

It's the little details that make all the difference

In recent weeks I have been listening to and reading about the seven miracles that Jesus performed and are to be found in the Gospel of John. Each miracle is unique and has, I believe, been included by John in order to illustrate Jesus' power over different and various circumstances and conditions. At the same time they convey Biblical truths that are designed to help us as we learn, more and more, to put our trust in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

By these seven miracles Jesus demonstrates His power over the elements as He reveals His ability to turn water into wine; His power over sickness as he heals a boy on the brink of death and His power over infirmity as He heals a man who had been disabled for many years. The miracles also demonstrate Jesus' willingness and power to provide in a time of need as He feeds five thousand people with a meagre packed-lunch: His ability to contradict the law of gravity and to walk on water; His power over our senses as He enables a man to see who had been blind from birth, and His power to conquer death as He raises his friend, Lazarus, who has been in a tomb for several days.

Interestingly, however, has been the number of occasions when people have attempted to rationalise these miracles by providing an alternative explanation: the jars may have been already filled with new wine, the official's son would have got better anyway, when people saw the little boy's offering they all shared their lunches, the disciples imagined they saw Jesus and thought it would be a good tale to tell when they returned to the shore – or some such variation along the same lines.

My response to these suggestions is simply this: those people who advocate such explanations are, maybe, overlooking some of the small details that the Gospel writers have purposely included to indicate the authenticity of the miracles.

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In John's account of the wedding feast at Cana, for instance, he writes:

*Six stone water-jars were standing there, ready for use in the Jewish purification rites.
Each held about twenty or thirty gallons.
"Fill the jars with water," said Jesus to the servants
and **they filled them** right up to the brim.
"Now draw some out," he said, "and take it to the chief steward."
And they did.*

The servants knew that the jars contained water and had not been filled with wine previously because **they filled them**. No one could come along and suggest otherwise. They probably dreaded the moment that the chief steward poured what had now become wine into the guests' glasses ... they knew it had been water because **they were the ones who had filled the jars**.

The Gospel of Mark is attributed to John Mark, a companion of Simon Peter, who wrote the gospel using Peter's eyewitness accounts. It is recognised as the first of the gospels to have been written. In Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand he writes:

*It was already getting late when his disciples came to him and said,
"Look: there's nothing here. It's getting late. Send them away. They need to go off into the countryside and the villages and buy themselves some food."
"Why don't you give them something?" Jesus replied.
"Are you suggesting," they asked, "that we should go and spend two hundred dinars and get food for this lot?"
"Well," said Jesus, "How many loaves have you got?
Go and see.
They found out, and said, "Five, and a couple of fish."*

Peter, who had been at the scene of the miracle, clearly told John Mark that the disciples had gone amongst the crowd to look for food ... and no one, other than the little boy, had brought anything to eat. **They found out** that the only food available among so many people was, in fact, two fish and five loaves. When they later collected the twelve baskets of crumbs and leftovers they clearly knew that Jesus had performed a miracle because **they were the ones who had checked earlier and knew there was no other food to be shared.**

Finally, for now, the account of Jesus healing the official's son in John's gospel states:

*There was a royal official in Capernaum whose son was ill.
He heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee and he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, since he was at the point of death.
... Jesus said, "Your son will live."
The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him, and he set off.
But while he was still on his way ... his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well.
So he asked them what time he had begun to get better.
"Yesterday afternoon, about one o'clock," they told him.
So the father knew that it had happened **at the very moment** when Jesus said to him, "Your son will live!"*

One may argue that the official's son was already getting better and would have recovered anyway. But, even though he wasn't a rich bloke with a Rolex, the father knew that his son's recovery had started **at the very moment** that Jesus had spoken the words. "Your son will live!"
Whatever anyone else might have said, **the father knew what Jesus had said and exactly when he had said it.**