

Title: Miracles and Evangelism

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Abstract

This lecture explores the relationship between miracles, evangelism, and church growth in the book of Acts and modern global contexts. Dr. Craig Keener presents documented modern accounts of resurrections from the dead and physical healings, particularly from the global South, to challenge Western philosophical objections pioneered by thinkers like David Hume and Rudolf Bultmann. He analyzes how the literary artistry of Luke-Acts uses cohesive parallels between Jesus, Peter, and Paul to highlight divine Providence. Finally, Keener outlines strategic principles of cross-cultural evangelism, relational networks, and the multiplication of disciples, demonstrating how signs and wonders serve to get people's attention for the gospel message.

Outline

I. Introduction and Contemporary Miracle Accounts (Focus on Africa/Congo)

A. Olive's Resurrection (Yaoundé, Cameroon)

1. Pronounced dead at a hospital, parents brought her corpse to church 8 hours later.
2. Pastor Andre Mamadze prayed for Olive while the assistant pastor started a prayer meeting.
3. Olive and her parents walked into the prayer meeting alive, and she remains well years later.

B. Stillborn Delivery (Congo Brazzaville War)

1. Midwife Jeanne Mabiala (trained by WHO) delivered a stillborn gray infant with umbilical cord wrapped around its neck.
2. Father went to build a coffin while Mama Jeanne and other women prayed.
3. The child revived and was named Milgrace (thousandfold grace).

C. Albert Bissouessoui's Account in Etoumbé, Congo

1. School inspector Albert Bissouessoui found crowds gathered around a girl dead for 8 hours.
2. Village had used animal sacrifices and traditional rituals unsuccessfully before bringing her to Bissouessoui's home to test 'the Christian God'.
3. Bissouessoui prayed for 30 minutes, and presented her back to the community alive, initiating a profound local spiritual impression.
4. Julienne Bissouessoui (Albert's wife) similarly prayed for a deceased child in his absence, who was subsequently raised.

D. Snakebite Healing of Therese (Keener's Sister-in-law)

1. Two-year-old Therese bitten by a snake, stopped breathing, and had no medical access.
2. Antoinette Malombe (mother) ran with her to a nearby village where Evangelist Coco N'Gomo Moise prayed.
3. Therese revived instantly, suffered no brain damage, and is now an adult in ministry.

E. Sarah Spear (Canadian Nurse)

1. Mother's uterus ruptured; child died. Mother survived by medical intervention.
2. Baby revived through prayer 20 minutes after medical staff had completely given up.

II. Nature Miracles and Environmental/Evangelistic Signs

A. Indonesian Revival of the 1960s (West Timor)

1. Extreme reports of blind eyes opened and water turned to wine during peak revival.
2. Verified firsthand by a skeptical Western researcher who put his academic reputation on the line to report these events.

B. Drought Miracle in Papua New Guinea

1. Ministry team led by Kandiwa visited a drought-stricken village where the well contained only dry mud.
2. After Kandiwa prayed overnight, the well filled completely with crystal-clear water without rain.

C. Watchman Nee's Rain Miracle in China

1. Local village boasted that their deity kept the festival day rainless for over 270 years.
2. An evangelism team member predicted rain; Watchman Nee's team prayed in response to mockery.
3. A torrential downpour broke the festival deity's statue on the scheduled day, and a rescheduled date was hit by another severe flood, prompting mass conversion.

D. Rain Miracle in Nigeria (1975)

1. Dr. Emanuel Topson's father (an ECWA church planter) was mocked by skeptics for trying to roof his home in the rainy season.

2. He declared it would not rain in the village until his roof was complete (four days).
3. Rain poured all around the village boundary for four days, leaving the village completely dry and leading to near-unanimous conversion.

III. Philosophical Critiques of Miracles

A. David Hume's Circular Argument on Miracles

1. Hume's central premises in 'Of Miracles':

- a. Miracles are violations of natural law.
- b. Natural law is absolute and cannot be violated based on uniform human experience.
- c. Therefore, miracles do not happen, and eyewitness testimony of miracles must be rejected.

2. Rebuttal to Hume's premise of natural law:

- a. Prescriptive approach to natural law is outdated; modern physics treats natural law descriptively.
- b. **Hume's argument is circular:** it presupposes uniform experience excluding miracles, then dismisses counter-evidence to preserve that uniformity.

B. Blaise Pascal's Niece

1. Organic, publicly known eyesore healed instantly at a Jansenist monastery.
2. Documented by the French Queen Mother's physician, yet dismissed by Hume's contemporaries due to anti-Jansenist theological politics.

C. Hume's Ethnocentric and Racist Biases

1. Hume claimed that only 'ignorant and barbarous nations' affirm miracles.
2. He actively defended slavery, held antisemitic views, and claimed people of color could not achieve high intellectual capacity.
3. **Williams Francis Case:** Hume dismissed this educated Jamaican poet, comparing him to a repeating parrot, showing how narrow his 'rational' circle was.

D. Rudolf Bultmann's Demythologization

1. Asserted that modern use of electric lights and telegraphs makes belief in the supernatural impossible.
2. Bultmann's view represents a regional Western academic bias that excludes the worldview of billions of people.

