

## HOW IMPRESSIVE ARE THE SIGNS GIVEN BY JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

Interestingly, the first five books of the Bible, speak of outrageous miracles being done by God through Moses. There is a world of difference between somebody making water fall on an Egyptian army than in somebody quietly rising from the dead on a sleepy Sunday morning. That alone is suspicious.

The last gospel, the Gospel of John, seems to come close if not quite to calling Jesus God. Yet the miracles there are bizarre in that light. They are not very good and seem a bit random. No exorcisms by Jesus are hinted at all. They were a focal point in the other gospels.

John does not tell us to agree with the Baptist that the Holy Spirit really came to rest on Jesus in the form of a dove (1:32-34).

Nathaniel believed in Jesus because Jesus said he saw him under a fig tree (1:47-50) which says a lot about his not being hard to impress. John does not claim that this was miraculous and who wouldn't have sat under fig trees in those warm days? If John is wrong Nathaniel could have felt Jesus was divinely inspired because he saw the genius in him and heard of what John the Baptist had allegedly said about him being the world saviour.

Jesus' seemingly psychic knowledge of the Samaritan woman may just have been the result of trained observation and what they call cold reading. The woman might have thought he was clairvoyant but John does not indicate that she was right if she did (4). Perhaps she just thought that God had given him incredible but natural wisdom?

In John 5, Jesus was said to have cured a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. We are not told what was wrong with him but it seems he couldn't walk or was afraid to walk. Perhaps he had been sick and for some neurotic reason imagined he was still sick. We are told that Jesus knew this man for he knew he was sick a long time. Then Jesus sneaks away and the man does not know who cured him. Jesus never actually told the man he cured him even when they met later in the Temple. This miracle then cannot be believed for we don't even know if it witnesses to Jesus or why John and the man thought Jesus did it. The man did not care for Jesus when he was caught breaking the Sabbath by carrying his mat and said Jesus told him to do that making the Jews angry. And this on the Temple doorstep which made it worse. We are told that the cure happened by the sacred pool of Bethesda. We know that this pool was sacred to the pagan god of healing, Asclepius. We have here an incident where a cure happened discreetly so Jesus obviously didn't care if the miracle was attributed to the god or not. That would indicate that he didn't mind pagan worship. Or it could be that it was not a miracle and nobody was entitled to believe it was. In that case, the incident would not be inferring that the god should be prayed to. In that case Jesus would not have wanted anybody to know what happened. Why boast about non-miracles? In that case, we would have to assume the John author made it up for how else could he have got the story?

John neglected to tell us if the cure of the man born blind was a miracle that Jesus did or if it was natural (9). The healings in John are not said to have been miracles. We can believe they were natural.

In John 6, the apostles rowed their boat three or four miles but not out to sea for they suddenly came aground. They saw Jesus walking on water which means he was paddling. They got a fright when they saw him probably because they thought he was a ghost, the credulous fools. John just says that they saw Jesus but not that they recognised him so don't think that they were necessarily shocked by seeing a man walking literally on top of the water. John never claimed that there was a miracle here.

The footnote in the New American Bible says that when the text says Jesus walked on the sea "the Greek would permit a translation "on the seashore" or "by the sea". This would eliminate the miraculous from the story and leave it pointless (see also page 115, *Doing Away with God?*). They want us to think that recording that Jesus was walking on the water was pointless unless John meant that Jesus really did walk on water as if it were solid ground. This would have been an unnecessary miracle and a form of showing off power of that would be out of character with God. Jesus could have travelled on water in a boat of his own. John did write a lot of seemingly pointless stuff. There is a lot of repetition in the gospel. Jesus told the apostles when he stepped into the boat not to be afraid which could have been the point of the whole story.

It is not said that Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead by some clairvoyant power (11).

John seems to say that Jesus miraculously raised Lazarus from death to life. Jesus told his friends that Lazarus's sickness would not end in death. Christians say that he meant that the final result of it would not be death but resurrection. But they

surely claim that the result of the sickness was death and the result of death was resurrection. They say that he meant that death would not be the final result of the sickness. But if Jesus meant that he would have said that it would finally end not end. There is a huge difference. They are lying. Jesus denied that Lazarus would fully die. He said that Lazarus was asleep and the apostles said that if that was true then Lazarus was not dead. Then Jesus said that he was dead. So Lazarus is asleep and dead. This tells us that Lazarus was in a coma. Jesus could not be any clearer because he was describing a coma the best way he knew how.

Lazarus came out of the tomb when Jesus called him to. The resurrection of Lazarus was not a true resurrection. Perhaps Jesus knew that Lazarus had been taking some kind of drug that could have made him look dead all along so he came round and got away when Jesus had the tomb opened.

If you take the story as it is interpreted by Christians you will see that the story exalts Lazarus and not Jesus. It does not tell us much about Lazarus and we don't know if he might have fooled Jesus. Lazarus and his sisters might have staged the resurrection without Jesus knowing. Jesus might have thought he raised him from the dead. The fact that John thought he was exalting Jesus by the story shows he was not divinely inspired for we have to trust Lazarus on the basis of gossip that this miracle really took place and Lazarus is the one being trusted and not Jesus.

