

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 2, Reliability of the Gospels, Miracles Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome back, deep divers. Today, we're really going deep into the reliability of the Gospels. Really going back in time.

Yeah. Especially Matthew's Gospel. You know, and we're not just talking about ancient history; you're going to be looking at miracle accounts, both from Jesus's time and modern times.

I like it. It's going to be a journey, might just challenge your perception of what is possible. Sounds good.

Our guide for this deep dive is a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Oh, yeah. He's great.

Leading expert on the New Testament. And early Christianity. By the end of this episode, you'll have a fresh look at the world that the Gospels were written in.

Right. Like what was going on back then. Yeah, exactly.

And how they stack up against other historical records. You know, one of the fascinating things is how these ancient texts have these clues in them that connect them directly back to Jesus's time and culture. Right.

It's like unearthing linguistic fossils. Whoa. Okay.

That reveal a hidden layer of history, bringing the past right to life. Linguistic fossils. Okay.

So Dr. Keener explains that while the Gospels were written in Greek, they still have these unique early characteristics, like they're whispering secrets from a bygone era. Exactly. You see, Jesus likely spoke Aramaic, which was the everyday language of Judea and Galilee back then.

Right. So finding these Aramaic rhythms and expressions embedded in the Greek text, that's a huge sign of authenticity. It's like you're seeing glimpses of the original language shining through the translation.

Like echoes from the past. Yeah. Echoes.

From the past. So Dr. Keener gives this really great example using his wife, who's multilingual. Cool.

She can switch between languages so easily while keeping the meaning intact. It's amazing how people can do that. Right.

And all the nuances, too. Yeah. Without losing any of the heart of the message.

Yeah. And it shows how translation can really happen without losing the core of the message. That's a fantastic analogy, you know? Yeah.

It helps bridge the gap between us and the ancient world. Totally. Makes it feel real.

For sure. Relatable. So in the Gospels, we see things like the Aramaic rhythm in Jesus' sayings, expressions like, you have heard it said.

Uh-huh. That's a classic. Which was a common way of introducing a teaching.

Yeah. Like back then. Back then.

Right. And then like those familiar parables. Oh, the parables.

Yeah. All pointing to a genuine connection with Jesus' time. And we can't forget about the Lord's Prayer.

Oh, right. It reflects a common Jewish prayer from that time. Interesting.

All of these seemingly small details. Yeah. They give us a really incredible insight into the historical setting of the Gospels.

You know, they ground them firmly in that world of first-century Palestine. It's like assembling a historical jigsaw puzzle. Oh, I like that.

Right. Each one of these linguistic fossils helps us to see the complete picture. The full picture.

Yeah. But there's another crucial piece of the puzzle. Uh-oh, what's that? The eyewitnesses.

Oh, right. That raises the question. How much weight should we give to eyewitness accounts? Right.

Well, you see, in the early church, eyewitnesses were everything. Okay. They were central.

Yeah. Dr. Keener highlights Paul's letters, particularly Galatians and First Corinthians. And Paul specifically mentions that the leaders of the early church were people like James.

Jesus' brother. Yeah. And the close disciples like Peter and John.

These weren't just random people. They were the people closest to Jesus. Yeah.

The ones who knew the truth about his life. And that's crucial. They weren't just sharing stories.

No. They were putting their lives on the line. Right.

They were staking it all. Yeah. As Dr. Keener puts it, who would die for something they knew was a lie? That's a good point.

You know? Yeah. It really highlights their deep conviction. And the sincerity of their belief.

Their belief. And here's another point that really stuck with me. The gospels include women's testimony.

Oh, that's interesting. Even though it wasn't considered as reliable back then. That's right.

That says a lot. It really does. You know? About their commitment to capturing the truth.

If they were trying to invent a narrative, they wouldn't have been so inclusive about whose voices to include. Right. The fact that they included wives' perspectives adds this layer of authenticity.

It does. It's hard to dismiss. It's like we're eavesdropping on history.

I like that. Right. Yeah.

Now, talking about eyewitnesses, Dr. Keener discusses Luke's unique approach to writing his gospel. Yeah, Luke. Almost like a modern-day investigator.

