

Four “Unexplained” Actions of Jesus

Introduction

In many places, the Bible states that it contains the information that we need to be *saved*. In other words, there is nothing “lacking” from the Bible, as far as our salvation is concerned. One of the more explicit examples of this can be found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (ESV):

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

However, it is also true that the Bible does not contain information about *every* event that occurred to followers of God. In fact, Scripture does not even describe all of the events in *Jesus’* life. The apostle John mentioned that very fact, at the end of his Gospel:

John 21:24-25 (ESV):

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

In addition, even when events *are* recorded, Scripture does not always specify the **reasons** behind the events. In other words, in some cases an event will be listed in Scripture; but it is not clear why the event occurred. In those cases, the events in question can sometimes be rather difficult to understand – because the events are “**unexplained**”. (Cue the theme song from “The X-Files”...)

Four such “unexplained” events in Jesus’ life are described in the sections below.

“Do not cling to me”

Let’s begin with a rather straightforward example. The following passage describes Jesus’ first appearance to Mary Magdalene, after his resurrection:

John 20:11-18 (ESV):

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in

Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

As listed above, Jesus says “do not cling to me”, after appearing to Mary. However, there is no explanation given for *why* Jesus said that. So, what is going on here?

The explanation for this item can be determined from the context. At the beginning of the passage, Mary is *extremely* distraught – i.e., she is “crying her eyes out” – because she **thinks** that Jesus is dead. Then, all of a sudden, she realizes that Jesus is alive – and he is standing *right in front* of her. So, what do you suppose Mary did next? Well, she probably *grabbed* Jesus – she probably had him in the tightest bear-hug the world has ever seen!

So, this presumably explains why Jesus had to ask Mary to *release* him...

Waiting for Two Days

John chapter 11 contains the account of the resurrection of Lazarus. One of the events listed in that account is rather “puzzling”, however. Here is an excerpt from that account:

John 11:1-6,11-14,17 (ESV):

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”

¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” ¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

As shown above, Martha and Mary sent a messenger to Jesus, to tell him that Lazarus was deathly ill. However, after Jesus received that news, he remained *where he was* for **two days**, before he started off to see Lazarus. So, why did Jesus do that? After all, Scripture explicitly states that Jesus *loved* Lazarus – so one would expect that Jesus would go to see Lazarus immediately after hearing that he is close to death.

One clue to this puzzling behavior can be found in the fact that Jesus emphasizes the *importance* of raising Lazarus from the dead. In the above passage, Jesus refers to the fact that raising Lazarus will allow people to **believe** in him, and will bring **glory** to God.

Of course, in order for those things to occur, everyone would need to be convinced that Lazarus was actually dead. In other words, if people were **not** convinced that Lazarus had *actually* died, then they would not be very “impressed” if they saw Lazarus walking around again – because they would assume that Lazarus had just recovered on his own.

The reason why this is important is because in some cases, people have fallen into **very** deep comatose states, which are almost indistinguishable from death. In fact, up until modern times, it was sometimes impossible to detect any signs of life in people in such states. As a result, there have been documented cases in which people in those states have been buried – but the people later *recovered*, **after** being interred. This is a rather “nightmarish” scenario, of course.

The Jewish community in ancient times was well aware of the possibility that a person might *appear* to be dead; but could later recover. The general thinking was that a person could appear to be dead for up to three days – but during that time he could still possibly **recover** on his own. After three days, though, the person was judged to be “permanently” dead.

(As an aside, it is not too surprising that three days was used as the “borderline” value. For one thing, people can generally only survive for about three days without *water*. Also, obvious signs of *decomposition* begin to appear on a corpse after three days of death.)

Here is an excerpt from an article on ancient Jewish burial practices; the phrase “pseudo-death” in the excerpt refers to a comatose state resembling death:

In talmudic times, while the burial was not delayed, graves were “watched” for a period of three days to avoid all possibility of pseudo-death.

The full article can be found here: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/ancientburial.html>

In any case, this certainly appears to provide an explanation for *why* Jesus waited for two days, before heading off to visit Lazarus. Basically, if Jesus had left **immediately**, then when he arrived Lazarus would only have been dead for two days. Of course, if Jesus had raised Lazarus at *that* point, then many people would have assumed that Lazarus had simply recovered on his own – i.e., they would have dismissed the possibility of a miracle occurring.

So, it appears that Jesus purposely stayed where he was for two days, after hearing the news about Lazarus – so that when he arrived, Lazarus had been dead, and in his tomb, for four days. This ensured that everyone was convinced that Lazarus was “permanently” dead – and that, in turn, demonstrated that Jesus had performed a **miracle** by resurrecting Lazarus.

Unusual Healing Miracles

Three of the more “unusual” accounts of Jesus’ healing miracles can be found in the following three passages. The miracles in those passages all have one “unexplained” item in common:

Mark 7:31-35 (ESV):

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up

to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Mark 8:22-25 (ESV):

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” ²⁴ And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

John 9:1,6-8 (ESV):

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.

⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

In the above passages, Jesus performed the following actions as part of his healing miracles:

- In the first passage, he spit on his fingers, and then touched the man’s tongue;
- In the second passage, he spit on the man’s eyes;
- In the third passage, he spit on dirt to make mud; and then he placed the mud on the man’s eyes.

As listed above, in each of those three passages, Jesus uses his **spittle** as part of the healing miracle. Of course, that raises the question – why did Jesus use his saliva in those healings? Presumably, Jesus did not need to use his saliva to heal the men – because in almost every *other* case, Jesus would just **touch** a person to remove his malady – or even just say that the person was healed in order to heal him. Not only that, but one might say that using spit to heal someone is rather “repulsive”...

One item to consider about this perplexing issue is the fact that the Pharisees often put much more emphasis on following their own *traditions*, rather than on following the *Bible*. In fact, that was one of the items about which Jesus frequently upbraided the Pharisees. For example, consider this famous passage:

Matthew 15:1-9 (ESV):

¹ Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” ³ He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” ⁶ he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

⁸ “This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

The fact that the Pharisees paid more attention to their traditions than to Scripture also led them to dismiss any possibility of Jesus being the Messiah. Basically, Jesus never violated any of the commandments of *Scripture*; but his actions **did** sometimes violate the man-made traditions of the Pharisees – and the Pharisees would then point to those actions as “proof” that Jesus could not be the Messiah.

Of course, Jesus wanted *everyone* that he encountered – even the Pharisees – to acknowledge him as the Messiah, and therefore to have the opportunity to be *saved*. In addition, throughout his ministry, Jesus proved to be amazingly adept at saying and doing things that would be quite *convincing* to his various audiences.

One item that would be very convincing to *Pharisees* is if Jesus performed miracles which were consistent with their traditions. With that in mind, take a look at one of the traditions of the Pharisees, below. (Many of those traditions are now listed in a book called the *Talmud*):

Baba Bathra 126b:

There is a tradition that the **spittle** of the firstborn of a father is healing

Given that tradition, it may very well be that Jesus purposefully used his spittle in some of his healing miracles – not because he *needed* to use it; but rather because doing so would “match” the tradition listed above. In other words, by using his saliva in some healing miracles, Jesus could demonstrate to the Pharisees that he was able to heal people even in a manner that is described in their traditions – and that that *particular* tradition would also **affirm** his status as the firstborn of our Heavenly Father.

Using Unrighteous Wealth

Finally, one of Jesus’ parables **appears** to encourage unethical behavior. Here is the parable in question – the parable of the “Dishonest Manager”:

Luke 16:1-9 (ESV):

He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ ³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ ⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ ⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ ⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

The above parable describes the actions of a “dishonest manager”. The manager basically defrauds his master out of a lot of goods, shortly before being fired from his position. After the parable is over, though, Jesus then tells the disciples to “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth”! So, what is going on here? Certainly, Jesus would not *encourage* us to defraud others, right?

One of the points that Jesus makes in many of his parables is the fact that we should **not** “hoard” our resources – and we certainly should not give ourselves **all** of the credit when we have good fortune. Instead, we should share our resources with those who are truly needy; and we should always give thanks to God for our blessings. This is especially true because all of us are *mortal* during this age – so we will all die eventually. Here is one parable, from earlier in Luke, which makes those exact points:

Luke 12:16-21 (ESV):

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

The three overall points that are made in that parable (and similar ones) are as follows:

1. All of us are *mortal*; so we have a very limited amount of **time** to accomplish tasks.
2. As a result, we should use whatever resources we have to *assist* others, during our lifetimes.
3. By doing so, we will be *obeying* God – and that will cause God to look favorably upon our actions.

It appears to me that the three basic points above are also expressed in the “Dishonest Manager” parable. Consider these points from that parable:

1. The manager has a very limited amount of **time** left in his position (as he is about to get fired).
2. As a result, the manager uses the resources to which he has access (his master’s accounts) to *assist* others.
3. By doing do, he causes other people to look favorably upon him.

From the above, it appears that the same “general points” are made in the Dishonest Manager parable as are made in other parables. That is, it appears that the “overall theme” of this parable is that we should use our resources to assist others during our brief lifetimes – and that is the *same theme* as in many other parables.

So, Jesus is certainly not telling us to defraud people – instead, he is apparently using the *overall events* in the parable to emphasize the importance of assisting others now – while we have the chance. Note that that very item is *also* mentioned in Proverbs:

Proverbs 3:27-28 (ESV):

²⁷ Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

²⁸ Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you.

Conclusion

There are many items in Scripture which *appear* to be “unexplained”. However, from what I can see, there generally *is* an explanation for such events; the explanation is usually determined either by the *context*, or by the *culture* and *time* in which the passage in question was written. Hopefully this article was informative to you!