E. Global Rebuttal of Western Skepticism

1. **Justo Gonzalez (Latino Churches):** Miracles are not only possible but frequent.
2. **Hua Yung (Asian Bishop):** Spirits and the supernatural are not major conceptual hurdles in Asia.

3. Philip Jenkins (Oxford Press): The global South Christianity remains heavily focused on the supernatural.

IV. Widespread Nature of Modern Healing Claims

A. Pew Forum Survey (2006) Data

1. Surveyed Pentecostals and Charismatics across 10 diverse countries.
2. Approximately 200 million people within these groups claim to have witnessed divine healings.
3. 39% of non-charismatic Christians in those countries also claim to have witnessed healings.
4. 34% of all Americans (including non-Christians) claim to have witnessed or experienced supernatural healing.

B. China Church Growth (1980s-1990s)

1. Half of all new conversions (estimated by the China Christian Council) were motivated by faith healing experiences.
2. Rural house church networks estimate this figure to be as high as 90%.

C. India (Chennai/Madras Study)

1. 10% of non-Christians reported being healed through prayer in Jesus' name.
2. Pastor Israel's Baptist church grew from a handful of people to 600 primarily due to prayer for the sick.

D. Signs and Wonders in Mission Contexts

1. **J.P. Moreland:** Up to 70% of global evangelical growth is connected with signs and wonders.
2. **Signs as strategic attention-getters:** Miracles occur most frequently in unevangelized, groundbreaking frontier areas to display God's love and message.
3. **Early Church Parallel:** Ramsey MacMullen (Yale) notes that healings and exorcisms were the leading cause of conversion to Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries.
4. **1907 Korean Revival:** Korean Presbyterian healings converted skeptical Western missionaries who had been trained to deny miracles.

V. Unity and Literary Parallel Structure of Luke-Acts

A. Gabriel's Announcements in Luke 1

1. Parallels and comparisons (rhetorical syncrisis) between Gabriel's announcements to Zechariah and Mary.
2. Both are troubled, told not to fear, given the child's name (John and Jesus), told the child will be great and filled with the Spirit.

3. Zechariah (aged priest, great temple) is muted for unbelief; Mary (young girl, humble Nazareth) is praised for faith, showing a 'good' vs 'better' comparison.

B. Gospel and Acts Parallel Structures

1. **Holy Spirit:** Descends on Jesus (Luke 3) and on the Church (Acts 2).
2. **Inaugural Speeches:** Jesus (Luke 4), Peter (Acts 2), Paul (Acts 13).
3. **Miraculous Power:** Jesus' garment (Luke 8), Peter's shadow (Acts 5), Paul's aprons/sweatbands (Acts 19).
4. **Miracles:** Healing of a paralyzed person, raising of the dead, healing of a centurion's servant/companion, raising of a widow's son.
5. **Journeys:** Jesus' journey to Jerusalem paralleled with Paul's journey to Rome.
6. **Arraignments:** Four trials of Jesus paralleled with four trials of Paul (both declared innocent by Roman authorities).
7. **Sanhedrin and Martyrdom:** Stephen's announcement of the Son of Man and prayer of forgiveness matches Jesus' crucifixion scenes.
8. **Sanhedrin Pharisees:** Gamaliel defends Peter (Acts 5) and Pharisees defend Paul (Acts 23) against Sadducees, mirroring positive Sanhedrin members like Joseph of Arimathea.

C. Peter-Paul Parallels in Acts

1. Both confront false prophets, are imprisoned at Jewish festivals, and are miraculously released.
2. Both reject human worship (Peter with Cornelius, Paul and Barnabas tearing their clothes at Lystra, Paul at Malta).
3. Contrast with Herod Agrippa I, who accepts worship and is struck dead by an angel (Acts 12).

VI. Evangelism, Church Planting, and Multiplication

A. The Role of Prayer in Luke-Acts

1. Prayer consistently precedes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost, Samaria, Paul's conversion, Cornelius).
2. **Believers pray for boldness and signs (Acts 4:30)**, showing signs are an answer to prayer.

B. Character of the Evangelist (Paul)

1. **Serves without financial covetousness (Acts 20:33)**, silver and gold have we none).
2. Cares deeply for individual souls with tears and hard labor, providing a counter to ancient charlatans.

C. Discipleship Multiplication vs. Addition

1. Evangelism (Philip's addition) vs. Church Planting and Discipleship (Paul's multiplication).
2. **Mathematical model of discipling leaders:** discipling two people a year who then disciple others leads to over 11 million disciples by year 15, and 16 billion by year 22.

3. Acts shows realistic barriers (persecution, strife), but emphasizes the necessity of follow-up and establishing elders (Acts 14:22).

D. Strategy of Contextualization

1. Preaching to Synagogues: Uses scripture and direct messianic proofs.

2. Preaching to Farmers (Acts 14): Connects with natural seasons, rain, and harvest without overt scripture references.

3. Preaching to Philosophers (Acts 17): Uses Hellenistic poetry and philosophy to introduce the true monotheistic God.

4. Strategic longevity: Paul stays for extended periods (18 months in Corinth, 2.5 years in Ephesus) to build communal stability.

5. Utilizing forums: Adapting to local cultural spaces, including public streets, synagogues, and the School of Tyrannus (treated as a philosophical school).