Oh, interesting. So Luke was a meticulous historian. He was.

Right at the beginning of his gospel, he states his intention to carefully investigate everything. From the beginning. Yes.

He wasn't just gathering stories. Yeah. He was actively pursuing the truth.

The truth. Like in Luke 1.13, where he emphasizes his commitment to this thorough research. He wanted to get the story right.

It wasn't just a casual retelling. No, no. It was deliberate.

It was deliberate. And this fits perfectly with the Hellenistic ideal. Oh, yeah.

Of careful investigation. Right. Historians back then, they were expected to consult eyewitnesses and verify their information.

And guess what? Those wee passages in Acts indicate that Luke actually spent a lot of time in Judea. He was there. He had the opportunity to interview key figures like James.

He's his brother. Can you imagine having access to someone that close to Jesus? Oh, wow. Yeah.

That would be incredible. Right. Luke's time in Judea would have given him incredible insights.

Yeah. Insights that he could weave into his narrative. And there's this other intriguing point.

Oh, what's that? About Luke. He mentions confirming things in his gospel that were already well-known in the church. So, like, common knowledge at the time.

Yeah, exactly. He's telling Theophilus, the person he's writing to, that he wants to assure him about the things he's already been taught. Oh, okay.

So it's like saying, hey, remember all that stuff we've been talking about? Yeah. Well, I did some digging. And here's the full story.

Exactly. So Luke's building on a foundation of shared knowledge, not introducing new concepts out of thin air. He was giving more context and depth to a story that was already circulating.

Yeah. And this common knowledge element is key. It suggests that the gospel accounts were already widespread within a few decades of Jesus's life.

So it's not like these stories popped up out of nowhere generations later. So if the gospels were made up to push some later agenda, wouldn't we see hints of those later debates within the text itself? That's a great point. If they were trying to settle these theological arguments, shouldn't we find at least a trace of those controversies in their stories? And what's striking is that those later debates are noticeably absent from the gospels.

Like, take, for instance, the whole circumcision debate. Oh, yeah. The big one.

For Gentile converts. Yeah. A major issue in the early church.

Right. If the gospels were crafted to support one side of that argument. Shouldn't we see some indication of that? Exactly.

Yeah. Their silence on this and other later issues really strengthens their historical reliability. It suggests they were written before those controversies even became prominent.

Yeah. Capturing a more original version of the story. And Dr. Keener highlights that even Paul, the earliest New Testament writer, distinguishes between Jesus's actual teachings and his own interpretations of them.

He's not trying to put words in Jesus's mouth. He's explaining how they apply to different situations. Yeah.

In 1 Corinthians 7, he's addressing divorce. He presents what Jesus taught and then clarifies in that context. Even going so far as to say, now this is what I say.

Yeah. To contrast. To contrast it with this is what the Lord says.

That's a subtle but significant distinction. It really shows a genuine respect. For the integrity of Jesus's teachings.

He wasn't trying to manipulate them for his own gain. Okay. Now let's tackle those lost gospels.

Oh, yeah. The conspiracy theories. You know, all those conspiracy theories about hidden information.

Lost gospels. Right. Yeah.

Dr. Keener really sets the record straight on what those so-called lost gospels actually are. So the term lost gospels. Right.

It's a little misleading. It is. Right.

Yeah. It implies that these texts were somehow suppressed or hidden. When in reality, they were just discarded.

They didn't meet the standards. Yeah. The standards of authenticity.

Right. It's crucial to remember that the four canonical gospels. Okay.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Those are the big four. They were widely accepted from the very beginning of the church.

They are considered the most reliable accounts. Right. And when we examine these non-canonical gospels, we find they generally fall into two categories.

Categories? First, they're the apocryphal gospels. Oh, yeah. Those are like ancient novels, basically.

Like those sensationalized biographies. Yeah. You see those in the tabloids today? Entertaining, maybe? Maybe.

But not exactly reliable. Not historically accurate. And then you have the Gnostic gospels.

Right. Those are mainly collections of sayings. Attributed to Jesus.

But they're all mixed up with Gnostic beliefs. And Gnosticism was a complex philosophical and religious movement. That didn't come around until the second century.

