

## THE OVERWHELMING WEIGHT OF GOD, PART 5: WONDER

Mark 4:35-41, 5:35-43, 8:1-9, 10:46-52 (NASB)

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Some years ago there was a science fiction miniseries on television entitled simply *V* (the capital letter "V"). It has been updated into a current series which bears the same plot which goes like this: Suddenly, without warning, gigantic spaceships approach the earth, descend through the atmosphere and position themselves over the major cities of the world. The entire population of the earth is understandably both riveted on the spacecraft and terrified of what their arrival might mean.

Then the bottom of the spacecrafts morph into gigantic alien jumbotrons. A beautiful woman's face appears on the screen with a soothing voice telling everyone not to be afraid. The message is delivered simultaneously around the world with appropriate translations for every city. The woman, who turns out to be the leader of the alien race and their queen, concludes her calm announcement with the words: "We are of peace—always." Some people are reassured by her words, but many are concerned that the arrival of aliens in giant spacecraft cannot mean anything good.

The aliens know this, and—here comes the spoiler—their intentions are not good at all. But they need the population of the entire planet to cooperate, so they begin to do what look like technological miracles to win them. They set up healing centers where, if your ailment is on a limited list, you can simply go and be healed. There is a dramatic moment when a wheelchair-bound man presents himself to his two local priests to reveal what the aliens had done for him. He rolls into the church, tells them to look, there is a pause--and then he stands and begins walking. Both priests are struck with wonder, but one is still skeptical. The symbolism of the healing is cutting: the aliens have arrived to do for people what the representatives of Jesus cannot.

It seems clear that the plan of the aliens is to turn wonder into trust which they can then exploit for their own ends. One definition of wonder is that it means "to be filled with admiration, awe, or amazement." Antonyms would be "hardened, insensitive, indifferent, or unsympathetic" (dictionary.com). Once you've healed hundreds of thousands of people you have a solid basis for their seeing you as the good guys. In fact, some characters in the film almost begin to worship the aliens as demigods. If they were truly good, trusting them would be a good thing—but they are not. True wonders, false impression. This is precisely what the Antichrist will do in the power of Satan during the last days. Paul describes him as **"the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders"** (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

## THE PLACE OF MIRACLES

But there is a vitally important place for miracles and the wonder they evoke in the kingdom of God. Miracles are one of the things God does to get us to recognize his overwhelming weight. C. S. Lewis wrote: "There is an activity of God through creation, a wholesale activity, let us say, which men refuse to recognize. The miracles done by God incarnate, living as a man in Palestine, perform the very same things as this wholesale activity, but at a different speed and on a different scale. One of their chief purposes is that men having seen a thing done by personal power on the small scale, may

recognize, when they see the same thing on the large scale, that the power behind it is also personal—is indeed the very same person who lived among us two thousand years ago" ("Miracles," *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity, and the Church*, London: HarperCollins, 2000, p. 110).

What this does is open to us the vision of the entire world as the handiwork and expression of God and his glory. We begin to see God everywhere, and as we do, we experience his overwhelming weight. And that becomes the engine of change in our lives.

## THE PERSONAL WORK OF THE SON OF GOD

What are some concrete examples of this personal work of the Son of God to which Lewis refers? A great place to start is in the book of Mark: **"On that day, when evening came, He said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'"** (Mark 4:35-41).

The disciples were struck with an awe—one aspect of wonder—that was so intense the gospel writers called it terror. It is good to have a healthy fear of the Lord. He was not threatening his disciples in any way, but the display of Christ's mastery of the creation was overwhelming. The point is that we are all living in a world where God sends the weather. On a general basis the weather follows observable patterns, many of which are now analyzed using what is called chaos theory or complexity theory—equations utilizing imaginary numbers.

But the Lord is not beholden to the patterns. The patterns are beholden to him. I do not know how to make that sink into your consciousness other than to tell you to read this passage and ask for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But then allow your attention to linger on the violence in the sky during the next lightning storm, on the spectacle of a hurricane, tornado, flood, earthquake, tsunami, or volcanic eruption. Let yourself feel the wonder, and as you do, let it become an opportunity to glorify God and appreciate his greatness! As the psalmist wrote: **"Let the glory of the LORD endure forever; /Let the LORD be glad in His works; /He looks at the earth, and it trembles; /He touches the mountains, and they smoke"** (Psalm 104:31-32).

