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SERMON DCCXX.

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DIVINE TRUTH ATTESTED BY MIRACLES.*

"We know that thou art a Teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou dost, except God be with him."—JOHN iii, 3.

THAT the Bible was written at the time and by the men it claims to have been, is one of the most certain of all things. The genuineness of no other book on earth, ancient or modern, has anything like the amount or perfection of proof which demonstrates the genuineness of this book.

This conclusion involves its truth; *i. e.* its historical truth; and this again, its moral truth, by clear and logical consequence. For the great facts which it records not only came under the personal knowledge of its writers, but they were recorded and published at the time, and among the people, when and where they took place, and were not denied. On the day of Pentecost for example, and in Jerusalem itself, the great scene of these facts, Peter said, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words—Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you—as *ye yourselves also know!*" They were bold words, but true. They fell on that mocking crowd like a thunder-bolt. They did know these great facts. Not a man among them had the hardihood to confront Peter with a denial. And knowing the facts, the conviction that flashed through their inmost being was irresistible. The religion

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which such facts attested must be divine. No wonder then, that before the sun-set of that day, thousands took upon them the name and faith of Christ.

But Peter was addressing the common people—the masses. And they, unbelief suggests, are not accustomed to discriminate—they are liable to be imposed on. In a question of this kind it is needful to get at the convictions of those who move in a higher sphere, of cultivated intellect, who can analyze testimony, and accurately estimate its worth.

Very well; let us follow this suggestion. From Jerusalem let us go to Cesarea. There Paul is arraigned before the great and noble. Festus and Agrippa are there in imposing array. The elite of the court; the Ecclesiastics and Civilians of the land; wealth, rank, learning, beauty—all are there. They have come from curiosity, or to be amused by the fearless and famous disciple of the Nazarene. Look in upon that assembly. In conscious innocence Paul rises—conscious, too, of the power within him that had already made Felix tremble. He stretches forth his hand despite the chain that binds and galls it—and begins. His exordium is skilful and courtly. He adverts then to his former life—his memorable conversion,—the nature of the accusations made against him and their groundlessness—adroitly interweaving with the whole tissue of his unsurpassed discourse the great facts of christianity; and then in open court, in the presence of all those witnesses, he appeals to his royal Judge, as having a personal knowledge of their verity. “For the King,” said he, “the King knoweth of these things, before whom I speak freely: for I am persuaded that *none* of these things are hidden from him, for this thing was not done in a corner!” It was a daring, but sublime appeal. It must have electrified that august assembly. It must have thrilled Agrippa’s own soul to its centre. And did he deny his knowledge of these facts? Never! Or did any one in that throng of cultivated men and women deny them? Never! They knew what Paul affirmed, that the great facts of christianity, whose record makes up the warp and woof of this God-given Book, “were *not* done in a corner,” that they *were* done in the clear daylight, and on that broad theatre where nations act, and the world looks on. No wonder then that the convictions of Agrippa, overcame for the moment, at least, his prejudice and pride, and that he cried out far more in seriousness than jest, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!” No wonder that thousands and tens of thousands, just where and when these facts took place, seeing they could not deny their reality, yielded to their power, and made them the ground of their faith, and hope for eternity.

But, without pressing the inference thus generally resulting from the genuineness of the Scriptures, let us fix our attention on

that evidence for the Christian truth, which comes from a single class of facts—to wit, *its Miracles*.

Of course, if God has made a revelation to men, it must bear his name and seal. It must be attested to be from Him by something beyond the reach of any impostor and deceiver. If the men who wrote this Book were in fact the amanuenses or agents of God in writing it, He would put into their hands unmistakable proofs of their divine commission. He would enable them to exhibit *credentials*—such as neither men nor devils could counterfeit; and, having these credentials, the communications they should make in the name of God, would have precisely the same reliability on the one hand, and binding force on the other, as though they were made by God in his own person. Now, they claim to have had these credentials, and they did have them. Among others, they possessed and exercised the power of miracles.

