

and fishes) which did not prompt that response; it is omitted in Mark and John; and the fact that Matthew is building up towards another incident for the declaration, with Peter's profession of faith (Mtt.16). For these reasons the last sentence in Matthew's passage may be the result of some later insertion.

In Mark's Gospel, the additional comment is given about the walking on water, that it showed that the disciples had not yet understood the meaning of the miracle of the loaves and fishes that had preceded it.

Combining Matthew's declaration and Mark's comment shows that this was the key moment the disciples, on reflection, recognised that Jesus had a special relationship with God.

Linking the Miracles of the Loaves and the Walking on Water

John's Gospel use the miracles of the loaves and the walking on the water to begin his great discourse on the Eucharist. It begins with Jesus asking the crowd to believe in the one sent by God, and ironically depicts the crowd as asking for a sign so that they might believe that Jesus is that person. This is the same people that participated in the miracle of the loaves and wanted to declare Jesus the Messiah as a result of it!

The Cursing of the Barren Fig Tree

Matthew (ch.21) and Mark in two sections (ch.11) describe how when Jesus was hungry he went to get figs from a tree. When he found none he cursed the tree and it died. This is a strange miracle, apparently a selfish one, especially when Mark notes it was not the season for fruit! However, it serves as a device for a discourse about the importance of faith, its power and the necessity of prayer.



Jesus in the Gospels

7. Jesus' Non - Healing Miracles



Questions For Reflection

1. Are Jesus' healing miracles more important than his other ones?
2. Is there a link between Jesus calming the storm and the cure of the Gadarene demoniac?
3. What is the connection between the miracle of the loaves and Jesus walking on the sea?

There are relatively few non-healing or nature miracles in the gospels, so it is worthwhile examining them individually. In general they tend to follow a set pattern: the outline of a situation, a request to Jesus, Jesus' response and action, and the reaction of the participants to Jesus' action



The Wedding Feast at Cana

The changing of water into wine at Cana (Jn 2) was the first of Jesus' public miracles or, given John's theology, the first of the signs given by Jesus about who he might be.

It is interesting to speculate that this may not actually have been Jesus' first miracle. His mother's request indicates that she knew Jesus had some special power; perhaps because he had done something similar before in a more private setting. Jesus reply to his mother 'my hour has not yet come' merely indicates that the time for his public ministry had not quite arrived yet.

The Calming of the Storm

This miracle is one that shows Jesus' power extends even over the forces of nature. It serves the theological purpose of emphasising the need for total faith in the person of Jesus, and this is its main thrust. However, in all 3 synoptic Gospels (Mtt 8, Mk 4/5 and Lk 8) it is linked directly with the cure of the Gadarene demoniac. In Matthew's Gospel this is the first of Jesus' exorcisms and serves the purpose of extending Jesus' power from nature to the underworld. Together, the two incidents are meant to inform the reader that there are no limits to Jesus' miraculous powers— illness and disease, nature and even the underworld of Satan are all within his domain.

The effect in Matthew's Gospel is somewhat lessened in Mark's and Luke's because they both include an earlier example of Jesus performing an exorcism (Mk.1 and Lk.4). This difference brings back questions about which Gospel may have been the first. The order of

these miracle types in Matthew's Gospel lend support for it having priority over Mark's.

The Loaves and Fishes

This is one of the most famous and well known of all Jesus' miracles, and is recorded in all four Gospels (Mtt.14, Mk.6, Lk.9 and Jn.6). A similar miracle is also given in Mtt.15 and Mk.8.



The miracle is described succinctly in Matthew and Luke but Mark, as with many other incidents, provides more pieces of detail: Jesus takes pity on the crowd because 'they are like sheep without a shepherd'; the disciples complain when Jesus asks them to feed the crowd 'are we to spend two hundred denarii on them to buy food?'; the crowd is asked to sit down in groups on the grass in hundreds and fifties. In John's Gospel a further detail is added with Jesus asking Philip where they could buy bread from to feed the crowd although 'he himself knew exactly what he was going to do'.

In the synoptic gospels no reaction is given from either the crowd or the disciples to the miracle. In John, however, in line with his emphasis on the importance of Jesus' actions as signs, shows the crowd hailing Jesus as both the 'prophet who is to come into the world' and Messianic king. Jesus, not wishing this acclamation, flees to the hills.

Jesus Walks on Water

Immediately following the miracle of the loaves and fishes Matthew and Mark depict Jesus as telling the disciples to sail without him while he dismisses the crowd and stays in the hills to pray. Jesus later walks across the Sea and reaches the disciples in their boat.



Only in Matthew's Gospel is it related that Peter tries to walk on the water to Jesus. For Matthew the incident is one about **faith** in Jesus and one that provides an opportunity to proclaim Jesus as 'truly the Son of God'. This seems artificial in its placement for several reasons: more dramatic miracles had already taken place (including the loaves