Mark's gospel contains many wonders done by the Lord, and another one is found in chapter five. A synagogue official had sought the Lord to heal his daughter, but Jesus' response was delayed. The story continues: **"While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, 'Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?' But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, 'Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.' And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. And entering in, He said to them, 'Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.' They began laughing at Him. But putting them**

**all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, 'Talitha kum!' (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat" (Mar 5:35-43).**

The people who saw this miracle experienced what in the Greek is called *ekstasei*, from which we get our word ecstasy. In that day it meant astonishment or even bewilderment, so great that it might cause one to doubt oneself: *Did Rabbi Jesus really call out to the dead girl and raise her back to life?!?* And the answer is: Yes, he did.

The birth of a human being should evoke wonder. How could we ever think that a little hugging plus nine months of "eating for two" could ever result in the beauty and stunning complexity of a baby? Maybe the right thing is for us to train ourselves to hear Christ saying over every newborn baby: "I did that!" -- over every calf, every faun, every tadpole, every chick, and every living thing. God seeks glory to his name for every living thing he has made, as the psalmist wrote: **"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!"** (Psalm 150:6).

But neither babies nor fauns can praise the Lord directly, so it is up to us. The personal miracle of raising the little girl from the dead—of returning breath where there was no breath—was designed to cause us to be astonished at every new life we see. And when we wonder, we turn that wonder into praise to God. I can say from personal experience that every breath is a gift from God. We should be reminded of him with every inspiration and every expiration. As Paul preached to the Athenians: **"He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things"** (Acts 17:25).

Here's another cause for wonder from the gospel of Mark: **"In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, 'I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.' And His disciples answered Him, 'Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?' And He was asking them, 'How many loaves do you have?' And they said, 'Seven.' And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away"** (Mark 8:1-9).

Several years ago a friend of our family came to visit. He is an agnostic intellectual. He wanted to take us out to eat. When it came time to say grace, he instinctively knew that we wanted to do it. And so we did, but he was angry. He hated the idea that we had thanked God for food which he was buying us. And that is precisely the point of this miracle. Whatever the agency which brings our food to us, our "daily bread" is a gift from God's hand. That is one truth which is obscured by having the Lord's Supper in a church sanctuary rather than over a supper in the fellowship hall. We are supposed to make the crucial connection between the normal food we eat and the wonder of divine provision. The

One who multiplies bread and fish whenever he wants multiplies our food to us, as well.

A final example of cause for wonder is found in Mark 10:46-52: **"Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' And Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.' Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' And the blind man said to Him, 'Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!' And Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road."**

The man who had been excluded from the rhythms of life was now suddenly, wondrously included. And the first thing he did was join the throng of worshipers headed to Jerusalem to the temple for the Passover. We take it as a given that our cuts will heal automatically, our sunburned skin will recover, and even the wound left by an amputation will seal itself up with the help of some careful stitching. We must never forget that the Band-Aid does not heal, neither does the skin lotion, nor the sutures. The human body only heals because the Creator made it to do so.

If we will train ourselves, we can re-experience the wonder of God's healing hand over and over again. The miracle of Bartimaeus receiving his sight in a very personal way shouts to us that there is a personal God in heaven causing every so-called natural healing we ever see.

Of course, the wonder which leads to trust in God does not have to do so. We could adopt the position that the entire history of Jesus is the fabrication of schemers who did so for their own purposes. Except that there are remarkable corroborative histories from the ancient world written about Jesus Christ by those with no motive to confirm his existence or influence. What historian would be justified in arguing that the person named Jesus of Nazareth never lived?

One might also argue that Jesus lived, but Christians have always been liars about what Jesus actually did and said. Except that there were thousands of witnesses. Except that among those who saw him personally many gladly permitted themselves to be martyred instead of renouncing their faith in his deity.

The reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that Jesus Christ is before all things, that all things were made through him, and that in him all things hold together. As we read of his miraculous works in the Bible we are pointed by them to the immense work of God in all of life: directing the weather and all creation; giving life and breath to all; providing sustenance for our bodies; and, working healing in these same bodies. It would be impossible to provide a definition of greatness higher than this.

Let our wonder move to its natural conclusion and be the engine of trust in God through Christ Jesus our Lord. **"O LORD, how many are Your works! /In wisdom You have made them all; /The earth is full of Your possessions"** (Psalm 104:24). **"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!"** (Psalm 150:6).