1. Look for a moment at the great *Founder of Christianity*. The circumstances of his birth were extraordinary—the perfection of his character and the beneficence of his life, unexampled. But independently of these, he made the specific claim of one sent from God—even of the long looked-for Messiah; and to authenticate this claim, he performed works beyond the reach of all creature power. These works were God's visible signature to his divine character and mission. He healed the sick, gave hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, sight to the blind, not by natural means or in accordance with natural laws, but by a word or touch. At the sound of his voice, wild winds were hushed—the heaving sea sunk to rest—legions of devils fled—and death itself gave back its prey. Such works—surpassing the power of creatures—he performed almost daily, and he appealed to them as the conclusive vouchers of his Messiahship. When his enemies demanded—“What sign showest thou that we may see and believe thee?” He answered—“The works that I do, they bear witness of me.” When John the Baptist, in a moment perhaps of despondency, or rather to confirm their faith in Jesus, sent two of his disciples to inquire—“Art thou He that should come—or look we for another?” he pointed them to those acts of his power and mercy which Isaiah long before had specified as the very acts Messiah should perform, and so make himself known to Israel. “Go, and tell John, he said, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.” And these appeals were resistless. They silenced cavil. They extorted confession. Nicodemus expressed the conviction of multitudes, when he said, “We know that thou art a Teacher come from God.” And how did they know it? Because, is their answer, “No man can do these miracles which thou dost except God be with him.” It was the clear and inevitable verdict of their common sense.

2. In like manner the Hebrew Prophets and the Apostles of Christ, as the human media and agents of the divine Word, bore the same credentials. It was necessary they should. In so vast a matter it was imperative that nothing should be taken on trust. When once we have God's word, we may indeed believe. Never can we do it too implicitly. But, on the question of fact, whether this or that volume is the word of God, we must have *proof*. That is a question of reason not of faith. If God spoke in the Prophets and Apostles, it was necessary that he should work by them, that thus, the visible act might attest the presence of the invisible and divine agent. Accordingly, as they went forth among men, in the name of God, He bare "them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost."

3. But, some one asks, *What is a miracle?* The question is pertinent. Indeed its answer is necessary to disclose the true nature and value of our present argument, or rather, fragment of an argument, for the Christian truth.

In the merely verbal sense, a miracle is any wonderful work—any work which, because of its seeming or real difficulty with reference to human skill or power, is adapted to excite surprise or awe. In this sense, the feats of the conjuror, or ventriloquist, or juggler of any sort, are miracles—*i. e.*, they excite the wonder of men, especially of those who are ignorant of the secret arts, by which they are done. So too, those great processes in nature, which, while they surpass human power, are yet the result of natural laws and forces—such as the ebb and flow of the tides—the revolution of the planets—the succession of the seasons—all these are miracles—that is, they are wonderful. No thoughtful eye can contemplate them without admiration and astonishment. But, then, none of these things are miracles in that specific sense in which the Scriptures use this term, and in which we use it in the argument for the Scriptures as the word of God.

4. What then is a miracle in this sense? I answer—a work, or an effect—not only wonderful or even superhuman, but supernatural; not only impossible to man, but impossible to nature; a work which can be wrought only by God—and this by means either supra-natural or contra-natural—above nature or against nature.

For an illustration, go back to that day when "Joshua ascended from Gilgal—he and all the people of war with him—and all the mighty men of valor," to encounter the five-kings of the Canaanites. On the morning of that day an immense globe, as if of fire, was seen emerging from below the eastern horizon, casting a very flood of beauty and brightness upon hill-top and valley, and rolling up the concave of the heavens, in grandeur and glory unspeakable. Had this phenomenon occurred then for the first time, no language could express the wonder and awe upon men's minds. That, however, was not a miracle. It was indeed superhuman—but it was not supernatural. It was only the sun pursuing his

daily course of beneficence and majesty, in accordance with, nay, as a result of those forces and laws which God at the beginning established for this very purpose. It was just a natural process and event—though, indeed, very wonderful. But look now. While that glorious orb rushes through the heavens with a velocity difficult to conceive and fearful to think upon—while, having passed the zenith and impelled by all the power of nature, it makes haste to its hiding place in the west—the Leader of the Lord's people, cries out in the sight of all Israel—“*Oh Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon!*” The sun stood still! For about a day it stood still in mid heaven! That was a miracle. Man did not work it. Such an achievement would baffle all men. Nature did not work it. It was beyond and against nature. God worked it. The fixed laws and mighty forces of nature were turned back and held in check by Him who made them; and that He did this “at the voice of a man,” was a demonstration that there and then, that man was the representative of God.

