

[Notes for a sermon – Miracles and History by Gordon H. Clark. Date unknown.]

Miracles and History

Auburn Affirmation attacks miracles esp. V.B. + Res.

We should defend the Bible.

I Pet. 3:15 Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason.

Phil. 1:17: I am set for the defense of the gospel.

Defend the whole. A general does not abandon half his positions to an invader. Easier to defend all. Bible teaches a system. Sermon deals with one point: To justify miracles and to show their important.

Materialism ruled out miracles + all religion. Indeterministic physics called friend of religion. But not friend of Xty. [Greeks bearing gifts]

Bible does not teach indeterminism, but Sovereignty. Not a haphazard world. God's promises are sure bec God controls the world.

His plan: Gen 45: 8 – So now it was not you who sent me hither, but God.

Ps. 135:6 – Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

Miracles a part of God's plan. Unless God can do as he pleases, unless he controls the world, his promises are doubtful and miracles have no significance. Can we believe in God. He performed miracles he has told us about them. Can we believe?

David Hume defines miracles as a “transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of God”

Contrary to all experience. Therefore, never happened.

cf. Archbishop Whately on Napoleon.

Note: Some miracles are not such transgressions others are. Red Sea vs. Res[surrection]

We must meet the difficulty.

The miracles which are the stumbling blocks for so many are those which apparently break the laws of nature. To meet such objections to Christianity one must grasp clearly what is meant by a law of nature. That we may avoid misunderstanding the phrase could well be changed to “a law of physics.” The reason is that no one can suppose a miracle to break a law unless the law in question be known, and the only laws which are known or are thought to be known are the definite results of modern science.

In the next place, before we can compare miracles and laws we ought to know how a scientist comes by his laws. Now, without becoming too technical, let it be stated that the empirical data with which the physicist works, the observations which he actually makes, are inexact. His readings always include a variable error. This means that while empirical observation always fixes limits between which

the law must be made, empirical observation never discovers any one law. The observations set limits, but the actual, definite, mathematical law depends on the choice of the scientist. He may choose a law for personal, or aesthetic, or moral reasons, but he chooses the law rather than discovers it.

In the next place, the miracles which the Christian is interested in defending, lie outside the range of experiment. They do not directly concern the motions of hypothetical point-centers of force. Rather they are events of history, just as the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Science has just as much and just as little to do with miracles as with Napoleon. No event of history satisfies the artificial conditions of a physics laboratory.

Finally, therefore, we suggest that in addition to experiment in laboratory, the scientist in choosing which law he wants should first consult history and after determining by historical evidences what has happened should then choose his law within the limits of historical actuality. The non-Christian scientist, so it seems to me, proceeds by a reverse and absurd method. He chooses his law to suit himself and then rewrites history to suit his law. I must say that I do not believe that physical science is so advanced as to be able to reconstruct history from laboratory observations.

Even in the case of more ordinary occurrences, the laws of physics do not describe what common opinion considers to be nature itself. The law of the pendulum assumes that the mass of the pendulum is concentrated at a mathematical point and that it swings on a tensionless string from a frictionless point. No such pendulum has ever existed in the visible world. If then the swinging of the pendulum of a grandfather's clock occurs without being invalidated by a law of physics, a law well known and mathematically exact, why should the Resurrection of Christ be adjudged impossible through a law entirely unknown and never even approximated. Rather: just as the law of the pendulum has its limits set by real occurrences, so this supposed universal law of physics, if it ever be formulated, will have its limits set by the historical fact of Christ's Resurrection.

The question of miracles therefore is not so much a scientific question as it is an historical question.

In Acts. Twelfth apostle chosen as a witness to the Resurrection. Every sermon mentions the Resurrection.

Better attested historically than most ancient history.

500 witnesses – hallucinations for 40 days and never again?!

5 written accounts (not 5 for Caesar's War)

Change of Sabbath – required a tremendous change.

Discrepancies: Dr. Geo. S. Buttrick Madison Ave. Presby. Ch. “The Xn Fact and Modern Doubt”

Angels: Mt. One angel outside sitting.

Mk. One angel inside sitting.

Lk. Two angels inside standing.

Requires merely average intelligence

Buttrick thinks it casts doubt on the Resurrection.

To accept Xenophon, Thucydides, and reject Mt, Luke, Paul is merely religious prejudice.

Bible a record of God's redemptive acts for men.

Intervention in history. Hence to deny

miracles = to deny that God redeems.

Xty an historical religion. Philosophy +Science
deal with the abstract or the repeated.

Xty insists on unique events. Once for all

Crucifixion – Resurrection

Stoics on Mars Hill = a judgment.

We look back to past events: Creation, Flood, Exodus, Crucifixion.

Look forward to Christ's return and the consummation.

Rethinking Missions removes significance from the past but most obviously, as Dr. Machen said, has no hope for the future. I does not look for intervention but trusts forces now at work.

The Christian church was begun in the face of great opposition forces – persecution – It was like a little boat launched on a storm sea. Today also the church of Christ is tossed by the billows of a perilous present, and buffeted by the waves of unbelief, is sailing to an unknown future. Master, carest thou not that we perish?

Carest thou not that we perish
How caust thou lie asleep
When each moment so madly is threatening
A grave in the angry deep.

The winds and the waves shall obey they will
Peace, be still.
Whether the wrath of the storm tossed sea,
Or demons, or men, whatever it be,
No waves can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean, of earth, of skies.
They all shall sweetly obey thy will
Peace, peace, be still.