

Session #2: Apologetic Matters

Session #1 Revisited

controversy

clarifications

fideism - & a sub-set = "pre-suppositionalism" (Cornelius Van Til, Timothy Keller)

Session Introduction

Basics – Christ

Manner – questions & statements

Content – whole-part-whole (Wittgenstein)

1. The Existence of God

a. classical apologetics – theism (Schaeffer)

b. arguments for – deontological, cosmological,

c. proofs & evidences (CS Lewis – cumulative)

2. Miracles & modern science

3. The reliability of the Bible

4. Theodicy (God & suffering / God & evil)

Miracles

Miracles are an integral part of the story of Jesus. Taking just the first nine chapters of Luke (which we've been reading), we are told not only about the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, but the numerous exorcisms that he performs, the dramatic healings of lepers and paralytics, and even the raising of two dead children back to life. Add to this the stilling of the storm (in chapter 8) and the feeding of the five thousand (in chapter 9), and you have a picture of someone with extraordinary power.

There is little doubt, historically speaking, that Jesus was famous as a miracle worker. The many stories of his miracles are spread throughout the four Gospels, and even Josephus, the Jewish historian, records that Jesus was known for his 'surprising feats'.

We will come back to consider why Jesus' miracles are important, and what they mean, but first we need to deal with a more basic issue. Can we, as modern people, believe that these miracles really happened? Can we accept that the laws of nature were broken or suspended so that Jesus could walk on water, or feed thousands of people with a single cut lunch? These stories seem so strange to us, so outside our experience, that we almost instinctively doubt their credibility.

Can we believe in miracles? And if we can't, can we believe in Jesus?

Before we answer these questions, there is a more basic problem to solve.

1. What are 'miracles'?

The first step towards understanding the miracles of Jesus (and the Bible generally) is to understand what Luke and the other Bible writers thought a 'miracle' was. This is because they thought about the whole subject very differently from most 20th century people.

How modern people regard miracles

For us, a 'miracle' is where the normal laws of nature are supposedly suspended or broken, indicating that some 'god' or supernatural force has been active. Someone might be 'miraculously' healed of cancer, for instance, and since there is no other explanation available, we shake our heads and say "Well, maybe there is a God after all".

This way of viewing miracles stems from how 20th century Western people think about the world in general. Most of us assume that the world is like a giant complex machine or organism, with millions of interlocking parts. Science has discovered how many of these parts work, and has formulated laws and principles by which we can predict how 'the machine' will operate. According to this way of thinking, the world runs along under its own steam. If there is a 'God', then he might have been responsible for designing the world, and even setting it running, but he isn't involved in its day-to-day operations. In fact, the only way you know he exists is when he puts his fingers into the machine and dabbles with it, producing what we call a 'miracle'.

How the Bible regards miracles

In many respects, people in biblical times thought very differently from us, not only about miracles, but about the world in general. But this is not to say that they thought completely differently.

They knew, for example, that the world was a regular and orderly place. Like us, they noticed the patterns of nature—day and night, the seasons, and the rain. They knew that if you dropped something, it fell, and that if you stood on water, you would sink. They understood that the world operated according to certain patterns and you could make the most of these in order to live successfully—for example, if you planted your seed at the right time of year, in the right kind of soil, under the right weather conditions, you could be fairly certain of getting a good crop.

However, unlike us, they regarded all this as being the work of God. They saw the world not as an independently operating machine, but as something that God had made and continued to sustain and uphold. It was God who caused the sun to rise, the rain to fall and the seasons to come and go. They knew God to be the sovereign ruler of all things, who kept everything going in his great power and wisdom. And precisely because he was in charge of everything, God could change his normal way of doing things and act in an amazing or unusual way, if it suited him.

This way of thinking about the world is often called 'theism'. According to biblical theism, a miracle is not God sticking his finger into the works of the machine so as to prove his existence. It is simply God working outside his normal regular patterns.

This, then, was what the writers of the Bible (like Luke) thought a 'miracle' was—some work of God that was surprising or noteworthy or unusual, and which was performed for some important reason.

2. The modern objection to miracles

With this background in mind, it is not difficult to see that many of the objections that people have to the miracles of the Bible are either not very relevant or not very clever.