5. Take another illustration. Enter your garden or meadow. Take the bulb of a tulip—the root of a rose-bush, or an acorn from the ancient forests. Place them in the mellow ground. Let them have the influence of the air, light, heat and moisture. Presently there are signs of life—there is a visible process of growth—formation, expansion. In due time the unsightly bulb puts on a form and dress that no touches of the pencil can rival: the dry root sends out its stems, branches, leaves; and, amidst the airs of summer, gracefully waves with its load of beauty and fragrance, the acorn re-appears in the strength and stateliness of the oak. The whole process, as well as result, is most interesting and wonderful. It is superhuman too. No man could effect it, any more than by his own power, he could create. But there is no miracle in it. If there is the superhuman, there is not the supernatural. If man is not competent to such results, nature is. The tulip, the rose-bush, and the oak are just the product of fixed natural laws and powers, made and established at the creative period, and ever operating in order to these very ends.

But suppose now, while you stand admiring these beautiful or grand creations of God, in and through nature, there should come to you a man claiming to be sent from God, and authorized to make known his will. You at once demand his credentials. You say to him, “I must see God's unquestionable signature attesting your mission, or I cannot yield you my faith.” “Certainly,” he replies, your demand is reasonable and I will answer it. I will speak, and at the word, there shall spring from the earth duplicates of these wonderful things you are now admiring as the result of nature's processes and laws.” He does speak. The miraculous effect at once follows! The tulip, in all its gorgeousness—the rose-bush, in all its perfection—the oak, in all its majesty—are visible and palpable before you. The conviction is instant and resistless.

You cannot repress it, if you would. It vibrates through your being. "Man has not done this! Nature has not done this! No, no, God has done it! It is a miracle! It authenticates the claim of his servant. It brings me under the power of a divine obligation to hear his voice and obey his commands!"

6. Take one illustration more—such an one as comes within the actualities of the Gospel history. Go to some death-scene. Alas! it will not be difficult to find. The ghastly king invades alike the lowliest cabin and the proudest palace, the city and the wilderness, the land and the ocean, and never wearies in his work. Go to that darkened room where the daughter of Jairus has just fallen asleep; or to the gate of that retired city, whence they are bearing for burial the widow's son; or, as meeting fully all the demands of the case—go to that grave, in which four days since Mary and Martha laid their beloved Lazarus. Take away the stone from the door. Within is the muffled and already putrefying corpse! Invoke now the *power of man* to quicken this dead body. If the power of one man will not avail, combine the power of all men and bring it to bear. How utterly vain! Man cannot give life to the dead. Invoke then the *mightier power of nature*. Those energies that sometimes shake the earth, or heave the ocean, or roll the stars along; surely they can vitalize this mortal frame. Ah, my brethren, nature has stupendous powers; we see them in the earthquake and the storm; we see them in the minute and the grand movements and changes of the universe from tiny atoms to huge planets—nature has stupendous powers, but they have no adaptation to a work like this. While life lasts there are laws and forces of nature which operate steadily to preserve it; but, when at length these are overcome—when death is actually present, the whole drift and might of nature are reversed. The direct and resistless tendency and pressure of every natural law are to corruption and decay. The sad process begins at once, and decomposition, putrefaction, dust, are the inevitable result. Unless we can apply some power above man and above nature, Mary and Martha must still weep—Lazarus must remain dead. In order to his revivification there needs, not only the *superhuman*, but the *supernatural*; not only the power of creatures but the power of God. There must be a miracle!

As then you still stand by this open grave, *invoke the power of Jesus Christ*. He is there as one sent from the Father. He has already pronounced those sublime words—"I am the *resurrection and the life!*" He prepares now to demonstrate their truth. While the tear of sympathy yet moistens his eye, which shows him to be man, He calmly speaks, as if conscious that he is also God, "*Lazarus come forth!*" Why does that concourse of strong men start back with sudden terror? Why do those confiding sisters flee from the door of the sepulchre to the side of Jesus? Why! The dead has heard his voice! that ghastly form stands up with

a renewed life—the process of decay is arrested and turned back—the decomposing flesh is made sound and fair again—sight has come to the glassy eye—speech to the rigid tongue—sensation, thought, emotion again fill the soul of Lazarus, and he comes forth! It is a miracle! Not man, not nature, but God has done it! He has done it without man. He has done it in contravention of nature. No power but that of God, supernaturally exerted, could do it. God, therefore, was with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, therefore, came from God. This Holy Book, therefore, which is the testimony of Jesus Christ, is divine.

