

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

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The miracles of Jesus by Karl Beth

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KARL BETH

**THE MIRACLES
OF JESUS**

The Miracles of Jesus



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I

OUR TASK

IN every religion the supernatural affects man. The religious man seeks to grasp the supernatural. But the supernatural repels just as soon as it obtrudes itself in perceptible events and in a measure unveils the secret. The religious man sees himself in the struggle of these two tendencies of his being; he reaches after the supernatural and would snatch it, so imperfect does he feel himself and his world to be without it; but when he sees it he is tossed to and fro by doubts whether it is, indeed, the supernatural or merely a delusion.

The Christian religion connects one most intimately with the supernatural. It reveals it. "Without controversy, God was manifest in the flesh." How is the union of the earthly creature and the divine nature, of God and man, to be realized? It might appear as impossible as the union of water and fire. Certainly, when it takes place, something happens which lies beyond all calcu-

lation, something wholly extraordinary, a miracle. This miracle, which repeats itself in every true Christian life, is linked with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, which—apart from any dogmatical statement—represents the godly life in its highest degree. The life of Jesus is the original miracle of Christian miracles. Four Gospels record this life, and these narratives show traits in the biographical portrait, which place the divine-human being of the founder of our religion, in immediate relation to the supernatural, and lift for us the veil of mystery. The Gospels are filled with the records of the miracles of Jesus. There the supernatural projects into this our world of nature in a solidly concrete manner. In the face of these miracles the religious man recognizes a twofold position. Truly, he, on whom we found our religious life, from whom we receive "grace for grace," can authenticate himself as sent from God by works which no other can do. And yet does it harmonize with the idea of the Redeemer who intended to seek souls and lead them to God, to interfere by means of miracles with the orderly course of the world? Is not such miracle-

working written on another page than that of prophetic soul-saving ministry? Is not this trait so foreign to his otherwise known nature that pious contemplation might have rather ascribed it to him afterward? And, should Christianity in this matter move along the same line as many other religions in whose traditions miraculous deeds are also assigned to their founders and heroes, but the reality of which criticism can by no means admit? The history of religion brings before us a great mass of marvelous legends. This uniformity in religious traditions seems to point first of all to the fact that human need always led it to ascribe miraculous deeds to religious heroes, and that the same is also the case with the miracles of Jesus.

The assertion is indeed very often made that Jesus did not perform real miracles, that is, acts which could not have been possible in the usual course of natural events. It is true that not all the remarkable cures of which the Gospels speak are questioned, but they are only admitted in so far as they stand in direct analogy to that class of psychical cures, which are also accomplished

among us by suggestion, therapeutics, or magnetism. Thus the cures of Jesus appear only as psychical influences produced by his strong personality, but which, on this account, cannot be declared miraculous. Thus, from this point of view, every real miracle is rejected.

But let us see whether this estimate of the gospel miracles is necessary. The question is an historical one. One can decide against the reality of each miracle performed by Jesus without previously denying the possibility of miracles. The question of the possibility of the miraculous is entirely different from that of its historicity, especially of the miracles of Jesus. Leaving aside the question of possibility, we may try to answer the question: "What can be said of the reality of the miracles of Jesus on the basis of an historical consideration of the records?" Two points require our attention. In the first place, we may inquire whether the working of miracles belongs to the personality of Jesus; that is, whether the Messianic calling to establish the kingdom of God and to give to men a reconciled God included miraculous deeds. In the second

place, the points in question are the historical instances which set forth the reality of the miracles of Jesus. Here religio-historical analogies, which seem to deprive the miracles of Jesus of their specific position and importance, as well as of their reality, have above all things to be taken into account. Our question also reads, whether the miracles of Jesus occupy a peculiar position over against the other miracles in the history of religion or whether they occupy the same position.

II

WHAT JESUS SAYS OF THE MEANING OF HIS MIRACLES

Do THE miracles of Jesus accord with his life and work? This is the first question. This query may be answered most positively by placing in the center of our consideration the copious testimonies which the Lord himself has given concerning his wondrous deeds. The discourses of Jesus reveal the purport of his person, and the closer they follow the work of the person the more valuable they become. If we can ascertain what Jesus himself thought of his miracles, it will be at the same time clear whether miracles stand in a positive or negative relation to his character.

We repeatedly read in the Gospels that the contemporaries of Jesus believed on him because of his miracles. This, at any rate, seems to suggest that the evangelist also occupied this position, that miracles were an excellent means for awakening faith, and that for this purpose Jesus himself per-