

Death

The most impressive of miracles, however, concern those where Jesus raises people from the dead: Jairus' daughter (Mtt 9 // Mk 5 // Lk 8), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7), and Lazarus (Jn 11).



However, Jesus himself denies that Jairus' daughter has died; perhaps she was just in a coma when Jesus cured her. In the case of the son of the widow of Nain, as the usual custom was to bury a person on the same day as they died it may also be the case that he was not actually dead when being taken out for burial. The incident is only recorded in Luke and in his Gospel it precedes Jesus' answer to John the Baptist's question about who he was. Jesus' reply, about going back to tell John what they had seen and heard, includes 'the dead are raised to life' (also in Mtt.11). Luke may have used the same source as Matthew for the answer to the Baptist, or only used Matthew's Gospel itself, and so may have taken the words literally when Matthew was only using them figuratively to depict Jesus in terms of Isaiah's prophecies (Isa.26:19). Remember, Matthew's Gospel often refers back to the OT to show how Jesus fulfils what was promised. As a result, Luke may have felt in some way obliged to produce some evidence of Jesus raising the dead.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is more difficult to explain in rational terms. The incident is clearly depicted as a resurrection miracle, not just to show Jesus as the resurrection and life, as John wanted to depict, but also to provide a reason for the Sanhedrin to want to kill Jesus. Why this miracle is not recorded in the synoptic Gospels is one of the most difficult problems in Gospel studies given the drama it has in John and the link with Jesus' friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But this itself may provide a clue. Only in Luke 10 is there any other direct reference to them in the synoptics, and there their friendship is not even hinted at. In Matthew and Mark's account of the anointing at Bethany, which John (ch.12) ascribes to Mary, no name is given for the woman. It is as if the synoptic authors, for unknown reasons, wished to minimise the role of the family. If so, their reasons must be extreme to cause them to omit what was Jesus' greatest miracle

Jesus in the Gospels

6. Jesus' Healing Miracles



Questions For Reflection

1. What was the main purpose of the healing miracles?
2. Did Jesus really exorcise demons?
3. Why is the raising of Lazarus only in John's Gospel?

Types of Healing Miracles

Jesus' healing miracles can be considered under three types: **disease, demons, death**. They tend to follow a set pattern of : introduction of the situation, the request to effect a cure, Jesus' reaction and the cure itself, and the reaction of the onlookers, although not all components are present in every case.



Disease

Most of the healing of disease miracles are included in all three of the synoptic gospels. However, **Mark** also includes the healing of the deaf man (ch.7) and the blind man at Bethsaida (ch.8), **Luke** has the ten lepers (ch.17) and the cure of the man with dropsy (ch.14), and **Matthew** has the cure of the two blind men (ch.9). **John's** Gospel has 3 healing of disease miracles: the cure of the ruler's son at Capernaum (ch.4) (which may be the same as the centurion's servant in Mtt 8 and Lk 7); the cure of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (ch.5) and the cure of the blind man (ch.9).

These miracles serve to show Jesus' power in order to add authority to his teaching and to make people ask who he is. They have a particular relevance when Jesus is in contention with the scribes and Pharisees to justify his behaviour and his attitude to the Law: Jesus cures the paralytic and forgives his sins, when only God can forgive sins (Mtt 9 // Mk.2 //Lk.5); Jesus cures the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath to show that man is more important (Mtt.12 // Mk.3 //Lk.6). In John's Gospel, the cure of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (ch.5) is developed to show several things: that God's favour must be reflected in a true conversion of the sinner, that Jesus is the son of the Father and, as such, is just doing what the Father requires, even extending to working on the Sabbath.

Sometimes the healing miracle is explicitly associated with **faith** in the person of Jesus, as in the cure of the woman with a haemorrhage (Mtt.9 //Mk.5// Lk.8), the two blind men (Mtt.9) and the centurion's Servant (Matt 8 // Lk.7 with similarities to Jn.4).

Demons

There are several exorcisms recorded in the synoptic Gospels (Mtt.8, 9/12 and possibly 15, and parallels in Mark and Luke, with Mark 1 and Luke 4 also recording a demoniac at Capernaum, and Mark 16 stating in passing that Jesus cast out 7 demons from Mary Magdalene. There are none in John's Gospel.



The episode with the Gadarene Demoniac (Mtt.8) is specific about the nature of the possession, but only Mark (ch.5) and Luke (ch.8) show Jesus asking the demon its name. The event expresses how even demons knew who Jesus was (as in Mark 1/ Luke 4) , and emphasises the extent of his power. It is also remarkable for showing the Gadarenes as being afraid and asking Jesus to leave, rather than expressing thanks. But perhaps Jesus was just too bad for business!

The purpose of the other exorcisms is to show Jesus' authority, rebut the claim that Jesus was casting out demons through the power of Satan (Mtt.9/12 // Lk.11) and, as with the healing miracles, to show the importance of faith and prayer (Mtt.15 // Mk.7 the Canaanite woman's daughter, and Mtt.17 // Mk.9 // Lk.9 the epileptic demoniac) in a situation where the disciples could not exorcise a demon.

It may also be noted that when the chosen twelve were sent out to preach and powers to cure given them (Mtt.10), the power to cast out demons is quoted first before the power to cure diseases (and Lk.9), and in the case of Mark's Gospel (ch.6) it is actually only the power to cast out demons that is mentioned.

The four given miracles all indicate a genuine possession phenomena although in two of the cases they are also accompanied by clear physical illnesses, namely deafness/ dumbness and epilepsy. Jesus is depicted as treating them not as pure physical illnesses as in other cases but recognises in them something more sinister.