But let us not anticipate. These illustrations serve to show that a miracle, in the specific sense of the word, is an effect of divine power, put forth, not in consonance with natural laws, but always independently of them, sometimes reversing them. It is not enough that a work be wonderful in its character to make it a miracle, for it may be that without requiring more than human ingenuity and dexterity to perform it. Nor is it enough that it transcend the resources of men. It may do that, and yet be only a result of the fixed laws by which God governs the universe. It must be more than wonderful—it must be more than superhuman—it must be supernatural, or it cannot be a miracle. That is the work of God, in distinction from any effect which man or nature can produce, and exceptional even to God's own works in his ordinary operations. A miracle, therefore, is the clear testimony of God in reference to that for which it is wrought. From the perfect holiness of his character, it results that He cannot bear testimony except to truth. When, therefore, a miracle is in fact wrought, to attest a person or doctrine as coming from God, the point is settled. There is no more room for question or doubt. We have his own testimony, and from it there can be no appeal.

Thus far our way is clear. If miracles have been wrought to authenticate the Scriptures as a divine revelation, then the Scriptures *are* a divine revelation. The infidel, therefore, calls in question the fact. He can meet our argument only by destroying its premises. If the premises stand, the conclusion is invincible. He therefore attempts to discredit the miracles of Scripture. He professes to doubt their reality. He asserts them unprovable. He would class them with the prodigies of superstition, or the feats of the juggler or magician. He has tried all possible means, fair and foul, to place the miracles of Moses and of Christ in the category, either of nonentities or of tricks. We may thank him for his attempts, while we deplore the spirit which has impelled them. Every assault has shown more clearly the invincibility of our bulwarks. Divine truth, like Christian character, shines the brighter for trial. The furnace refines—it does not consume. Conflict issues in greater strength, and heralds the final victory.

The word of God to-day is as a citadel built on the everlasting rock.

Time will permit us now to glance at only one of the attempts of scepticism to subvert the fact of miracles. Let it be the grand assault of Mr. Hume. Retiring from the domain of written and authentic history, he seeks the murky sphere of metaphysics. Ignoring the testimony of ages, his own brain devises a sophism, armed with which he comes before the world, and affirms, "*Miracles cannot be proved.*"

That is easily said, and, if it be true, sweeps from us one of our many proofs that the Bible is from God. But is it true? Other facts of history can be proved, and why not these? Surely there is no want of testimony, the only kind of proof which the nature of the case admits. Explicit, abundant, conclusive, this stretches from generation to generation in an unbroken chain.

"Ah!" but replies Mr. Hume, "*testimony cannot prove miracles!*" That, too, is easily said; and if true, is damaging to the Christian cause. But why cannot testimony prove miracles? It proves all other facts. There is no other possible way by which facts can be proved, except those which are immediately within our personal cognizance. Hence all past history is a testimony. Hence, too, all the doings and findings of jurisprudence, from the beginning of the world, proceed on testimony. It must be so. Mathematics, for example, cannot prove historical or moral facts. Reasoning cannot prove them. In regard to such facts, if there be no personal knowledge or reliable testimony, there can be no proof. The world over, and time through, testimony has been held as valid proof in reference to every other class and kind of facts. Why should it not be held valid in the case of miracles?

"Because," answers Mr. Hume, "our experience of the constancy of Nature is greater, and more to be relied on, than human veracity." In other words, men sometimes lie, but Nature is unchangeable. Miracles, therefore, which imply changes in nature, cannot be true, though men testify to their occurrence.