Some have argued, for example, that because 1st century people were primitive and did not understand science, they were prepared to believe anything. However, this is hardly reasonable. 1st century people, like us, knew that dead people stayed dead. That was their experience, as it is ours. That is why they mourned, as we do. They also knew that people who had been paralytics for 30 years didn't suddenly get up and start walking. And this is precisely why they called it a 'miracle' or a 'wonder' when Jesus raised the dead girl to life, or healed the paralytic. They believed that the God who ruled the world was well able to do such things, and regarded it as an amazing and exciting occurrence when he did so.

Another argument against miracles is that it is so unlikely that a genuine miracle would ever happen that we should dismiss all claims of miracles as being inherently unreliable. According to this argument, it is much more likely that the people involved

were mistaken or deceived or were themselves deceivers—and so we should not trust their testimony. This approach has a number of problems, not the least of which is that it rules out testimony about all unusual or extraordinary events. Take for example the following occurrences:

- In Greenberry Hill, London, in 1641, three men were hanged for the murder of a local magistrate. By pure coincidence, their surnames were Green, Berry and Hill.
- In the mid-1700s, a Russian peasant named Feodor Vassileyev gave birth to 69 children. In 27 separate pregnancies, she had 16 pairs of twins, seven sets of triplets, and four sets of quadruplets.
- In 1664, 1785 and 1860, three separate passenger ferries sank while crossing the Menai straight off North Wales. Amazingly, each disaster occurred on December 5th. More bizarre than this, however, is that on all three occasions there was only one survivor, and in each case his name was Hugh Williams.

Each of these events is strange, unusual, and highly unlikely. Yet there is excellent historical evidence that they all, in fact, occurred. Extraordinary things do occur. That they don't occur very often is what makes them extraordinary!

To say, therefore, that the miracles attributed to Jesus could not have happened, simply because they are beyond our own normal experience, is to prejudge the question entirely. It is to make up our minds without looking at the evidence. It is like someone who lives in the tropics refusing to believe in the possibility of such a thing as ice, simply because they have never seen or touched it.

If theism is true, then the occurrence of miracles is quite reasonable. Miracles are simply the extraordinary (as opposed to the ordinary) workings of the God who made the world and continues to rule it. What is more, if Jesus is God's representative—if he speaks and acts with all the power and authority of God—then it would seem quite consistent for him to be able to perform what we could call 'miraculous' feats. If theism, and Christianity, is true, then the miracles recorded of Jesus are almost to be expected.

The first thing to work out, then, is whether theism (and Christianity) is true. And that is one of the purposes of the *Simply Christianity* course.

One final thing needs to be said about the miracles of Jesus.

3. The meaning of the miracles

We have already said that for Luke (and the other Bible writers) miracles were not some proof of God's existence. They already knew that God existed and was powerfully in control of the world. Miracles were simply God acting in a striking or amazing way to achieve a particular purpose. In other words, the important thing about the miracles of Jesus is not so much that they happened, *but what they signified or meant*.

We get an important clue to the meaning of Jesus' miracles from this episode in

Luke, chapter 7:

The men came to Jesus and said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the Coming One or should we wait for another?'" At that particular time, Jesus healed many people from illnesses and diseases and evil spirits, and he gave many blind people back their sight. He answered the men, "Go back and tell John what you see and hear: the blind see, the crippled walk, and the lepers are being cleansed; the deaf hear, the dead are being raised, and the poor are hearing the great news. And blessed is the one who does not stumble because of me."

(Luke 7:20-23).

In response to John's enquiry about whether he really was 'the one', Jesus sends back the report of all the miracles he has been doing (as well as his preaching of the good news). Clearly, Jesus thinks this is all the answer John should need. And in light of the Old Testament, it was. John, like Simeon and Anna (of Luke Chapter 2) and many of the Israelites of his time, was looking forward to the Messiah, the One who would come in God's name as God's ruler, to bring redemption and victory for Israel. The Old Testament prophets had promised that this would happen in passages like this one:

Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. *(Isaiah 35:4-6).*

Or the passage from Isaiah that Jesus quoted in the synagogue in Nazareth:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to announce great news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim release for prisoners, and sight once more for the blind, to send the oppressed away free; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". *(Luke 4:18-19 quoting Isaiah 61:1-2).*

The miracles that Jesus performed were the signs of the Messiah. They were the powerful indication that God had fulfilled his ancient promises, that the time had come, and that 'the One' that Israel had waited so long for had arrived.

