

Title: Matthew: Miracles Part 2 and Exorcism

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Session 3

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener provides a comprehensive defense of supernatural phenomena, focusing on modern reports of miracles and exorcisms to support the credibility of biblical narratives. Keener challenges Enlightenment skepticism, particularly the circular reasoning of David Hume, by presenting extensive eyewitness testimonies and global statistics of supernatural occurrences. He further examines spirit possession and exorcism from both anthropological and personal perspectives, demonstrating that these are cross-cultural realities rather than mere psychological anomalies. Ultimately, Keener frames these supernatural events as "signs of the kingdom of God" that serve as foretastes of a restored world under Christ's authority.

Outline

I. Introduction to Session 3: Miracles, Part 2 and Exorcism

- **A. Overview of miracles:** Signs of God's faithfulness and love in the Gospels and today.
- **B. Connection to previous accounts:** Recalling the testimonies of Papa Besweswe and Julienne.

II. Eyewitness Testimonies of Contemporary Miracles

- **A. Resurrection report from Congo:** Antoinette Malombe (Madame Jacques—Dr. Keener's mother-in-law).
 1. Her two-year-old daughter, Therese (Dr. Keener's sister-in-law), stopped breathing for three hours after a snakebite in a remote village with no medical help.
 2. Therese was carried to family friend and evangelist Koko Ngomo Moise, who prayed for her.

3. The child revived with no subsequent brain damage, eventually graduating from seminary to serve in Congo.
- **B. Sarah Spear report:** Testimony of a raising from a Canadian nurse serving in Congo.

III. Nature Miracles: Objective and Non-Psychosomatic Signs

- **A. Historical nature miracle reports:**
 1. 17th-century reports associated with a Roman Catholic priest in Sri Lanka.
 2. 1800s reports associated with German Lutheran Pastor Blumhardt.
- **B. 20th-century Indonesian revival reports (1960s):**
 1. Investigation by Western researcher Kurt Koch, who witnessed opened blind eyes and water turned to wine.
 2. Eyewitness accounts of walking on water interviewed directly by Keener.
- **C. Papua New Guinea:** Testimony of miracles provided by Donna Urakua.
- **D. China nature miracle:** Watchman Nee and his evangelistic team.
 1. Occurred in a village boasting 200 years of rain-free festivals attributed to their local god.
 2. A team member predicted rain on the festival day; the team fasted and prayed.
 3. Torrential rain fell on both the scheduled and rescheduled festival days, breaking the idol and converting many villagers.
- **E. Nigeria nature miracle:** Dr. Emanuel Etopson and his father, Anana Etop (1975).
 1. Anana was building a home during the rainy season and lacked a roof.
 2. Mocked by locals, he declared that no rain would fall on the village until the roof was completed.
 3. Zero rain fell inside the village for four days (while raining heavily all around it), leading to widespread conversions.

IV. Philosophical Critique of Enlightenment Skepticism

- **A. David Hume's opposition to miracles:**

1. Defined miracles as "violations of natural law".
2. Earlier Enlightenment scientists (e.g., Isaac Newton and early Newtonians) believed in biblical miracles.
3. Hume's prescriptive view of natural law is undermined by modern physics, which views natural law descriptively.

- **B. Hume's argument as logically circular:**

1. Assumes "uniform human experience" excludes miracles as a starting premise.
2. Claims eyewitness testimony for miracles is always unreliable because miracles do not happen.
3. Example of Blaise Pascal's Jansenist niece: Healed of a medically documented eyesore upon contact with a thorn relic. Hume dismissed the account despite it meeting all his criteria for reliable testimony.

- **C. Ethnocentrism and racism in Hume's skepticism:**

1. Hume claimed only "ignorant and barbarous" peoples affirm miracles.
2. Documented racist views on non-white civilizations, dismissing black intellectual achievements (e.g., Jamaican poet Francis Williams).
3. Pro-slavery stance opposed by contemporary Christian abolitionists.

- **D. Rudolf Bultmann's mid-20th-century skepticism:**

1. Claimed modern technology (electric light, wireless) makes belief in spirits and miracles impossible.
2. Critique of Bultmann: Justo González notes Latino churches experience miracles frequently; Hua Yung notes spirits are a non-issue in Asia; Philip Jenkins highlights Global South supernaturalism.

V. Global Prevalence and Statistical Evidence of Divine Healing

- **A. Pew survey (2006 "Spirit and Power") across 10 countries:**

1. Estimated 200 million Pentecostals and charismatics claim to have witnessed divine healing.

2. 39% of non-Pentecostal/charismatic Christians in those countries also claim to have witnessed healing.
- **B. US Pew Forum survey (2008):** 34% of Americans claim to have experienced or witnessed divine healing.
 - **C. China Three-Self Church estimates (c. 2000):** 50% of new conversions over the prior 20 years were caused by faith healing (up to 90% in rural house churches).
 - **D. Chennai (Madras), India (1981):** 10% of non-Christians reported being healed through prayer in Jesus' name.
 - **E. Global evangelical growth connection:** J.P. Moreland notes up to 70% of rapid growth is connected with "signs and wonders".
 - **F. Historical consensus:** Third and fourth-century conversions of polytheists driven by healings/exorcisms; Korean Revival (1900s) Presbyterian study confirmed miracles.

VI. Theological Framework of Miracles

- **A. Epistemological limits of science:** Science deals with repeatable/replicable experiments, whereas history (and miracles by definition) deals with unique, unrepeatable events.
- **B. Miracles as "signs of the kingdom of God":** Temporary foretastes and promises of the ultimate restoration of the broken world.

VII. Exorcism and Spirit Possession

- **A. Biblical background: Matthew 8:28-34**
 1. Unclean tombs as a demonic haunt.
 2. Immediate recognition of Jesus' identity by supernatural beings (demons).
 3. Demons acknowledge future judgment: "Why have you come to torment us before the time?"
 4. Jesus casts out demons "with a word" as a foretaste of the kingdom (Matthew 8:16, 12:28).
- **B. Anthropological documentation of spirit possession:**

1. Erika Bourguignon (1970s): 74% of societies surveyed hold spirit possession beliefs.
2. Definition of spirit possession: Altered state of consciousness locally interpreted as evil spirit influence.
3. Traits: Altered neurophysiology, sudden dramatic changes in voice/personality, violent self-harming behavior.

- **C. Christian testimonies of exorcisms and spiritual warfare:**

1. Ethiopia: 74% of Christians claim to have witnessed exorcisms.
2. Paul Mokake (Congo): Sea spirits cast out of a writhing woman.
3. Mina K.C. (Nepal): Three sisters mute for three years instantly healed after exorcism.
4. Robin Snelger (South Africa): Academic psychologist freed from alien personality control after psychiatry failed.
5. Yusmarina Acosta Estevez (Cuba): Spiritist healed of severe heart/kidney malfunctions and converted.
6. Dr. Craig Keener's personal experiences: Intense spiritual attack followed by a three-story tree splitting and narrowly missing his family; brother-in-law (Emanuel Masunga) prayer for boys under an occult spell in Brazzaville.
7. Rodney Ragwan (South Africa): Occult practitioner sent a spirit; family prayed, heard loud footsteps, but the spirit was blocked.
8. Thandi Randa (Indonesia): 28 witch doctors converted and baptized in 2011.

- **D. Exorcism methodology:**

1. Contemporaries: Stinky roots, magic rings, and complex names/formulas.
2. Jesus: Cast out spirits simply "with a word" (Matthew 8:16).