

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 5, Miracles and Evangelism 6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's dive into a topic that, you know, makes a lot of people pretty uncomfortable. Modern miracles. And we're not talking about stories from 2,000 years ago; we're talking about credible eyewitness accounts from today.

Claims that really push back on our full understanding of what's even possible. So I want you to just picture this scene for a second. It's evening in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

A little girl named Olive. She's just six years old. Doctors have pronounced her dead.

Her parents are just shattered. They have nowhere else to go, so they take her body to their local church and lay her on a table in the pastor's office. The assistant pastor is there getting ready for a prayer meeting.

And as you can imagine, he's completely shocked. He tells the grieving parents, you know, you have to take the body away. But then the lead pastor, a man named André Mamadzadze, he feels like he needs to do something else.

And he just says, no, let me pray. And what happened next? Well, that's really at the heart of this whole discussion. Pastor André prayed.

And a little while later, he, the parents, and a very, very much alive Olive walked right into that prayer meeting. Just imagine the shock. And look, this isn't some ancient legend.

It's one of countless modern stories from eyewitnesses all across the globe. You know, the thing that makes this story so hard to just brush off is the detail and the witnesses. The account comes directly from Pastor André, and his credibility was vouched for by a local seminary dean.

They followed up five years later, and Olive was still totally healthy. And get this, it was all confirmed by that same assistant pastor who originally tried to turn them away. The source material we're drawing from is just packed with stories like Olive's.

From a stillborn maybe revived by a midwife in the Congo, to a well in Papua New Guinea suddenly filling with fresh water after prayer during a drought. So look, the question isn't if these stories are being told; they clearly are. The real question is, what are we supposed to do with them? For a lot of people, hearing these accounts, the immediate reaction is just, no way.

That's impossible. That kind of dismissal is super common, and it's not a new idea at all. In fact, probably the most famous, most influential argument against miracles comes straight from the world of philosophy.

And the guy behind it all is David Hume, a huge figure from the Enlightenment. Hume basically built what many still see as the ultimate intellectual case for never believing in a miracle claim, no matter how much evidence there seems to be. And his argument has really shaped skepticism for hundreds of years.

Okay, so the whole foundation of Hume's argument is this idea of natural law. For him, this wasn't just a description of how things usually work; no, he saw it as a totally rigid, unbreakable rulebook for the universe, based on all of human experience. So for Hume, a miracle isn't just something unusual; it's a violation of a law that literally cannot be violated.

It's like trying to break the law of gravity. His logic is actually pretty simple when you break it down. Step 1. A miracle, by its very definition, has to break a law of nature.

Step 2. We know what the laws of nature are because of our uniform human experience. For all of history, people who die stay dead. So step 3. It is always more probable that the person telling the story is either lying or mistaken than it is that an unbreakable law of nature has suddenly been broken.

For a really long time, Hume's argument was kind of seen as the final word on the matter. Case closed. But our source, Dr. Craig Keener, points out some major modern problems with it, arguing that Hume's logic isn't nearly as solid as it looks.

In fact, it might be built on some pretty shaky, and frankly, biased ideas. Right. So one of the biggest criticisms of Hume is that he didn't just dismiss the evidence; he dismissed the people giving it.

He actually wrote that miracle stories only come from, in his words, ignorant and barbarous nations. He basically implied that sophisticated people, you know, like him and his buddies in Europe, just don't have these kinds of experiences. Keener's response to that is blunt.

He calls it ethnocentric cultural bigotry. And this wasn't just some one-off comment from Hume. The source points out that Hume was a known supporter of slavery and had some seriously biased views about non-white people.

So his dismissal of testimony from these barbarous nations, well, it wasn't an accident. It fit a pattern. And this all leads to the biggest philosophical problem with Hume's whole argument.

It's circular. It's like a snake eating its own tail. He starts out by just assuming that uniform human experience proves miracles can't happen.

So what does he do when he's presented with millions of eyewitnesses whose experience isn't uniform? Well, he just dismisses them, because his starting assumption says they have to be wrong. He's literally using his conclusion to prove his own premise. So just how many people are we talking about here? I mean, how big is this group of witnesses that Hume's argument just forces you to ignore? Well, the modern data is kind of mind-blowing.

Get a load of this number. 200 million. According to a 2006 survey from the Pew Forum, a really well-respected research group, an estimated 200 million Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians in just 10 countries claim to have personally witnessed divine healing.

200 million people in only 10 countries. But here's where it gets even more interesting. You might think, okay, that's just those particular Christian groups.

But the same survey found that among other Christians, a massive 39 percent, almost four out of 10, also said they've witnessed divine healings. This suggests the experience is way more widespread than you might think. And to bring it right home, this is not just something happening over there in what Hume would call ignorant nations.

Here in the United States, a full 34 percent of Americans – that's more than a third of the entire country – claim to have personally witnessed or experienced a divine healing. So why does any of this matter? Well, beyond the whole philosophical debate, these experiences are being cited as one of the main drivers of religious change all over the world. For millions of people, this isn't some abstract idea.

It's a real-life event that changes everything for them. Take China, for instance. Our source cites estimates that within the official government-recognized church, about half of all new converts in recent decades came to that faith because of what they call faith-healing experiences.

And in some of the underground rural churches, that number is claimed to be as high as 90 percent. I mean, think about that. People are leaving behind centuries of family tradition because of these events.

And this isn't just happening in one country. The scholar J.P. Moreland suggests that as much as 70 percent of the explosive growth of certain Christian groups around the world is directly connected to these claims of supernatural events. It really seems to be a huge factor in modern faith.

Which brings us all the way back to the main question, right? David Hume built his entire argument on the foundation of a uniform human experience. But when you have hundreds of millions of people from every corner of the planet, including highly educated modern nations, all reporting an experience that completely contradicts his premise, can that premise really hold up? That's the challenge this data presents. And it leaves us with a really tough question.

Where exactly is the line between healthy skepticism and just ignoring the evidence?