Let us look at this. "Our experience is," says Mr. Hume, "that *Nature* never changes." Whose experience? He plainly means the experience of men generally—of the present and past generations of mankind, otherwise his argument were simply ridiculous. But pray tell me what does Mr. Hume know of their experience except by testimony. "Our experience" is really just that of each individual. In the case of Mr. Hume, "our experience" was simply his own experience, where and when he lived—nothing less and nothing more. Whatever he knew of the experience of other men, living or dead, he knew only and wholly by means of that very testimony whose value as evidence he so desperately tried to impeach. His logic, therefore, has no bottom. It falls in on itself. It is forceless, as it is baseless. The experi-

ence of the Siamese king was that nature never changes, and therefore no testimony could prove to him that water sometimes becomes solid. Mr. Hume's experience was that nature never changes, and therefore no testimony could prove to him that God has sometimes used nature to certify revelation. Admirable logic—and profound as admirable! The heathen king and the Scotch philosopher alike making their limited individual experience the ground and test of universal truth.

The simple fact is, Mr. Hume's sophism is not only false in its issue, but false in its data. The experience of men is, as we learn it from their testimony, and we can learn it noway else, that nature is *not* absolutely unchangeable; that, while regularity and uniformity are the great characteristics of the laws and forces by which God governs all material things, he has sometimes, for great moral reasons, hastened, or suspended, or reversed them; that in the majestic march of his great purposes concerning man, He has, at every now and then, made nature the minister of judgment or of grace, subordinating the physical to the moral and spiritual, and especially encompassing and attesting the records of his wisdom by the wonders of his power. And so the planets have heard his voice, and stood still in their orbits. The sea has heard his voice, and gathered its waves on either side, firm as brazen walls, that his people might go through. The mountains have quaked at his presence and flowed down, burning but not consumed. Ravens have ministered to the exiled prophet. The cruse of oil has been unwasting. Fire has refused to scorch, and lions to destroy. Thousands have been fed in the wilderness, and the fragments that remained were more than the loaves at the beginning. Devils have been cast out from tormented men. Incurable diseases have given place to health. Nay, death itself has awakened into life! And all this to attest the character and mission of Apostles and Prophets—all this to verify and magnify the Word of God!

Shall it be in vain with respect to you and me? Despite the manifold and great acts of God in thus certifying the Bible to be from Himself, shall we, on some frivolous pretence, or thousand times refuted cavil, put ourselves, with theoretical or practical unbelievers? Ah! my brethren, the crime in this case could be equalled only by the loss. The intelligence and virtue of the universe are with the Bible. The influences that conserve, refine, ennoble, are with the Bible. The light that reveals sin and God, the way to heaven, and the grace and power that lead there, are with the Bible. The cross and the atoning blood, the white robes and palms of victory, the crowns and thrones that gleam with undimmed brilliance, the songs that warble from immortal tongues, are with the Bible. Redeemed sinners, glorified saints, seraphs and cherubim, the Lamb that was slain, God on his eternal throne,

are with the Bible. And what, O man, is there without it? Ignorance, folly, sin, wo, forever!

Come, then, thou little child; come, then, thou ardent youth; come, then, thou aged man, to this blessed light of life and immortality—this glorious and imperishable word of God! Cleave to its truth, live in its holiness, rejoice in its hopes, until the shades of time vanish before the eternal day!

My beloved brethren in the ministry,

To us has been committed this Divine Word. It is our special office to preserve it, defend it, expound it, enforce it. Can there be a holier vocation? Can there be a vaster responsibility? And you see with what calm, immovable confidence we may ply our work. We are not deceiving immortal men. We are not amusing them with trifles. We are not setting before them the vagaries and dreams of human reason. We are not exciting within them hopes that will perish. No, no; this wondrous Word is truth; truth given in God's name; certified by God's power; glowing with God's wisdom; attractive with God's love, and that will lead to God's glory! Away, then, with all the pretentious but miserable substitutes of men's folly, and Satan's cunning; and, in the prosecution of our sacred work, let us abide steadfast on *God's everlasting Word.*

SERMON DCCXXI.

BY REV. WM. C. WHITCOMB,

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CHRISTIAN UNION.

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."—Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

"Let brotherly love continue."—HEB. xiii. 1.

CHRISTIAN union is my theme on this occasion. *Christian union*—not simply the union which should prevail among the members of any particular denomination of Christians, but the love and unity which ought to exist among all the real people of God. The subject thus brought before you by David the Psalmist, and Paul the Apostle, in the words of our text, and so beautifully expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ in his "New Commandment," is a subject of peculiar importance, especially at the present day.

If we go and take a stand upon some watch tower of our beloved Zion, and glance abroad over Christendom at this interesting pe-