reality in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, can I hope and believe that he will work in my time-space reality now? As real people living in the real world, it is important that we understand that these events actually did occur. They are *both true and significant*.

¹ Luke 1:35 (TNIV)

² L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 177.

December 27, 2007

Jesus

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”¹

Jesus,² is the Greek form of the Hebrew name ‘Jehoshua’ or ‘Joshua’, which in the period after the Exile in Babylon was usually pronounced ‘Yeshua’.

The most famous Joshua in the Old Testament was Joshua son of Nun, the successor to Moses who led God’s people into the Promised Land. When Moses was selecting ten spies to go into Canaan, he changed his name from Hoshea (“May Yahweh Save”) to Joshua (“Yahweh Saves or “Yahweh is Salvation”).³

Joshua ben Nun was faithful over the long haul. He came out of Egypt, lived for God during the forty years in the wilderness and actually led the people to possess what God had promised them. He did what Moses did not do.

Jesus, by his faithful life and particularly by his death on the cross, accomplishes a far more important salvation which is offered to the whole the world.

“For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.”⁴

Jesus saves us from sin, reunites us with God and leads us in abundant life under his Lordship. He truly lives up to his name.

¹ Matthew 1:21 (TNIV)

² Pronounced ‘Yay-sous’?

³ Numbers 13:16

⁴ Romans 8:3 (TNIV)

December 28, 2007

Christ

“and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”¹

While Jesus is his personal name, Christ or Messiah is his official name or title and it means “anointed one”. Kings and priests were regularly anointed with oil to represent the power of the Holy Spirit.² Elisha was also anointed as a prophet and it may have been the case that other prophets were commonly anointed with oil as well.³

Anointing with oil was a visible sign of at least three spiritual realities. First, it signified an appointment to an office, in Jesus’ case, that of King, Priest and Prophet. He is the heir of David who is establishing and governing God’s kingdom. He is the great High Priest who sacrificed his own blood for our sins. He truly spoke the word of God as he walked the earth, revealing God’s purposes and will.

Secondly, the anointing signified a sacred relationship and the sacrosanct nature of the person so anointed. No one was to lift a hand against God’s anointed.⁴ To reject him is to reject God’s agent. To embrace him is to embrace the purposes of God.

Thirdly, anointing signified the outpouring of the Spirit on the one anointed. While born of the Spirit, that anointing with power was visibly given to Jesus at his baptism. It qualified him for the work that he then began to do in earnest as our Prophet, Priest and King.

¹ Matthew 1:16 (NIV)

² E.g. Exodus 29:7; 1 Sam. 9:16

³ 1 Kings 19:16; Psalm 105:15; Isaiah 61:1

⁴ 2 Samuel 1:14-16