So these gospels reflect ideas that developed much later than Jesus. Much later. The earliest of these Gnostic gospels is the Gospel of Thomas.

Yeah. But even that one. Even that one.

Has ideas that align with second-century Gnosticism. It's just not a dependable source. For understanding the historical Jesus.

And then there's that Secret Gospel of Mark. Oh, yeah. That's a wild goose chase.

Talk about a wild goose chase. A lot of scholars believe it's a modern forgery. Really? Based on the language and the content and the circumstances surrounding its discovery.

The story of its discovery. I know. It's like a mystery novel.

It's amazing how easily misinformation can spread. Even among academics. Right.

The Secret Gospel of Mark. Is a perfect example of why we need to be so careful. Yeah.

About what sources we trust. Right. You know, and be wary of those sensational claims.

So if you're seeking reliable information about Jesus. Stick to the four Gospels. The four Gospels.

That have stood the test of time. They're the most credible sources we have. And it's remarkable that these four Gospels emerged as the most trusted accounts.

From so many different narratives. It's a testament to their lasting power. Yeah.

And the profound impact they had on the early church. All right. Ready to jump into the deep end.

Let's do it. Miracles. Miracles.

Now, miracles, they can be kind of a stumbling block. Right. Especially for those of us raised with like a more skeptical Western mindset.

Yeah. But, you know, Dr. Keener points out that this skepticism, it wasn't always the dominant perspective. Oh, okay.

Even in the West. Okay. So this is where it gets interesting.

It does. Dr. Keener talks about David Friedrich Strauss. Okay.

A 19th-century scholar who was highly critical. Oh, yeah. Strauss of miracle accounts.

He argued that eyewitnesses would never claim to have seen miracles. He believed they were just myths, you know. Right.

Legends that developed over time. Like distorted versions of what actually happened. He couldn't grasp how people could genuinely believe they'd seen these extraordinary things.

But get this: Strauss had a friend named Edward Morica. Okay. Who was healed by a pastor.

Interesting. Known for his healing ministry. It's almost like a cosmic joke, isn't it? Right.

Strauss, the skeptic of miracles, had a friend who experienced what seemed to be miraculous healing. It's like, what are the odds? It must have really challenged his worldview. What's even more intriguing is that we have these firsthand accounts of this pastor's healing ministry from letters and journals.

Oh, wow. Written at the time. So it's not like these stories were, you know, embellished or exaggerated over generations.

Yeah, not at all. These firsthand accounts provide some pretty compelling evidence that people in the past really did claim to witness miracles, which challenges the idea that these beliefs were just a product of later legendary development. So if people were reporting miracles back then, what about today? Are there credible accounts of miracles happening in our modern scientific world? That's the big question.

Yeah. And Dr. Keener's research offers some pretty compelling evidence. He spent years collecting and documenting modern-day miracle accounts, many of which are supported by medical records.

Okay. Give us the goods. Okay.

What kind of cases are we talking about? We're talking about a wide range of cases. But let's start with a few that highlight the variety of these reported healings. Like there's the case of this nine-year-old girl who was healed of auditory nerve damage.

Wow. The audiologist who examined her the day before her healing was astonished. He said there was simply no natural explanation- for her to just suddenly have her hearing restored.

That's incredible. And then there's Lisa Larios, who suffered from a degenerative bone disease and was confined to a wheelchair after attending a healing service. She was completely healed.

Completely healed. Yeah. Her bones even showed signs of regeneration.

That's hard to just dismiss as like, you know- A psychosomatic response. Exactly. And then there's the case of Bruce Van Matta, who was crushed under a semi-truck- Oh my goodness.

And lost a significant portion of his small intestine. Oh wow. But after someone prayed for him, his small intestine miraculously grew.

His small intestine grew. To a length that allowed him to function normally. Wait.

Hold on. His intestine grew. It did.

And we're not just talking about anecdotal reports here. Dr. Keener has the radiology reports to prove it. Okay.

That's crazy. And there's more. There's more.

There's Carl Cockrell, a man in his 60s, completely healed from a severely fractured ankle. He even has two radiology reports to prove it. One showing the fracture, and then another taken days later showing no sign that it had ever been broken.

