Defense: How Can You Believe in Miracles? Memory Verse: 1 Cor. 15:20

June 29th, 2025 Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 15:12-22

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Good morning! I want to begin by expressing my thanks to Steve Ruter for preaching last week. As we are talking about apologetics and going through many different strains of information it is important to remember that, at it’s heart, the gospel message is simple. We do not need advanced degrees to understand it or to explain it or to share it with others. I think Steve highlighted that very well for us last week. Also a huge thanks to Judy Jessup and Emma Carbajal for being willing to share their testimony. Thank you also to Rueben for helping put the music together for the week. It is wonderful to be able to hand things over to capable people while I am away.

 Now today, we are going to talk about miracles. How can you believe in miracles? This is another important question that is likely to come up when we are trying to talk to people about our faith. The existence of miracles stands as a hard and fast line. Are you someone who acknowledges or denies the possibility of supernatural intervention in our world? And that, by the way, is a good way to define **[SLIDE 2]** miracle. Remember, we need to make sure that we are clarifying our terms. Miracles are not readily explainable, but I think we can give more form to miracles than simply a giant question mark. We can say that a miracle is supernatural; beyond the scope of what we can naturally observe and yet, it affects the reality of our observable world. So we can say a miracle is supernatural intervention in our world. Now notice what this doesn’t say. We are not automatically assuming that every miracle comes from God. We believe there are other supernatural powers at work in this world. We are also not saying that every miracle is good or a welcomed event, though usually that is how we think of them. So we are going to define a miracle as supernatural intervention in our world. Is such a thing possible?

We talked about this in week one of this series when we discussed the question of

**[SLIDE 3]** origins. Either everything we see comes from a supernatural Creator or it has somehow happened that everything we see initially came from nothing. You can see the problem here…these two options are the same. The implications are different, what they mean for our lives is very different, but in either case either God created everything: a miracle; or everything spontaneously came from nothing: seems like a miracle, but it leaves no room for the supernatural so it’s a miracle with absolutely no explanation or meaning.

But let us assume that we are talking with someone who denies miracles **[SLIDE 4]** and denies the existence of any sort of supernatural realm. How can we talk to them at that point? It seems to be a closed conversation from the get-go. What we need to do is get specific. Instead of trying to discuss the general topic of miracles, we need to hone in on talking about one miracle in particular, the most important miracle when it comes to our faith; **[SLIDE 5]** the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe in miracles, because I believe that Jesus rose from the dead. That one miracle informs all the others.

But why would I believe in something that is impossible? Something that sounds like a fairy tale? People do not rise from the dead, especially not after three days! It is clearly just a made-up story.

((But let me encourage you today church. Christianity began as a movement not based on Jesus’ teachings, not based on the example of his life, not based on the passion of his followers. Christianity exists because something happened in history. Everything we are is rooted in an event that occurred in history. If it did not happen, we would not be sitting here today. There would be no Christian church here or anywhere else. We are a church retelling a crazy story about Easter because something miraculous happened about 2,000 years ago. No other religion works that way. Everyone else follows a teaching from a teacher. Everyone else follows an idea. But the church has grown out of a historical reality, and that reality included a miracle.))

Here is how I know it happened just as the gospels tell us. It’s not because I just believe it. It’s not because it makes me feel better. It’s not because it’s a happy ending to a sad story. It’s because it is true. And if it is true that the resurrection of Jesus occurred, then it must also be true that miracles of some other sort can occur as well.

So let us jump into some of the details. We know that Jesus died. **[SLIDE 6]** We know he died by crucifixion. This is told to us in the gospels, which we have already established are reliable documents. But we also know this to be true from other non-biblical ancient sources. **[SLIDE 7]** Josephus, the great Jewish historian is one, as well as Tacitus **[SLIDE 8]** on the other side of the coin who was a Roman. All agree that Jesus lived and died by crucifixion and, what’s more, all agree that Jesus’ tomb was found empty on Sunday morning. All these sources agree that Jesus’ followers began teaching and preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. And they did so at the risk of their own lives. And all agree that these events happened in Jerusalem. So how do we account for all of these agreed upon circumstances?

Well, **[SLIDE 9]** how do we know that anything happens anywhere? We either see it happen and experience it ourselves or someone tells us that something happened. Maybe we hear about it from a friend, maybe we see it on the news, or get some notification from our phone. Whatever the case, we know about things that happen because someone tells us about it. When it comes to the resurrection, we have many different voices telling us that Jesus rose from the dead. There are many eyewitness accounts that speak to the experience of seeing the risen Jesus. If we had one or two, maybe we could chalk it up to some sort of illusion or hallucination, but we have much more than that. Listen to the apostle Paul’s words, who, by the way, wrote his letters even before the gospels were written. He says to the church in Corinth in **[SLIDE 10]** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 READ.

So Paul is citing other sources by name. He is challenging his readers to go out and verify that what he says is true. According to Paul there are more than 500 people who can corroborate his story. If Paul were perpetuating a lie, why would he be overtly asked to be fact-checked? If Paul and the others had not encountered the risen Jesus, what would account for their radically changed lives? Paul admits here, he once was in the business of trying to shut down the church and now he is leading the charge and starting up more churches? Why the dramatic swing? Because Paul encountered the risen Jesus.

**[SLIDE 11]** 1 John 1:1-3 largely says the same thing. READ. John is basically saying that he is simply telling everyone what he has seen with his own eyes. That’s what an eyewitness does. That’s how we know about anything – someone who has seen something tells us about it.

