

Lesson 1: Medicine and Miracle

Medicine

What is the definition of medicine?

Ideas:

Physical means to improve physical health

Improve? Would exercise count as medicine?

Preventative medicine.

Physical health? What about mental disorders?

To the extent that mental disorders have physical causes or components.

Sum: We will consider broadly anything that is claimed to improve personal health through the body.

Miracle

What is the definition of a miracle?

Ideas:

An unexpected, unexplainable occurrence (e.g. healing).

E.g. A patient is not expected to live and remarkably recovers, to the wonderment of doctors and family.

A supernatural event (i.e. beyond the powers of nature).

E.g. Samson's great strength (by the holy spirit) or demonic possession (by an evil spirit).

A direct act of God (i.e. apart from means).

E.g. God speaks into existence, or sends a storm out of season (1 Samuel – where?), fire from heaven, etc.

An act contrary to the laws of nature.

E.g. 1 Kings 7 – the axe head floats

Note: There is a created order—a covenanted “law” that God has established for physical things (Ps. 119).

This idea is actually the medieval background for the idea of scientific laws of nature.

Remarkably, history does not violate the created order, but cannot be predicted (Eccl. 3:11; 7:14).

The uncertainty of quantum mechanics cannot account for this, because it is statistically certain.

God alone is Master of history—we cannot even predict the weather with certainty!

Because God can use history in remarkably unexpected ways, amazing things may not violate laws of nature.

Assessment:

In some way, all events are supernatural (Isaiah 45:7; Lam. 3:38-39), but not all events are God's direct hand.

Sometimes God uses a means to accomplish His purpose, but goes beyond its natural powers:

E.g. the feeding of the five thousand with a lunch, or the healing of a man born blind with clay.

Perhaps God blesses the natural means with extraordinary (and highly unlikely) success:

E.g. the “random” arrow that hit Ahab in between the armor.

Certainly, acts beyond or contrary to the laws and powers of nature would count as miracles.

As for the unexplainable, this idea of miracle (or magic) led to the discrediting of religion due to science.

E.g. snow rollers are infrequent but have an explanation, and Tylenol would seem incredible in the past.

In other words, something may seem miraculous only because we do not know the natural means involved.

Conclusion:

Broadly, we can call any event beyond our ability to understand a “wonder” (OT and NT word):

This would include true miracles (e.g. the Egyptian plagues), but also extraordinary answers to prayer.

E.g. Psalm 107 – finding the city in a desert (the needle in the haystack) – it is not “lucky”!

A wonder is anything that elicits the mental “Wow!” factor.

More technically, we should perhaps reserve the word miracle to events outside the created order of things.

(Some would argue that such miracles do not exist today, but that borders on practical atheism.)

However, because we experience both kinds in the same way (amazed by God's hand in it), both are miracles.

In other words, do not be bothered with the family's response to unexpected healing as a “miracle.”

(cont'd)

Medicine and Miracle

Where is the dividing line between the two?

The line is difficult to discern.

Illustration of the Difficulty: **Isaiah 38**

Hezekiah is going to die (v. 1) – accurate diagnosis from Knowledge better than a doctor!

Hezekiah prayed and wept bitterly (v. 3).

The Lord responds by adding fifteen more years (v. 5).

Isaiah (later) says, “Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil and he will recover” (v. 21).

Medicine or miracle?

The disease is terminal, so the recovery looks like a miracle.

The recovery comes through means, so it looks like medicine.

Had the figs been tried before and now they worked?

Were the figs not thought of before and now God gave the insight?

Were the figs necessary, or even magical (like Lourdes water, a miracle packaged in a means)?

Assessment:

The Bible’s use of the term “wonder” teaches us not to focus on the line between nature and super-nature, but to focus on God’s hand, whether using means or not.

In some sense miracle versus medicine may be a false dichotomy, a differentiation we will never know.

Did my sister recover due to blessed experimental medication, or the anointing of oil by elders, or both?

We will never know, but it remains remarkable—the only recovery in her medical classification.

Application:

Rather than seek a line between the natural and supernatural, we will seek a holistic worldview that includes both. As human beings, we have three components—body, soul, and spirit.

Our diseases can come from any of the three components, or from a combination of the three:

E.g. depression

It could come from gout or a brain injury.

It could come from obsessing on sad thoughts or fears.

It could come from an evil spirit tormenting us, such as Saul received.

Obviously, only the physical causes or symptoms can be ascertained through physical testing.

Our general rule of treatment will be to match the means of recovery with the type of causation:

Physical causes should receive physical means.

Mental causes should receive mental means (e.g. Ph. 4:8).

Spiritual causes should receive spiritual means, which only God can give, so we pray in Jesus’ name.

Sometimes it will not be easy to discern the differences, and we may misidentify a physical symptom as a cause.

E.g. hearing voices may be hallucination and not a demon.

Therefore, we should approach this topic very humbly.

Assignments

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones – a medical doctor who became a world-famous preacher

For his entire life, he was fascinated by healing along the interface of spirit and body.

His talk includes the handyman near death on his bed and the woman who asked, “When is he coming?”

Richard A. Swenson – a medical doctor impressed that half of his patients needed preventative measures

Loaded with quotes—a goldmine of anecdotal wisdom—he will really make you think about modern life.