Okay. That's... My mind is officially blown. It's like something straight out of a sci-fi movie.

It really is. Are these cases just like isolated incidents, or is there a larger pattern here? That's what's so fascinating about Dr. Keener's research. He's not just presenting a few isolated cases.

He's- He's painting a picture. Painting a picture of a reality where miracles might be more common than we think. Than we think.

Even in our modern world. Even in our modern world. Now, let's talk about the most dramatic type of miracle.

Uh-oh. Here we go. Resurrection from the dead.

That's where things get really challenging- yeah. For our modern sensibilities. Right? Right.

But Dr. Keener, he doesn't shy away from this topic. He shares his own personal experiences of knowing people who've claimed to have witnessed resurrections. Wait.

He knows people. He does. He's seen this firsthand.

Yeah. He mentions knowing at least 10 people in his close circle who have witnessed resurrection. That's incredible.

And he shares some really impactful accounts, like the story of Jeff Markin, who was revived after being clinically dead for 40 minutes. 40 minutes. That's well beyond the point where our doctors would expect any chance of recovery.

Right. And Dr. Keener gets his information directly from the cardiologist who treated Markin. That's amazing.

He even has a picture of the man being baptized after his recovery. Wow. Talk about a second chance.

I know. Okay. Any other mind-blowing resurrection stories? Oh, there are plenty.

Okay. There's Dr. Sean George from Australia- okay. Who was clinically dead for 55 minutes before his heart suddenly restarted.

55 minutes. It's like the boundaries of what we consider possible are just being stretched. Yeah.

Right before our eyes. And these accounts aren't just limited to modern times. Right.

Dr. Keener delves into historical records as well. Oh, cool. He describes this account from John Wesley's journal where he describes praying for a man who had died and seeing him come back to life.

It's amazing how these stories, both from history and our present day, converge around this theme. Yeah. Of just miraculous possibility.

Right. And let's not forget the story of Deborah Watson's baby sister- who fell from a significant height, landing head first on a concrete floor. Oh my gosh.

They thought she was dead, but she was completely healed. It's like these accounts are whispering to us that there might be more to reality than meets the eye. Yeah.

Than what we can see and measure. There are so many more stories where these came from. Really? Yeah.

Dr. Keener shares this fascinating account of a government official in Northeast India. Okay. Whose son was dying.

Oh no. He had tried everything to save him because nothing worked. And in desperation, he prayed to the Christian God, and his son was miraculously restored to health.

Wow. And this event sparked a wave of conversions among the Nishi tribal people. It's incredible how these individual stories just ripple outwards.

Affecting families. Yeah. Impacting communities.

Wait, our regions. And even entire regions. Demonstrating the power of these experiences to transform lives.

Access communities. Communities. Yeah.

He also mentions a case from Mumbai where a Hindu boy named Vikram was found dead at the bottom of a pool. Oh my goodness. And after an hour and a half of being lifeless, he suddenly came back to life.

What did he say? Claiming that he had heard the name Jesus. Wow. Vikram's story, along with many others, was even covered in local newspapers? Yep.

Highlighting the public nature of some of these events. It's fascinating how these stories often transcend cultural and religious boundaries. There's this universal human fascination with the possibility of the impossible.

Right. He even talks about this woman from the Philippines who died of liver cancer. Oh wow.

But was brought back to life in the morgue. No way. After a pastor prayed for her.

In the morgue. In the morgue. And get this: her distended abdomen.

The symptom. The symptom of her advanced cancer returned to normal. I don't even have words.

It's like the laws of nature are being temporarily suspended. They really are. And these stories aren't limited to one geographic region or religious group.

He shares stories from Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo, Indonesia, and many other places. Suggesting that this is a global phenomenon. That crosses all these denominations and cultural boundaries.

I got these incredible accounts of resurrections. But what about those who were skeptical? Right. How does Dr. Keener address their concerns? Yeah.

Well, he acknowledges the skepticism, of course. And he raises this valid point. He argues that if all these cases were simply misdiagnosed deaths, then we'd be burying a statistically improbable number of people prematurely.

