

## THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES.

John 4:43-54. – Feb. 12.

*Golden Text: – "The same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." – John 5:36.*

IN a previous lesson we considered our Lord's first miracle at Cana in Galilee. A considerable length apparently intervened between that miracle and the one recorded in this lesson. Evidently our Lord in the interim had been at Jerusalem, because we read that he was well received by the Galileans, who had "seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast." It is evident, therefore, that the Lord performed miracles in Jerusalem at this time that are not mentioned in the direct order of their occurrence. Jerusalem was the representative city of the nation, and properly enough our Lord's principal miracles and teachings would thence reach the whole people better than from any other locality – especially as the whole nation was accustomed representatively to gather at Jerusalem at certain religious feasts every year. The Lord's principal ministry was evidently first conducted in Judea, and there aroused such a storm of opposition on the part of the rulers (vs. 1-3) that he was obliged to go to Galilee to continue his ministry. In this he illustrated his instruction to his disciples – "When they shall persecute you in one city, flee ye to another."

"A prophet hath no honor in his own country," and it may have been in recognition of this proverb that our Lord commenced his ministry at Jerusalem rather than in Galilee, which was his "own country," – he and his disciples being recognized as "Galileans." Anyway the knowledge of his mighty works and teachings in Judea had by this time reached Galilee. He had honor amongst his own countrymen because of his fame in Judea, and hence, as we read, they received him more respectfully than they otherwise would have

done. He probably now found a better opportunity for public ministry than he did on the occasion of his first visit to Cana.

Human nature is much the same in all ages and in all places: it esteems that which is distant as grander, more wonderful than that which is near. We have all seen the same fact illustrated under various circumstances. The poet, the philosopher, the teacher, the talented, are not first recognized at home. How little those who heard our Lord realized the privileges they enjoyed – that the very Son of God was amongst them, that the Teacher of Teachers was addressing them, that the special Ambassador was in their midst. To a limited extent the same thing has been true throughout the Gospel age, for the Lord's consecrated people have been all the way down his representatives, as he said, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me." The Apostle reminds us along these lines that "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not." The world recognizes not the Lord's humble saints as being the children of the Highest, "Heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." – Rom. 8:17.

### **NONE PERFECT, NO, NOT ONE.**

Some one has remarked, "When a hero or a saint is seen to eat and drink, live and dress, like an ordinary man, weak where some are strong, ignorant of some things that others know, it is almost impossible to look over these things and recognize the hero or saint." It is the ability to look over these things and to appreciate their relationship to the Lord that enables the Lord's consecrated people to recognize themselves and each other as members of the Royal Priesthood. It is the ability to see things thus from the divine standpoint, being "taught of God" to recognize each other by the heart, the will, the intention, but not according to the flesh with its weaknesses and blemishes. Such a correct view from the Lord's standpoint is necessary before we can "love as brethren," and have this love of the brethren as one of the evidences that we have passed

from death unto life – that we have been begotten again as new creatures in Christ Jesus.

A nobleman whose name is not given, whose son lay at death's door, heard of our Lord's coming into Galilee, and recognized him as the one of whose mighty works in Judea he had previously heard. He at once went evidently a considerable journey to see the Lord and to request that he visit his home and heal his son, who was sick. Our Lord, by the way of testing his faith, said, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." Apparently this was a refusal of the nobleman's request and had his faith been slight he probably would have accepted it thus. On the contrary so great was his confidence that our Lord was able to heal his son that he entreated that the Lord go in haste, lest the boy should be dead on their arrival. Having thus tested his faith and made it stronger, our Lord answered the request and healed the son, but in a manner calculated still further to strengthen his faith. He told him to return home and he would find his son cured. The fact that the nobleman at once set out for home is an evidence that he had great confidence in the Lord – a faith worthy of reward.

### **DIVERSE DEALINGS, ONE PROVIDENCE.**

A lesson for us in this connection is that our Lord deals similarly with all of his people at times. (1) Often he does not answer our prayers immediately, but, delaying the answer, tests our faith, our earnestness, our confidence in him. He is pleased to have us hold on to him by faith, which strengthens our own hearts, by reiterations of his promises and reflections on his goodness and power. (2) When he does grant our requests the blessing frequently comes to us through a different channel or in a different manner from that we had in mind. As an illustration, a dear brother remarked to us recently that for an entire year the principal element of his prayer to the Lord had been for increase of heavenly wisdom, and that in no year had he seemed to be more unwise as respected earthly things – in no year

had he been less prosperous from a worldly standpoint. Another remarked that the special feature of his prayer for a year had been for an increase of patience, and that in no year had he seemed to have so many trials and difficulties and testings of patience. The lesson is obvious – "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

If the Lord would teach heavenly wisdom it must imply just such lessons as would win our hearts from temporalities and place them more and more upon the riches of his grace, the heavenly wisdom; if the Lord would teach patience it must be by showing us our own lack of this quality and permitting us to pass through trials and difficulties in which he is pleased to place us, and assist us in overcoming and gaining patience. **[R3494 : page 29]** Similarly with all the fruits and graces of the Spirit; they must be developed, and the school of experience is a severe one. Nevertheless we would not be without such experiences, such lessons, for unless we are taught of God, unless we learn the lessons due to be learned in the present time we would not be fitted and prepared to be the Lord's instruments in blessing and instructing the world during the Millennial age about to be ushered in. Let us learn these lessons of faith and patience and wisdom. Let us learn to look to the Lord and accept his way, and not expect him to gratify our whims and fancies. The true prayer of the consecrated is, "Thy will be done."