Luke opens the book of Acts with these words: **[SLIDE 12]** “After his (Jesus’) suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God’s kingdom.”

So we have testimony based on what others claim to have heard and seen for themselves. Some surmise that the disciples stole the body of Jesus and then said that he had risen. In other words, it was all a lie and a fabricated hoax. But if the disciples were going to make up such a story, then certainly, they would want people to believe it. But in each of the gospels, the first reporters of the empty tomb were who? The women. And, sorry to say, but in that culture in the first century, the word of a women meant very little. In fact, even in a court of law, testimony from a woman was not admissible. So is it plausible to think that this grand hoax put on by the disciples would begin in the mouths of unreliable women? Or it is more plausible to think that woman were the first reporters because that is actually what happened? Dr. William Lane Craig refers to this as an **[SLIDE 13]** argument from embarrassment. For the male disciples, such a beginning to their story would be too embarrassing to admit. And the gospels are full of all kinds of embarrassing moments, moments that you would not mention if you were making it all up.

Some skeptics assert what is known as the**[SLIDE 14]** “swoon theory”. Jesus did not actually die, he passed out and eventually recovered and exited the tomb of his own volition. This, of course, does not account for Rome’s expertise in killing people. If they were to “miss one” some soldier, or more likely soldiers, would have been punished by having their own lives taken. Suffice it to say, a Roman soldier was highly motived to carry out his duty in a thorough fashion. But let us assume one did slip through the cracks, there is still the wrinkle of the guards intervention with the tomb itself. The tomb was sealed with a heavy stone that might have been as large as two tons, and guards were posted at the entrance. Is a wounded and beaten survivor of crucifixion supposed to singlehandedly move a giant stone and then overpower or outmaneuver posted guards? If this man then somehow dragged himself into the presence of his followers, would they then take his appearance as a sign of his resurrection? Certainly not! They would instead immediately call for medical attention of some kind. If Jesus were in such a state, David Strauss writes, it would not have “changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, (or) have elevated their reverence into worship.”

Some scholars and liberal so-called Christians understand Easter to be about a **[SLIDE 15]** spiritual resurrection. Jesus has given us the idea of new life, but to say he physically rose from the dead is absurd. What we have is a beautiful allegory. But this does nothing to explain the acts of the apostles. These were distraught men who feared for their lives. They were in hiding when Jesus was killed. All of their hopes were placed in Jesus and it all crashed to the ground. These followers of Jesus were demoralized and likely wanted to be done with the whole debacle and try to piece their lives back together. How could Jesus’ beautiful lessons live on in these men without an actual resurrection? In fact, Jesus’ own lessons were not about some idyllic life in which we somehow rise above our problems. He told his disciples plainly that he came to die and be raised again on the third day. He told them plainly that this life was about dying to yourself, putting an end to your own will and overcoming sin. He taught that a final resurrection would eventually come, but that it would also include judgement. Given the facts, a spiritual resurrection alone is not acceptable.

And what about these disciples? **[SLIDE 16]** According to their own accounts, when they heard the news of the resurrection, how did they react? Even they did not believe it! In Luke 24:11 the woman come to them with their story about what they saw at the tomb and he says “it struck them as nonsense.” In Mark, the women are too afraid to even tell anybody. In John’s gospel, Peter and another disciple run to the tomb to investigate for themselves, and John writes, “They didn’t yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.” Matthew 28:17 when the disciples actually see Jesus post-resurrection he says, “they worshipped him, but some doubted.” The overall point here is that, even by their own admission, the disciples themselves were not expecting or looking forward to Jesus’ resurrection. They themselves were skeptics when it happened! They had no conception of what was going on or what it meant. They were hardly in a position to change the world by teaching about something they could not comprehend themselves. And not only would they teach based on this resurrection, but they would literally give their lives for it as well. As we have stated before, liars make poor martyrs.

So how can the historical facts be explained? Something happened. Something miraculous. Something supernatural. Our creator God has revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ who died and miraculously rose again. What does that mean for us? The apostle Paul recounts what might be the earliest Christian hymn, a poem that declares what this miraculous historical event means, a song that was composed shortly after these events took place. We can find it in **[SLIDE 17]** Philippians 2 verses 6-11. READ.

We dare not miss the conclusion of this hymn: Jesus Christ is Lord. Everyone will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ. He died, not because he deserved it, not because he had delusions of grandeur, not because he thought he could starts a movement. Jesus went to the cross out of his obedience to his Heavenly Father. He emptied himself, humbled himself and God raised him up out of the grave and to the highest place. Every Jew knows that to hail a man as God is to committed the most blatant act of blasphemy. Yet, here we have a Jews claiming that Jesus is not only the chosen one of God, but he was in the form of God. What would induce a faithful Jew to say such blasphemous things? The same thing that would induce a sinner to say the same things: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He is exalted above all, he is Lord of all and we must bow before his majesty. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can be united with God ourselves. We can follow Christ into our own death and resurrection. We can be with him for all eternity as he rules and reigns on his kingly throne forever.

A miracle has happened, **[SLIDE 18]** we, the church, are proof of it and it follows that the supernatural realm still intervenes in our world. Our God is a God of miracles. Apologist Josh McDowell wrote, “The difficulties of belief may be great, but the problems inherent in unbelief present even greater difficulties.” Biblical scholar N.T. Wright puts it this way, “If Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world.” That includes everyone. You and me and the people we daily come in contact with. We have good reason to believe in this miracle, the evidence for the resurrection dwarfs any other possibility. Jesus was raised! New life is possible and because of this, just like those first disciples, we have a story to tell! Amen.