That's a good point. It's not like we're constantly hearing about people waking up in morgues. Right.

Or coming back to life after being pronounced dead. So if these accounts are accurate, it suggests that something extraordinary has happened. Right.

Precisely. He also discusses the experience of his colleague, Dr. Ayo Adewuya, whose son was stillborn. After 30 minutes of being lifeless, the baby was revived through prayer and went on to live a healthy life.

It's amazing. Even earning a Master of Science degree from the University of London. That's incredible.

It's like these stories are challenging us to expand our understanding of what's possible. And what's so striking is the consistency of these accounts. Yeah.

Both ancient and modern. Right. They come from all these different sources, cultures, time periods, yet they share this common thread.

The belief in the power of divine intervention. Yeah. To bring about these seemingly impossible outcomes.

It's like these stories are tapping into this deep-seated human longing for hope and transcendence. Like this belief that maybe, just maybe, there's more to life than what we can see and measure. It seems like these accounts of resurrections, both ancient and modern, are challenging us to re-examine.

What we think we know. Our understanding of what's possible. Do you think there's a connection between the strength of someone's faith and the likelihood of a miracle occurring? That's a really interesting question.

You know, while we can't draw any definite conclusions, it is fascinating that so many of these accounts seem to happen when individuals are really deep in prayer or experiencing profound spiritual moments. It's almost as if their faith acts as a catalyst. You know, opening them up to the potential for the extraordinary.

So it's not about manipulating the universe with our thoughts, but more about aligning ourselves with a greater power. That's a good way to put it, yeah. It's about surrendering to something beyond ourselves and trusting that the impossible might just become possible.

I like that. Dr. Keener shares this really striking example from Nigeria. A man named Timothy Olinade was involved in this horrific accident, found with no pulse, no heartbeat.

His blood baked onto his body. They presumed him dead. But eight hours later, he was discovered alive in the mortuary.

The surgeon who treated Olinade, who was a medical school professor, was just astounded. He declared it a miracle to his students, pointing out that not only did Olinade survive, but he had no brain damage. No brain damage.

It's hard to argue with a medical professional who witnessed it firsthand. That's right. Sounds like a story straight out of a movie.

It does. And these extraordinary events aren't confined to just faraway places. Right.

Dr. Keener shares a story from his wife's family in Cameroon. Okay. A young girl named Olive died and was pronounced dead at two different hospitals.

Oh, wow. Her heartbroken parents brought her to the church, desperate for a miracle. Of course.

And hours later, Olive was walking hand in hand with her parents, fully restored to life. Wow. These stories are so powerful.

They are. They remind us of the incredible strength of human belief. And the possibility of hope.

Yeah. Even in the face of tragedy. Do you think these kinds of events are becoming more common, or have they always been happening, but just not as widely reported? That's a tough one to answer definitively.

Right. However, with modern communication and technology, it's definitely easier for these stories to be shared globally. Right.

But we've seen accounts of miracles have been documented throughout history. That's true. Which suggests that maybe they've always been a part of human experience.

So what does all of this mean for us? Right. Like, where do we go from here with all this information? Well, you know, I think this deep dive has shown us that the Gospels are more than just ancient texts. They're- Yeah.

Windows into a world where the impossible might just be possible. And if we approach them with an open mind, you know, and a willingness to consider the possibility of miracles, our understanding of Jesus and his message might be really profoundly deepened. You know, when we started this deep dive, I thought it was just going to be about determining whether or not the Gospels are, like, historically accurate.

Right. But this has gone so far beyond that. It really has, hasn't it? Yeah.

We've explored, like, the intricacies of language, the power of eyewitness accounts, and, like, the mind-boggling nature of miracles. You know, it's challenged us to really broaden our perspective and consider that. Maybe, just maybe, there's more to reality than we currently understand.

And I think that's the real takeaway here. I think so, too. If we just allow ourselves to embrace the possibility of the extraordinary, the Gospels become more than just stories.

They become invitations. Yes, invitations to explore a world where faith and reality intersect. In ways we can only begin to imagine.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. Yeah, it's been a journey. Until next time, keep exploring.