



## **The Resurrection Miracle**

John 11 and 20

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas  
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## THE RESURRECTION MIRACLE John 11 and 20

National Geographic traveled the world and asked people, “Do you believe in miracles?” Many said yes, and many said no. Some pointed to their children as proof of miracles. Others said waking up every morning was their miracle. And others suggested that what we call miracles are nothing more than good luck, coincidence, or the result hard work. So, when it comes to belief in miracles, some say yes and some say no.

The reality of miracles is not up to a worldwide poll. Miracles are either real or they are not. And faith, wishing them to be real, does not make them real. Miracles are either real or they are not. It’s not up to a poll or a matter of faith. It all depends on the existence of God. If God is not real, then miracles are impossible. But if God is real, then miracles are possible.

Christianity is based on a miracle. The message of Christianity is about a miracle. Therefore, the message we share with the world requires belief in miracles.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus supernaturally rose from dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. And furthermore, we believe in the resurrection promise, that as the Bible says, “God has not only raised up Jesus, He will also raise us up from the dead by His power” (1 Corinthians 6:14). We not only believe in His resurrection, we believe in our resurrection. That’s what we believe, and that is our hope.

But wait a minute. Dead people don’t come back to life. That’s impossible. It would take a miracle for someone to come back to life from the dead. Yes, it would. And that’s exactly what Christianity is founded on, the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Apart from a miracle, there is no resurrection and there is no Gospel. The Bible admits that. “If there is no resurrection of the dead,” if resurrection is impossible, “not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, and so is our faith” (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

But if God is real, then surely miracles are possible. If God created the universe with a word, then surely He can raise the dead. ***If miracles are impossible, then so is the resurrection. But if God is real, then miracles ARE possible, and so is the resurrection.***

Some of you are sitting there, as Christians, and your mind is telling you that miracles are scientifically impossible, and your heart is telling you that resurrection seems so theological and so irrelevant. Sure, if there’s a heaven, you want to go there when you die. But if you’re in your 20s, or 30s, or 40s, you’ve got a lot of life left and you don’t want to think about death, not yet. But there’s a reality every one of us have to accept. We don’t know how many days we have left.

Resurrection is far from irrelevant, because it is more than an after-death promise. It is a promise that shapes our present reality. The promise that God will one day raise us from the dead tells us how much we are loved by our Father. And because of His love, we can trust that His promise is true. We can live today with joy and peace. We can live with certainty in our hope, all

because of His promise. “God has not only raised up Jesus, He will also raise us up from the dead by His power” (1 Corinthians 6:14).

But again, how can we believe in something that requires belief in miracles? Here’s how. ***If miracles are impossible, then so is the resurrection. But if God is real, then miracles ARE possible, and so is the resurrection.***

## JOHN 11

The Bible presents Jesus as a miracle-worker, and His miracles were meant to prove that He was the Son of God and that everything He said was true. One of His most amazing miracles was raising Lazarus from the dead. I want us to read about this miracle in John 11, because the resurrection of Lazarus is a forecast of the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus was friends with Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Word reached Jesus that Lazarus was ill and near death. But instead of rushing, Jesus purposely delayed. When He finally arrived, Lazarus was dead and buried. And here’s what happened.

“When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ***‘I am the resurrection and the life.*** The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. ***Do you believe this?***’ ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:20-27, NIV).

John 11 tells us that Jesus wept with Martha and Mary. He loved them and loved his friend Lazarus. When Jesus came to the tomb, something amazing happened.

“The tomb was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. And Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ ‘But, Lord,’ Martha said, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone ... Then Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go’ ” (John 11:38-44, NIV).

The Bible presents Jesus as a miracle-worker, and His miracles were meant to prove that He was the Son of God and that everything He said was true. Jesus changed water into wine, He walked on water, and He fed 5,000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread. He healed the blind and deaf. He healed lepers and cripples. There are 35 of His miracles recorded in the New Testament, but He performed many more. In John’s historical account of Jesus’ life, he writes, “There are many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).<sup>1</sup>

## JOHN 20

Not only does the Bible present Jesus as a miracle-worker, the Bible also presents Jesus as a miracle Himself. What proof could be better than performing a miracle? Being the miracle!

