

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 3, Miracles and Exorcism 6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, today we're going to tackle a topic that, you know, really pushes up against the edges of our modern scientific worldview. And that topic is miracles. But look, this isn't just going to be a conversation about belief; we're going to look at this massive global phenomenon of eyewitness testimony that frankly forces us to ask some really tough questions about what we think is real.

So let's just dive in and explore the evidence that challenges the very limits of reality as we understand it. To really get a feel for what we're talking about, let's not start with some dry statistic. Let's start with a story, a really personal account from the Congo, documented by the scholar Craig Keener, that just seems to defy any simple medical explanation.

I mean, can you just imagine the sheer terror in those words? You've got a mother, Antoinette Malombe, who finds her little two-year-old daughter, Therese, completely lifeless after a snake bite. They're in a remote village. There's no doctor.

There's no hospital. There's basically no hope. Okay, so just look at this timeline.

The mother straps her child to her back and literally runs for three hours to find help. Medically speaking, I mean, three hours without breathing? That's an eternity. Then after an evangelist prays for her, Therese starts breathing again.

And not only does she survive, but she also grows up with zero brain damage and eventually graduates from seminary. The real question this story makes you ask is, how do you even begin to process something like that? For a lot of us, stories like that just hit a wall, a big intellectual wall that was built in large part by this 18th-century philosopher David Hume. His argument against miracles pretty much became the cornerstone of modern skepticism.

See, for Hume, his entire case rested on this one definition. He saw the laws of nature, you know, things like gravity, as these fixed, totally unbreakable rules. So a miracle, by his definition, would have to break those rules, and he basically argued that's impossible.

Period. And right here, this is the core tension. Hume's whole argument was that because, you know, uniform human experience shows us that dead people stay dead and that gravity always works, any testimony that says otherwise has to be false.

But that just begs a huge question, right? What if human experience isn't actually uniform? What happens when the testimony against that idea becomes just too massive to ignore? Yeah, and critics have pointed out that Hume's logic is, well, it's kind of circular. He basically says we can't believe the witnesses because miracles are impossible. And how do we know they're impossible? Well, because we've never accepted any witnesses.

So you see the loop, right? He starts by assuming the very thing he's trying to prove. So with that in mind, let's put Hume's big idea to the test. Is human experience really so uniform when it comes to miracles? Well, the data from our modern world presents a pretty staggering challenge to that notion.

Just take a look at this number: a 2006 Pew survey found that in just 10 countries, 10, an estimated 200 million Pentecostal and charismatic Christians claim to have personally witnessed a divine healing. Two hundred million. That number alone makes it really, really hard to argue that uniform human experience just excludes miracles.

And what's really striking is that this isn't just one niche group, you know? The same survey found that a huge chunk of other Christians- we're talking nearly 40% of them also report witnessing divine healings. This whole experience, or at least the belief in it, is way more mainstream than you might think. And here's the absolute key takeaway.

The point isn't whether you believe every single one of these 200 million-plus claims is a legit miracle. The point is that with that sheer volume of testimony, you just can't start from Hume's assumption that no credible person ever experiences these things. His whole starting point is just, well, it's flawed.

Okay, so let's shift gears to a topic that's maybe even more challenging for the modern mind. Spirit possession. You know, claims of divine healing might push our boundaries, but this next thing, this often breaks them completely.

But for a second, let's put theology on the shelf and just look at this through the lens of secular anthropology. So get this: anthropological studies have found that a belief in spirit possession exists in about 74% of societies all around the world. So something that someone in the West might just dismiss as a fringe superstition is actually the global norm.

It's actually the denial of it that's the statistical outlier. And this is where it gets really weird. Anthropologists, who usually try to explain this stuff as an altered state of consciousness, consistently document similar behaviors across totally disconnected cultures.

We're talking about radical personality and voice changes, people suddenly knowing things they could not possibly have learned, and even eyewitness reports of weird physical stuff happening in the room. And this isn't just some ancient belief either. The famous psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, after looking into a whole bunch of cases that he thought were psychological, said he came across two that just defied any medical or psychiatric explanation he had.

For him, the evidence pointed to something else entirely. So if these events, whether we're talking about healings or exorcisms, are reported so widely, what's the supposed meaning of it all within that worldview? It turns out it's not really about random displays of power. From the theological perspective we're looking at, these events are seen as signs of the kingdom of God.

They aren't meant to prove anything like a science experiment. The idea is that they're a foretaste, like a little sample of a future hope, where all the suffering and brokenness in the world is healed for good. They're basically pointers to a different kind of reality.

Which really, it just leaves us with one final question to think about. When you're confronted with hundreds of millions of eyewitnesses, and phenomena that even secular researchers find kind of puzzling, you just have to wonder: is it possible that our modern Western definition of reality has been drawn just a little too narrowly?