Extra Information on 'Miracles' compiled by Tony Payne.

For further reading:

Kirsten Birkett, *Unnatural Enemies: an introduction to Science and Christianity.*
(Matthias Media, 1997)

principal Greek and Roman writers whose works have come down to us, of Sophocles, of Thucydides, of Cicero, of Virgil; yet our knowledge of their writings depends on a mere handful of manuscripts, whereas the manuscripts of the New Testament are counted by hundreds, and even thousands." 25/23

Benjamin Warfield said, "If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must . . . declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied—a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words—such has been the providence of God in preserving for His Church in each and every age a competently exact text of the Scriptures, that not only is the New Testament unrivalled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use, but also in the abundance of testimony which has come down to us for castigating its comparatively infrequent blemishes." 54/12f.

The editors of the Revised Standard Version say that: "It will be obvious to the careful reader that still in 1946, as in 1881 and 1901, no doctrine of the Christian faith has been affected by the revision, for the simple reason that, out of the thousands of variant readings in the manuscripts, none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine." 16/42

Burnett H. Streeter believes that because of the great quantity of textual material for the New Testament "the degree of security that . . . the text has been handed down to us in a reliable form is prima facie very high." 46/33

Frederic G. Kenyon continues in *The Story of the Bible* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.): "It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries (of manuscripts) and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God." 26/113

Millar Burrows of Yale (*What Mean These Stones?* Meridian Books, 1956) says: "Another result of comparing New Testament Greek with the language of the papyri is an increase of confidence in the accurate transmission of the text of the New Testament itself." 68/52

Burrows continues that the texts "have been transmitted with remarkable fidelity, so that there need be no doubt whatever regarding the teaching conveyed by them." 68/2

Howard Vos (*Can I Trust My Bible*, Moody Press, 1963) declares that: "From the standpoint of literary evidence the only logical conclusion is that the case for the reliability of the New Testament is infinitely stronger than that for any other record of antiquity." 79/176

2C. MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. T. Robertson, the author of the most comprehensive grammar of New Testament Greek, wrote, "There are some 8,000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate and at least 1,000 for the other early versions. Add over 4,000 [Bruce Metzger says we now have close to 5,000. 33/36] Greek manuscripts and we have 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. Besides all this, much of the New Testament can be reproduced from the quotations of the early Christian writers." 39/29

Bruce Metzger says that: "Of the approximately 5,000 Greek manuscripts . . . they contain all or part of the New Testament" 33/36

John Warwick Montgomery says that, "to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament." 34/29

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, who was the director and principal librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about MSS, says, ". . . besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors, and this time the difference is clear gain. In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say from 250 to 300 years later.

"This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death." 24/4

Kenyon continues in *The Bible and Archaeology*: "The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." 56/288

3C. MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT COMPARED WITH OTHER AUTHORS AND WORKS OF ANTIQUITY

The great scholar *F. F. Bruce* in *The New Testament Documents* vividly pictures the comparison between the New Testament and ancient historical writings:

"Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's Gallic War (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C. —A.D. 17), only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than 20 MSS of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III-VI, is as old as the fourth century. Of the 14 books of the Histories of Tacitus (c. A.D. 100) only four and a half survive; of the 16 books of his Annals, 10 survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two MSS, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.

"The extant MSS of his minor works (*Dialogus de Oratoribus*, *Agricola*, *Germania*) all descend from a codex of the tenth century. The History of Thucydides (c. 460—400 B.C.) is known to us from eight MSS, the earliest belonging to c. A.D. 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (B.C. 488-428). Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Her-

odotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals." 7/16f.

The following is taken from F. W. Hall, "MS Authorities for the Text of the Chief Classical Writers," *Companion to Classical Text* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913).