Another lesson for us is that while sickness, pain, sorrow and death are all parts of the great penalty for sin, yet the Lord is able to turn all these painful experiences into valuable lessons for his people – for those who trust him and seek to learn the lessons in his school. Our Lord did not heal all the sick nor awaken all the dead of the Jewish nation at his first advent. That great work belongs to the future, to the Millennial Kingdom. What he did do in these directions was merely to illustrate his power. They were miracles, intended more for the instruction they would give than for the blessings they **[R3495 : page 29]** contained. Had our Lord merely been intent upon comforting the bereaved, healing the sick and awakening those

in the sleep of death, he might have accomplished a thousand-fold more than he did. He might at one word have healed all the sick and awakened all the sleeping ones, but he had no such purpose. That glorious work is future; and what our Lord did was merely a sign, an indication, a wonder to the people to attract their attention to him, to establish in their minds the thought that he was indeed the Son of God, and thus to prepare their hearts for the spiritual truths which he uttered in parables, and which after Pentecost were plainly stated through his mouthpieces, the apostles.

### **WHAT MIRACLES ARE.**

There are many different views of miracles. Some call them violations of the laws of nature, and deny that nature's laws ever could be set aside. The numbers of those who deny that the Lord performed miracles or that any miracles ever were performed seem to increase daily. We are living in a very sceptical age. From the standpoint of faith, from the standpoint of the scriptural teaching, we must believe in miracles; but such belief does not imply that miracles set aside the laws of nature. In our view miracles are entirely co-operative with the laws of nature. More and more we should learn that all the forces of nature are under spiritual control. We may not understand this, but we can believe it nevertheless. We have illustrations of such mental or spiritual control all about us, as also in our own bodies for instance. The human mind, the will, is of itself invisible, yet it controls the nerves, muscles, sinews, bones, our entire human anatomy.

And if this be true, if the human will can move the human hand, the human foot, and if without the will these could not move, does that will interfere with the laws of nature either in moving or in staying the hand and the foot? Assuredly not: it is part and parcel of the laws of nature that the will should control and direct the physical system. Likewise we may see that the divine mind or will has control not only of the divine being but also of all things in the universe.

How fully this is true, to what extent the divine will can control all the forces of nature, it is impossible for us to appreciate because of our weakness of intellect and our limited knowledge of the forces all about us. We may have a slight conception, however, of these matters to-day that could not have been had a few years ago. The telephone, for instance, is as nearly a miracle as could be found – an invisible agency operating in a mysterious and unseen manner at great distances, and contrary to what we might have supposed to have been the laws of nature. We are merely asserting that there are many laws and operations of nature which are not understood, all of which are subject to the divine power.

**"THEN WE SHALL KNOW IF WE FOLLOW ON TO  
KNOW THE LORD."**

Not until we shall experience our "change" and know as we are known shall we be able to fathom all the mysteries connected with the miracles of Jesus and the miracles which we see in ourselves and all about us to-day. Meantime, however, let us be on our guard against the devices of the Adversary, by which he would ensnare those who are merely looking for earthly blessings, relief from earthly troubles. We are living in a time when, apparently in order to hold his dominion, the great Adversary is going into the healing business in a wholesale manner. Through spirit mediums, hypnotists, Mormon elders, Christian Scientists and others, Satan is making a bid for power in the world. He is seeking to use such power as he possesses in a manner that will allure and ensnare those who are selfishly seeking merely for earthly blessings, ignoring the great spiritual lessons of the Lord's Word. The Lord's consecrated people should be on their guard against the Adversary's methods and the snares of false doctrines into which he would lead them by this means.

Our Lord's remark, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe," implies that the highest order of faith would be that

which would not require such ocular demonstrations of divine power – that could trust the Lord without the proofs of miracles. So we find it to-day and so we believe it has always been. A similar lesson is found in our Lord's words to Thomas, who, after having seen the print of the nails, believed in the resurrection of Jesus. Our Lord there observed, "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed are they who not having seen yet have believed." Miracles were necessary for the introduction of the Gospel message to identify our Lord with the prophecies and to prepare the nucleus of the Church for the Spirit baptism; but in later years, throughout the Gospel age, the Lord has given his people the opportunity of still greater blessing by withholding the miracles and allowing us to believe in him and to accept him without the attestation of wonders.

One of the greatest wonders, one of the greatest miracles, one that is more convincing to us than any other could be, is the change which the divine message has wrought in our own hearts – transforming us through the power of the holy Spirit. Not only do we see this transforming power at work in others, changing them from glory to glory and preparing them for the final glorious change of the First Resurrection, but additionally we experience it in our own hearts and appreciate the fact that the things that we once hated now we love, and the things we once loved now we hate. The poet gave the right thought here when he exclaimed, "I am a miracle of grace."

Our Golden Text bears out this thought, that the **[R3495 : page 30]** miracles which our Lord did were only intended to be sufficient to establish his identity, and were not with the view of establishing a precedent for the healing of the world nor of the Church. The Lord's great healing time is designated in the Scriptures, "times of restitution." (Acts 3:21.) When those times shall come, when the Millennial Kingdom shall be established, the healing of the nations will be the great work; and it will not merely be a physical but also a mental and moral healing, which will gradually bring all in proper

condition back to all that was lost in Eden, with increased knowledge through experience.

