

# Things that Jesus did

*Miracles of the Kingdom  
& Signs of Eternal Life*

Doug Rowston

GRACE & PEACE BOOKS 

Rowston, Doug  
THINGS THAT JESUS DID  
Miracles of the Kingdom & Signs of Eternal Life

Published by  
Grace & Peace Books  
4A Wurilba Ave Hawthorn SA 5062 Australia  
djrowston@gmail.com

© Douglas James Rowston 2018

This work is copyright. Other than for the purposes and subject to the conditions prescribed under the Copyright Act, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher.

First published 2018 by MediaCom Education Inc  
This edition published in 2022

ISBN 978-0-6453288-6-8

*This book is dedicated to*  
*Norm Bennett*  
*with whom it was my privilege*  
*to teach religious education*  
*for sixteen years*

A significant proportion of the Gospels narrate the actions of Jesus. What Jesus did is integral to his mission and ministry, and Doug Rowston's most helpful overview guides the reader into perceiving deeper meanings and truths that form our gospel traditions. Providing just enough background information, Rowston adeptly places the passages in context, while ensuring the power of these narratives stays much in the foreground. Accessible for those seeking an introduction, and with some great insights for those more familiar with such passages, this new book continues like the earlier *Things that Jesus said* to take the reader on a pilgrimage of sorts, drawn further along following the footsteps of Jesus on a journey still underway.

**Bishop Tim Harris**

*Research Fellow St Barnabas College*

Doug Rowston's *Things that Jesus did* brings his considerable scholarship alongside personal stories and reflections from believers throughout the centuries to invite readers to both understand and experience the miracle stories of the gospels. He draws on insights from archaeology, geography, and history to provide helpful background commentary, but his real strength is in his ability to weave personal stories – of his own, those he has met, and those both known and obscure to history – to offer an invitation to the reader to engage their imagination, enter into the events, and therein encounter Jesus. His simple reflections and humble prayers at the conclusion of each story serve as a profound reminder that these stories can be encountered again and again.

**Rev Dr Melinda Cousins**

*Director of Ministries Baptist Churches of SA*

## **Acknowledgements**

The front cover is a mosaic of Christ and the Gospel at the Monastery of Hosios Lucas on the slopes of Mount Helikon in Greece.

The ink sketches throughout the book were drawn by Craig Bowyer during the author's time as teacher at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide. They are reproduced with his permission.

Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U S A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part 1: Miracles in Matthew's Gospel</b>	<b>5</b>
1 A Leper	6
2 A Centurion's Servant	11
3 Peter's Mother-in-law	17
4 A Gale	23
5 A Paralysed Man	28
6 A Woman and a Girl	32
<b>Part 2: Miracles in Mark's Gospel</b>	<b>37</b>
7 A Gerasene Demoniac	38
8 A Syrophenician Woman	44
9 A Deaf and Dumb Man	49
10 A Blind Man	54
11 An Epileptic Boy	59
12 Blind Bartimaeus	66
<b>Part 3: Miracles in Luke's Gospel</b>	<b>71</b>
13 A Catch of Fish	72
14 A Widow's Son	82
15 A Crippled Woman	88
16 A Swollen Man	94
17 Ten Lepers	98
18 A Stranger on the Road	106

<b>Part 4: Signs in John's Gospel</b>	<b>114</b>
19 A Wedding	115
20 A Royal Official	121
21 A Lame Man	125
22 A Large Crowd	132
23 The Lake	139
24 A Blind Man	144
25 Dead Lazarus	149
26 Doubting Thomas	156
27 A Stranger on the Shore	163
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Select Bibliography</b>	<b>173</b>





## **Introduction**

*Things that Jesus did* is an attempt to take seriously the stories about Jesus in the Four Gospels. Not only is Jesus remembered for the stories he told, but he is also famous for stories about his healing of people who suffered from leprosy, paralysis, fever, haemorrhages, physical handicaps, demonic possession, epilepsy, deafness and dumbness, blindness, and lameness. Furthermore, he is the central character in stories told about nature miracles such as stilling storms, multiplying loaves and fishes, even abnormal catches of fish, and even water turning into wine. Most amazingly, Jesus is credited with raising dead people, let alone being raised from the dead himself.