AUTHOR	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	59 B.C.-A.D. 17			20
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	7
Tacitus (<i>Annals</i>)	100 A.D.	1,100 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	20 (-)
also minor works	100 A.D.	1,000 A.D.	900 yrs.	1
Pliny the Younger (<i>History</i>)	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs.	7
Thucydides (<i>History</i>)	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	8
Suetonius (<i>De Vita Caesarum</i>)	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs.	8
Herodotus (<i>History</i>)	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	8
Horace			900 yrs.	
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1,000 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	100
Lucretius	Died 55 or 53 B.C.		1,100 yrs.	2
Catullus	54 B.C.	1,550 A.D.	1,600 yrs.	3
Euripedes	480-406 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,500 yrs.	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	200*
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	5†
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	10

*All from one copy.
†Of any one work.

4C. CHRONOLOGY OF NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPT AUTHORITY

Dating Procedure: Some of the factors that help determine the age of a MSS are: 14/242-46

1. Materials
2. Letter size and form
3. Punctuation
4. Text divisions
5. Ornamentation
6. The color of the ink
7. The texture and color of parchment

John Ryland MSS (130 A.D.) is located in The John Ryland Library of Manchester, England (oldest fragment of the N. T.). "Because of its early date and location (Egypt), some distance from the traditional place of composition (Asia Minor), this portion of the gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date of the composition of the gospel about the end of the 1st century." 14/268

Bruce Metzger speaks of defunct criticism: "Had this little fragment been known during the middle of the past century, that school of New Testament

CAN I TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT?

There are several questions in this question.

- Q: Were the documents written by eyewitnesses?
A: Some were, some weren't.
- Q: Were they in circulation in the lifetime of eyewitnesses?
A: Yes.
- Q: Do we have independent records of Jesus?
A: Yes. Matthew, Mark and Luke are independent from John.
- Q: Have they been transmitted accurately?
A: Yes.
- Q: Can we ever get accurate information from the past?
A: Yes.
- Q: Are there non-Christian historians who tell us about Jesus?
A: Yes.

For further reading:

"Is the New Testament History" Paul Barnett
(Hodder & Stoughton)

HOW WILL YOU SAY IT?

Sometimes when we are asked to answer questions there is more than one answer that could be given. In making a choice we need to think, "Does it..."

- ...bring glory to God?" The answer should be truthful and loving. If God's glory is lost on the journey you won't have it when you arrive. Sometimes telling the truth will mean you'll have to say, "I don't know the answer to that. I will have to find out."
- ...lead towards the gospel?" The answer to a question, no matter how accurate it is, will not of itself lead a person to Christ. The gospel does that. An answer which easily leads to that gospel then it is the best one to choose.
- ...sound believable?" Remember we are only talking about a choice of ways of presenting the truth. If you have no choice then give the answer whether the person can believe it or not.
- ...REALLY answer the question?" Sometimes when people ask questions they have another question behind the one they have stated. If you suspect this it is wise to check it out, or even to directly answer the question behind the question.

SOME BOOKS TO READ ...

"A FRESH START"

JOHN CHAPMAN

"KNOW AND TELL THE GOSPEL"

JOHN CHAPMAN

"WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?"

JOHN CHAPMAN

"MERE CHRISTIANITY"

C.S. LEWIS

"HOW TO GIVE AWAY YOUR FAITH"

PAUL E. LITTLE

"IS THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY?"

PAUL BARNETT

"SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?"

FRITZ RIDENOUR

"THE CASE AGAINST CHRIST"

JOHN YOUNG

"A REASONABLE FAITH"

TONY CAMPOLO

**"THE MASTER PLAN OF
EVANGELISM"**

ROBERT E. COLEMAN

"YOU MUST BE JOKING"

MICHAEL GREEN

... AND YOUR BIBLE!

WHAT DO I SAY WHEN ...

HERE ARE SOME BRIEF
OUTLINES OF WHAT YOU
CAN SAY AND HOW YOU
CAN SAY IT WHEN
SOMEONE SUDDENLY
ASKS YOU ONE OF THOSE
CURLY BUT VITAL
QUESTIONS ABOUT
CHRISTIANITY

**AND YOUR MIND GOES
BLANK ...**

TRY THEM OUT



WHAT DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE?

