**Can We Disprove Miracles? – By Thailer Jimerson**

**Mistrust of Miraculous**

Dr. Timothy Keller reports that the “Scientific mistrust of the Bible began with the Enlightenment belief that miracles cannot be reconciled to a modern, rational view of the world.” Or, to put it directly, Van Harvey**,** professor at Stanford University, states: “Science has proven that there is no such thing as miracles.”

A very common sentiment encountered in any array of media or communication is that belief in miracles was a primitive way of trying to understand unexplainable phenomena, and with that assumption modernism plows full steam ahead with psychological explanations, leaving the supernatural behind. And, honestly, I can understand the mistrust of the term “miracle” since such a term has been severely abused, e.g., when the religious get into the business of calling everything a miracle that can easily be accounted for by natural (and repeatable) causes. Dr. Francis Collins makes the great point that the blooming of a flower is not a miracle so much as it is plant biology.

We look at a plane floating through the air at enormous speed – how in the world could nearly 50 tons of metal seemingly fly against the laws of gravity? Isn’t metal heavier than air? Surely this must be a miracle! But we know better. We know that this can easily be explained by aerodynamics, jet propulsion – by science.

There’s a basic assumption in the skeptical world that could be summarized with the following syllogism: “Science has disproven miracles. Christianity is based in a large part on the occurrence of miracles [e.g., incarnation, resurrection, etc.], therefore science has disproven Christianity.” It seems logical on the surface. From this perspective it’s very easy to dismiss Christian claims, but I don’t think we’re being fair. I want to ask you to dig deeper, and just, for a moment, give further thought to this. Ask the question: Can a person be scientifically sophisticated (that is, be reasonable) and still believe in the possibility of miracles? Can one reasonably stand with nuclear physicist Hugh Siefken who states, “My faith can be summed up in this one [alleged] paradox: I believe in science, and I believe in God….I plan to continue testifying to both.”

**Miracles or Magic?**

First, let’s just get a working definition so that we’re standing on common ground here: **Miracle**: “an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause.”

Now, before we move any further we have to do some work differentiating between what the Bible recognizes to be a miracle versus just plain magic, i.e. faux-miracle, if you will. Because we often confuse the two today, mistaking one for the other. Not everything that happens in the so-called “Christian” world or media is biblical – like Benny Hinn and some of these faith-healers that have been exposed as charlatans. I think we’ve been rightly offended by such people, but, unfortunately, have thrown the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. David Marshall writes in his book *Jesus and the Religions of Man*, that miracles are different than magic in 5 ways: 1) Miracles invite verification, while magic instead flaunts its irrational character; 2) Miracles are practical (biblically people are relieved of suffering), whereas magic is show – levitation, bleeding statues, etc; 3) Miracles enhance human dignity, while magic undermines it – e.g. making people bark like dogs and the like; 4) Miracles point to God (we see often in the bible a miracle was given to confirm God’s message), but magic points to someone else; 5) Miracles often come as requests, whereas magic often makes demands.

So, the point is, don’t make the mistake of either believing everything you hear/see to be a miracle OR dismissing the Christian faith because they claim these “ludicrous acts of magic from charlatans” – we don’t. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches that miracles of a biblical nature (e.g. where a piece of cloth taken from the apostle Paul was said to be able to heal people) by and large have ceased to be possible with the death of the apostles themselves, since the ability to perform these acts were transferred through the laying on of their hands. *(Of course, I’m not saying it is not within God’s power to do as he pleases, for example, in answer to prayer – he can, and he will.)*

Miracles are not, to quote Dr. Francis Collins, “supernatural acts of a capricious magician, simply designed to amaze.” Furthermore, I want to share with you a fair quote from theoretical physicist and believer John Polkinghorneon the correct way to view miracles, “Miracles are not to be interpreted as divine acts against the laws of nature (for those laws are themselves expressions of God’s will) but as more profound revelations of the character of the divine relationship to creation. To be credible, miracles must convey a deeper understanding than could have been obtained without them.” *And this is exactly what we see in the Bible*.

**Science Cannot Disprove Biblical Miracles**

Alright, so now putting all that aside, I don’t believe that science can really disprove miracles. It can prove a natural cause behind an alleged miracle. But it can’t disprove that a legitimate miracle occurred; it isn’t designed to.

Dr. Timothy Keller writes: “It is one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and cannot speak to any others. It is quite another to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist,” i.e., you overstep your bounds when you say that miracles cannot occur.

Yes, if something amazing happens (e.g. video of pepper repelled by dish soap), a scientist must always assume a natural cause behind an event. *But that’s because natural causes are the only kind your methodology can address*. “There would be no experimental model for testing the statement: ‘No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible,’” writes Keller.

Science is only designed to study the natural world and natural causes – it can’t transcend to study the supernatural, not because the supernatural doesn’t exist but because it’s not repeatable. To say “Every event that occurs in the natural world, must have a natural cause – and cancels out every supernatural cause” is like, as **Alvin** **Plantinga** illustrates, “the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys only under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there, [or] insist that because the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light.”

Bottom-line: we’re actually making a ***category*** ***error***. Biblical miracles are unique experiences. They are not reproducible in a lab. They don’t fit under the scientific method. And that’s because they’re in an altogether different category.

*Biblical miracles lie in the province of history, not science.*

**Schedule of Messages:**

February 3rd - Jesus: The Exorcist, Mark 1.21-28

February 10th – Who Can Forgive Sins? Mark 2.1-12

February 17th – Why Does He Eat With Sinners? Mark 2.13-22

February 24th – Why Does He Break the Sabbath? Mark 2.23 – 3.6

**Memory Verse:**

7  I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;

today I have begotten you.

8  Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,

and the ends of the earth your possession.

(**Psalm 2.7-8**)