The incredible claim of Christianity is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. We believe in the physical, bodily, supernatural, dead-coming-back-to-life resurrection of Jesus. That's the incredible claim of Christianity, and that's what is recorded in John 20.

“Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that *the stone had been rolled away* ... She ran and found Peter and John and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’ Peter and John raced to the tomb ... John reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. Peter went inside and he noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying to the side. Then John also went inside the tomb, and he saw and believed – until then they hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.” (John 20:1-10).

The “stone had been rolled away” and Jesus’ body was not there! Mary Magdalene, the other women with her, and Peter and John all saw the empty tomb. Peter and John went to tell the other disciples, but Mary stayed behind trying to make sense of it all. And here’s what happened next.

“Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked inside. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot where the body of Jesus had been lying. ‘Dear woman, why are you crying?’ the angels asked her. ‘Because they have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have put him.’ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him at first. ‘Dear woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?’ She thought he was the gardener. ‘Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.’ ‘Mary!’ It was Jesus. She turned to him and cried out, ‘Rabbi!’ ... Clinging to Jesus, He said to her, ‘Go find my brothers and tell them you have seen Me.’ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, *‘I have seen the Lord!’*” (John 20:11-18).

Mary would not be the only one to see Jesus that day.

“That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, *Jesus was standing there* among them! ... And he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!” (John 20:19-20).

Jesus appeared to Mary first, and to the disciples later that night. Unfortunately, Thomas was not there. Where had Thomas been? Wandering the streets in a daze? Sitting under a tree in despair? Wherever he was, he was devastated. He had believed in Jesus. He had placed all his hope in Jesus. And his faith died when Jesus died. So when Thomas returned to the house and the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” Thomas refused to believe it. “Unless I see the nail

marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, ***I will not believe it***” (John 20:24-25, NIV).

“Unless I see ... I will not believe.”

Admittedly, resurrection is hard to believe. It’s not just incredible, it’s impossible. But the Christian faith claims that the dead corpse of the crucified Jesus came back to life! And no one wanted to believe it more than Thomas. “Guys, you know how much I loved Him. But come on. I saw what happened. I watched Him beaten. I watched Him bleed to death. We all saw it. We all saw Him die!”

So, how did Thomas move from doubt to belief? John 20 tells us. “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them ... and He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. ***Stop doubting and believe***’ ” (John 20:26-27, NIV)

How did Thomas move from doubt to belief? He saw the hands of Jesus. When Thomas saw the nail-scarred hands of Jesus doubt vanished. And he blurted out something different this time. “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28).<sup>2</sup>

It’s a wonderful story. But miracles are impossible. Dead people don’t come back to life from the dead. Unless ... unless God is real. ***If miracles are impossible, then so is the resurrection. But if God is real, then miracles ARE possible, and so is the resurrection.***

#### HOW CAN WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

The question of miracles is the ultimate God question, because a miracle requires the intervention of God in the natural world. The 18th century philosopher David Hume famously declared that “miracles are a violation of the laws of nature.”

Thomas Jefferson was influenced by the works of Hume and a product of Enlightenment thinking, which emphasized reason over religion. On a cold winter night in 1804, Thomas Jefferson sat at his desk in the White House with two Bibles in front of him. Jefferson took a razor and cut out the portions of the New Testament he believed were true, and rejected the rest. Jefferson preserved the words of Jesus, but rejected miracles and any reference to Jesus as God. He labeled his 84-page book “The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth.” He had it bound in a red cover and used it for personal, private reflection. Jefferson argued with John Adams, that he, Jefferson, was a real Christian and more a follower of Jesus’ moral code than any of his pompous religious friends. Jefferson kept the morality of Jesus, but not the miracles of Jesus.

Our culture is more and more like Jefferson. Keeping the morality of Jesus, but not the miracles of Jesus. Scientific naturalism defines the universe as a closed system bound by the laws of nature, and therefore, there is no force outside the universe that can intervene and interrupt the laws of nature. So, scientific naturalism rejects the possibility for God and the possibility for miracles.

But some scientists do believe in the possibility of God and in the possibility of miracles. MIT professor Ian Hutchinson is one of them.