GOD...

This is God's world. He made it. God has declared Jesus, His Son, to be the Ruler of this world. Jesus has the right to run our lives (Philippians 2:9 & 11).

MAN'KIND...

Everyone has rebelled against the right of Jesus to run their lives. Some are in open hostility, some just couldn't care less. No matter how it is displayed the rebellion is real (Romans 3:12).

GOD...

God's response to this is what you'd expect - He calls on us to stop rebelling and to let Jesus run our lives (Acts 17:30).

WHAT IF YOU DO?...

What would happen if a person stopped this rebellion and asked God for forgiveness? That person would be treated as if he had never rebelled. God will forgive us because Jesus has died for us (John 3:36).

WHAT IF YOU WON'T?...

If a person will not stop rebelling then that person will be overthrown in the end and brought to judgement because Jesus really is in charge (John 3:36).

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

This is the hardest of all questions to answer because we don't know what the answer is. It is tied up with the bigger question "Why did God allow evil into His world?" We do, however, have some things to say which will be helpful.

- Some suffering is caused directly through our sinfulness. A drunken driver may cause an accident and the suffering that results is because of his irresponsibility.
- But some suffering is not the result of any particular person's sin (contrast "fallen" creation (Romans 8:18-25)).
- God uses suffering to strengthen His children (Romans 5:3-5).
- Jesus suffered so we could be forgiven (1 Peter 2:24). There will be no suffering in the "new creation", so make sure you don't miss out on it! (Revelation 21:4)

For further reading:

"How to Give Away Your Faith"

Paul E Little (IVP) Chapter 5.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

- When God judges the world He will be absolutely fair in His judgments (Psalm 96:13).
- Justice is good if you have done the right thing. It isn't so good if you haven't. Mercy is our best option.
- Those who have had more revealed to them will be held responsible (Matthew 11:20-24).
- Just because some one does not serve God does not mean he or she has received no revelation. Look at the average Australian, he behaves as if he has heard nothing of God (Romans 1:18-32).
- You have heard so there is no excuse for you.

For further reading:

"How to Give Away Your Faith" Paul E. Little (IVP) Chapter 5.

HOW DO YOU KNOW GOD IS THERE?

- The reasons I know God exists are the same as the reasons I know the Prime Minister exists.
- "Have you ever seen God?" "No, but I could have if I hadn't been born too late." We can't live in every moment of history.
- Jesus claimed to be God (John 20:28, 5:18). His actions bear out that claim. He healed the sick, stilled the storm at sea, brought the dead back to life, exorcised demons, and then died and rose again from the dead.
- If Jesus is not God then He is either a lunatic or a liar. That is, He thinks that He is God but He isn't (a lunatic), or He knows He isn't but says He is (a liar).
- Read a gospel and check it out for yourself.
- If He is God then you should serve Him as God.

For further reading:

"A Fresh Start" John Chapman

(Hodder & Stoughton) Chapters 6-8.

AREN'T ALL GOOD PEOPLE CHRISTIANS?

- What is "good" anyway, and how "good" do you have to be?
- Some people are better than others but none of us is good enough. Suppose you and I decide to go to a concert and the tickets cost \$10, if you have \$8 and I have \$1, neither of us can make it (Romans 3:23).
- God says there is only one way and it is not "being good" (John 14:6).
- It is possible to "be good" and be a Buddhist.
- God is after friends, not good rebels. It is a matter of whose side you are on. Are you for Jesus or against Him? (John 3:36).

For further reading:

"A Fresh Start" John Chapman

(Hodder & Stoughton) Chapter 11.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS?

- Sincerity is not the issue. It is possible to be sincerely wrong.
- It is not possible for all to be right because they contradict each other. Christianity has some unique features which makes it definitely incompatible.
- The questions are 'Has God revealed Himself and how?' Jesus claims to be God "in the flesh".
- The Old Testament condemns other religions of the day (1 Chronicles 16:26), as does the New Testament (Romans 1:18-32).
- Jesus says He is the only way (John 14:6).

For further reading:

"So What's the Difference" Fritz Ridenour

(Regal books)