What are we in the twenty-first century to make of these stories about Jesus which took place in the first century? We belong to an era with a modern scientific worldview. Today there are non-believing scientists and historians who think that they can explain everything without recourse to God. But this is not the whole story. There are believing scientists who see both the mysterious work of God through the microscope and the majestic work of God through the telescope. Similarly, there are believing historians who acknowledge the importance of both the memorable words of Jesus and his mighty works in the Gospels.

All of this is a far cry from the first century context of a pre-scientific worldview. The ancients tended to attribute events and processes to the direct influence of good or evil powers. They felt themselves at the mercy of fate and death. They engaged in superstitious rituals to manipulate the unseen spirits and demons. Despite sharing a pre-scientific worldview, the

followers of Jesus rejected an unresolved dualism of good and evil. Good and evil forces were in conflict as Jesus challenged his world. But Jesus was the ultimate victor over evil and death. His followers came to acknowledge the coming of God's rule in the works and words of Jesus and to await Jesus' final glorious reign.

While we do not share the pre-scientific worldview, we can still empathise with the ways in which the Gospels tell the stories of Jesus' miracles and signs. While we seek many answers about what happened from a scientific worldview, we shall find it more helpful to move to the issue of the actual meaning of the miracles for ancient and modern readers of the Gospels.

According to Alan Culpepper, the miracle stories may serve five functions in the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> First, in terms of God, 'the miracle stories ... are signs of God's power and glory.' Second, in relation to Christ, 'the miracles tell us who Jesus was.' Third, in the interpretation of the Bible, 'the miracle stories ... link Jesus to "the Law and the prophets" and show that he was the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures.' Fourth, as part of the church's proclamation, 'the miracle stories often ... demonstrate the power of Jesus' word.' Fifth, as part of the church's instruction, 'the miracle stories often ... offer a lesson on discipleship.'

The miracles told in the First Three Gospels are indications of the coming of the reign of God in the life of Jesus. When his predecessor asked if Jesus was the one for whom they were waiting, Jesus sent John the Baptist this message, '*Go and tell*

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, pp. 68-70.

*John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.' (Matthew 11:4-5)*

The signs recorded in the Fourth Gospel are revelations of the splendour of God in his Son, the Messiah. When the editor of the Fourth Gospel summed up his testimony, he wrote: *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)*

What are we to make of this variety of miracles or signs? Are they for us interventions by the outside Creator into his creation? Are they powerful acts of the unseen yet present Creator within his creation? In his insightful *For Everyone* series Tom Wright seems to bridge the pre-scientific and scientific worldview when he writes,

Our word 'miracle' tends to imply that God, normally 'outside' the closed system of the world, sometimes 'intervenes'; miracles have then frequently been denied by sceptics as a matter of principle. However, in the Bible God is always present, however strangely, and 'deeds of power' are seen as *special acts of a present God rather than intrusive acts of an absent one.*<sup>2</sup>

I trust that this book will encourage you my readers to take seriously the variety of stories about Jesus found in the Four

---

<sup>2</sup> Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, 1:215-216. This comment appears in the glossary at the end of each volume in this excellent series on the New Testament.

Gospels. It is worth reminding ourselves that the first followers of Jesus learned to appreciate him as God who is there. May we see him as the God who is with us, indeed God's very Son. Not only can we read and appreciate his unforgettable words but we too can treasure the records of his life-changing deeds. In him God's heaven and humankind's earth are joined; in him God's future continues to transform humankind's present. No wonder that for two thousand years known and unknown followers of Jesus, including theologians, evangelists, preachers, writers, poets, rebels, missionaries, mystics, activists, scholars, and martyrs have each in their own way testified in word and deed to this Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Like my previous book, *Things that Jesus said*, the present book comes from my experience as a theological lecturer at Burleigh College, a religious education teacher at Prince Alfred College, a pastor at Richmond Baptist Church, and an adjunct lecturer at St Barnabas College (Charles Sturt University). I have also been helped by the usual suspects in the world of academia as the bibliography will reveal. I thank my wife Rosalie for her companionship and support. I am also grateful to my brother Laurie for his reading and critique of this project as a work in progress. I trust that *Things that Jesus did* will be interesting and enjoyable reading for seekers either as individuals or groups enquiring further after the truth as it is in Jesus.

Doug Rowston