“I’m a professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT, and I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. So do dozens of my colleagues ... We really believe in the bodily resurrection of the first century Jew known as Jesus of Nazareth ... We believe that a literal miracle like the resurrection of Jesus is possible.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, as a scientist, Hutchinson acknowledges that science explains what naturally and normally happens. But because he believes in existence of God, he also believes that anything is possible with God.

“Science is not the only means for accessing truth. In the case of Jesus’ resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence, and the historical evidence for the resurrection is as good as the evidence for any other ancient event.”<sup>4</sup>

Rosalind Pickard, another MIT professor, also believes.

“For most of my life, I believed smart people didn’t need religion. So I declared myself an atheist and dismissed people who believed in God as uneducated. But when a friend asked me if I had ever read the Bible, I had to admit that I had not. So my friend challenged me, how could I claim to be so educated if I was unwilling to read the Bible. So I did. I read through the Bible ten times in ten years. And each time I read it, I felt this strange sense of being spoken to. It was disturbing yet oddly attractive. I began wondering whether there really might be a God. I didn’t want it to be true because I didn’t want religion. But over time, it became clear what it meant to have faith in Jesus. And then the day came when I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life and be the Lord of my life. I once thought I was too smart to believe in God. Now I know I was an arrogant fool who snubbed the greatest mind in the cosmos – the author of all science, mathematics, art, and everything else there is to know. Today I walk humbly, having received the most undeserved grace. I walk with joy, alongside the most amazing companion anyone could ask for.”<sup>5</sup>

If God is real, then surely miracles are possible. If God created the universe with a word, then surely He can raise the dead. ***If miracles are impossible, then so is the resurrection. But if God is real, then miracles ARE possible, and so is the resurrection.***

#### A MIRACLE OF ANOTHER KIND

As Christians, we believe in the physical, bodily, supernatural resurrection of Jesus. We also believe because of a miracle of another kind, the miracle of a changed life, the miracle of how Jesus has changed our lives.

I want to introduce you to one of those miracles. At first you might not think you can relate to Bryon Widner. But as he tells his story, I hope you see how much you do have in common with him. **[VIDEO]**

Bryon Widner is a miracle. I loved what he said. “God has done miraculous things in my life.” A street kid, a Nazi skinhead, who loved to hate and loved to fight. We may think we have nothing in common with him. That his story is too extreme and we can’t relate. But we would be

wrong. Our story is exactly like his story. None of us have endured 25 laser treatments to remove tattoos from our face. And maybe our sin was not as violent as his sin. We may think it only took a towelette to cleanse us of our sin, but it took a lot more. We are just like Bryon. It took the blood of Jesus to cleanse Bryon from his sin and it took the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sin. And we are living proof that miracles are possible. Each of us is the miracle of a changed life.

Christianity is about miracles. The miracle of Jesus' resurrection and the miracle of our salvation.

### CONCLUSION

Dead people don't come back to life. That's impossible. It would take a miracle for someone to come back to life from the dead. Yes, it would. Apart from a miracle, there is no resurrection and there is no Gospel. But if God is real, then surely miracles are possible. If God created the universe with a word, then surely He can raise the dead. ***If miracles are impossible, then so is the resurrection. But if God is real, then miracles ARE possible, and so is the resurrection.***

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25, NAS). And then He asked the ultimate question, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26, NAS).

### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Scientifically, miracles are impossible. Philosophically, miracles are irrational. But what about historically? Historically, there were eyewitnesses. Jesus performed miracles in public, and both followers and enemies witnessed them. The miracles were open for scrutiny. His opponents could not deny what the crowds had seen, and they could deny what they had seen with their own eyes. Jewish historians wrote about His miracles, and so did Roman historians. Jesus' miracles were in the headlines and never refuted by His enemies.

<sup>2</sup> That moment would change the rest of his life. Historians track the travels of Thomas and the spread of the gospel to India. There is a tomb located in Madras, India, believed to be the burial place of Thomas. And these same historians indicate that Thomas was martyred by being run through with a spear.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Hutchinson, "Can A Scientist Believe in the Resurrection?" The Veritas Forum, March 25, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Picard, "I Got Smart and Took a Chance on God," *Christianity Today*, April 2019.