John says that Jesus died and rose again but does not say that this was a miracle, an unnatural event. And what does he mean by dead? That the heart or the breathing stopped for a minute? He says only that Jesus was dead when he was stabbed on the cross and does not rule out the notion that Jesus began to recover when removed from the cross. We have already seen that John does not use the word death to mean what it usually means. His Jesus called Lazarus asleep when he could have been dead or in a state not far from it. There is no evidence in John for a miraculous resurrection or miraculous appearances of Jesus afterwards.

John is the one who gives the least reason for believing that Jesus died and miraculously rose again. In those days, they thought that you could die for a few moments and come back. His Jesus got into where the apostles were though the doors were locked which only tells us he got in not that he necessarily dematerialised himself to pass through a closed door.

In John 21, the Risen Jesus tells the disciples to cast their net over the starboard side to get fish. This seems miraculous until it is realised that the passage does not suggest that the disciples were using the other side at that time. They caught nothing all night and may have stopped and been about to start again when Jesus came along. The fact that they were near the shore adds weight to this. Commentators think they must have been using the other side when Jesus told them to change. But he may not have been giving practical advice but telling them to use that side for some kind of symbolical reason. The starboard side is the back of the boat so the symbolism of a boat dragging fish after it is that they are to drag men after them into the Church of God. A parallel story implies that Jesus had this meaning in mind (Luke 5:1-11).

John doesn't say that Jesus miraculously knew that Peter would die by martyrdom but just that he said it would happen (21:18, 19). Peter allegedly died by crucifixion. Jesus tells him he will stretch out his hands and someone will tie him and carry him off and John says this will glorify God. This need not be a prediction of crucifixion for it doesn't say that his stretching his hands has anything to do with his death. It says his capture will lead to his death. If Jesus meant crucifixion he would have been clearer but he seems to be describing a death in captivity for nobody was tied to a cross and carried off before crucifixion. He says that Peter's death will give glory to God but even an unholy one can do that.

Jesus asked the Jews to believe in him or if they could not, to believe in his works to believe in them instead (John 14:11). Let's assume he meant miracles. So he wanted them to believe in his miracle powers rather than in him if that was the best they could manage. But it is universally accepted in religion and theology that miracles shouldn't be accepted for their own sake but as pointers to God. Jesus miracles couldn't point to God unless they pointed to himself as the spokesman and prophet of God. To believe in miracles done by a man who you don't consider a reliable mouthpiece of God would be saying that God does miracles just for the hell of it.

If Jesus did not mean miracles but only that his good works were to be believed in that is fine. But then Jesus is saying that he does not need to do any miracles. He is saying they are not important. Jesus would say that God does not do silly, that is, unnecessary miracles. We would all have seen them if he did. So Jesus is indicating that his miracles are not magical. Jesus is really saying that his signs are not miracles for he would not contradict himself and John would not be writing what he said down if he thought he did. The signs are just good works. A miracle-worker would not emphasise his natural goodness over his supernatural goodness. Jesus did so Jesus was not a super-powered magician.

The interpretation of some that Jesus meant miracle powers and was thinking that he would do the miracle of the resurrection and they would do better. In that case, Jesus contradicted his claim that the resurrection of Jesus would be the best, the most inimitable and most credible miracle ever. And we know for a fact and are one hundred and ten percent sure of it that it is the opposites of these things.

Jesus in the John gospel says that the man who believes and trusts in him will do the same works as him and even do greater works than him for Jesus will go back to the Father (John 14:12-14).

Some say this is a false prophecy for believers cannot walk on water and make hundreds of loaves out of one loaf or rise from the dead. If that is so then it follows that the author of John was a religious maniac and his gospel should be regarded with derision for he would have known believers could not do these things. And if Jesus could give somebody better powers than he had it follows that two or three witnesses could come along and when the disciple of Jesus renowned for miracles is dead make it seem that that person had appeared to them and testified that the miracles were done to draw attention to himself as saviour and not Jesus and that he had had to testify in Jesus' favour just like Jesus had to feign devotion to the Jewish religion.

Others say that Jesus was putting a natural interpretation on, and requiring one for, the stories about his powers and so there would be people who would think of better things to do than him.

Others say Jesus only meant that believers will do better than him for they will be the ones going out and finding converts for God and him. This interpretation denies he meant miracles, his own or theirs. This is the standard Christian interpretation. And the only one they can think of. But the interpretation is wrong. He said the reason they would do better than him is because he would go back to the Father. But he promised that he would be with his people just as much as ever when he cannot be seen any more and when he is in Heaven again.

The next verse says that whatever the Father will be asked in the name of Jesus for, he will do it. He means that they will do better than him for he will go back to the Father to get the Father to answer their prayers better – which implies by the way that he did not consider himself to be literally God. A man who is God would get results from God whether he was on earth or in heaven for he is God. So what Jesus could have meant was that they would get better results from God by prayer after he goes back to God's side to whisper in God's ear for all eternity. Jesus then would be doing better works for God when he goes back to him than what he was doing on earth. This certainly never happened. No tradition said that Jesus did more miracles after going back to Heaven than before he went back. It is no wonder Christians hate this interpretation. The interpretation says that there was nothing unusual or obviously supernatural about Jesus' teaching and works and others would do more interesting and spectacular things than him. It is correct.

There are no miracles spoken of in this gospel. But the miracle of the food being multiplied in John 6 seems to be an exception. In the light of what John's Jesus said about his own miracles it is clear that this was no miracle.