

Extraordinary Resurrection of Jesus

You Need Top Evidence for this Super-Miracle

To avoid the risk of superstition and the risk of suggesting that regularity in nature is doubtful it is vital that a miracle claim be supported by careful and good evidence. Otherwise you end up saying you can say the sun will not rise tomorrow for some evidence says so. You need top quality evidence for any miracle claim. And even more so if the miracle is claimed to be the ultimate one and of vital spiritual and social and religious importance. The resurrection is taught by Christianity as the core of the gospel along with the death of Jesus for sins and the only miracle you need to know about and absolutely accept. So the evidence needs to be monumental. Christians say that to argue that extraordinary miracle claims need matching evidence that is extraordinary evidence is biased and unfair but they cannot say that where the resurrection is concerned. It is in a different league from any other miracle done by Jesus such as casting out devils or feeding thousands.

Religion says that miracles are extraordinary and are against our regular experience of the world. For example, we know that dead people stay dead. If somebody rose from the dead that would be against our regular experience. They argue that if the evidence is sufficient we can believe the person rose. In fact we need evidence to say something so strange and to justify belief. And really good evidence at that.

Many Christians today believe that we are body and soul. The body is you meaning you are not yourself unless you have your body. This eliminates the previously popular notion of days gone by where it was supposed that when you died you, as in your spirit, lived on and doesn't really need a body and will get one at the general resurrection. Believers reason that when you die, so that you are not a soul without a body, you will get a temporary body until the resurrection. We read in the Bible how the rich man has a body that suffers in Hades even though the resurrection has not happened yet. If people get a body when they die, it follows that the resurrection of Jesus is only a guess. If he had a body it does not follow that he was resurrected. It does not follow that he is a holy man. Evil people who die have bodies too. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is based wholly on hearsay. If Jesus went to the trouble of appearing on earth in his pre-resurrection body, he was a fraud because he claimed he was proof that the resurrection is true. If the pre-resurrection were a proper resurrection what you would need another one for?

If there is a tomb nearby and the body disappears from it, and somebody says the body magically disappeared and somebody else says it was stolen, the latter view gets first preference. Otherwise we will end up believing every tall story.

Is the evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead good enough?

Christians say it is. Indeed it would be degrading and superstitious - superstition is a manifestation of stupidity and fear (therefore it paves the way for hate) - to believe in it if the evidence was inadequate.

The bigger and stranger the claim the more evidence you need for it.

In terms of adequate evidence, the resurrection story fails. Nobody can disprove the suggestion that the body was smuggled out of the tomb when the mourners were not looking - just before the stone was rolled across. The gospels do not even mention that that would have been impossible.

Also, even if the gospels are without contradictions that does not prove that their accounts are correct or true.

Did the New Testament witnesses think they seen Jesus and did somebody convey to them that belief in the resurrection made emotional or philosophical sense? If so, did they promote the resurrection account not because they seen Jesus but because they were motivated by the emotional and philosophical baggage it had got? If so the quest for evidence for the resurrection ignores the fact that the believers might not have cared about it. Also, the gospel accounts are fragmentary and thus not concerned about evidence. Putting material in a work that seems to have evidential value does not mean it is in it for evidence. Even the most outrageous work of fiction has to draw on some truth.

Some Christians say there are problems with the principle that the bigger and stranger the claim the more evidence you need for it.

One problem is that extraordinary things can happen without leaving enough evidence that they happened. But that is not a problem. We are talking about believability. The event might have happened but if there is insufficient evidence left then we will not find it believable and indeed should not.

The second problem is that the extraordinary evidence might not have been found yet. That does not mean its believable. And its a non-problem as well. We cannot believe in something odd or extraordinary in the hope that there will be extraordinary evidence out there.

A third problem is that the evidence may be there and may be clear but people come along with distorted interpretations of it making it controversial. This has nothing to do with the principle but how it is applied. Its a non-problem.

A fourth problem is that people having a magical or miraculous experience already have their extraordinary evidence. Again this does not mean the rest of us should believe. Its a non-problem.

A fifth is that that people disagree on what is extraordinary in terms of an event or evidence or both. The answer to this would be for people to spell out exactly what they think and believe. This is a problem with the people not the principle. It has nothing to do with the principle. If people disagreed about what 2 and 2 added up to that would not mean that maths is wrong only that they may be wrong.

A sixth problem is that if you believe that the miraculous and paranormal are impossible or extremely unlikely to happen you will need a lot of evidence before you believe. The believer's solution then is to deny that this phenomena is impossible and/or to deny that it is extremely unlikely. So the believers have to say it may be either unlikely or likely. To say unlikely means you need evidence before you believe. To say likely means just believe whoever says a miracle happened.

The seventh problem is that it tells us to retain the established theory even if there is evidence that the theory should be abandoned or revised. An example. It is saying that if science denies telepathy and evidence comes up indicating that at least in some cases it can happen the denial must be maintained.

But there is nothing wrong with that! The scientific theory is based on good evidence. If evidence appears that undermines it, science takes a wait and see attitude. You have to follow what the greatest and best evidence says even if there is evidence that it is wrong!

If forensic evidence shows that Johnny was not in town when the town bank was robbed, it overrides the testimony of reliable witnesses that he was in town. There is always evidence for and against everything.

The seventh problem sees a problem where there is none. Thus it is opposed to what is fair and decent.

If we cannot take a wait and see attitude with miracles and the paranormal then we can never take it. Believers put us sceptics in the same league as those who say, "We will not believe no matter how good the evidence is." That is not what we are doing at all. Rather what we are saying is, "We have no choice but to suspend belief about miracles and the paranormal." Belief in miracles underhandedly accuses us falsely and shows what kind of people the believers are.

It is fanaticism to attack people for not believing in miracles. The Bible Jesus was always verbally abusing those who did not believe in his miracles. We do not need miracles to get by day by day. Nobody died because they didn't believe in miracles. Even many believers have only a weak belief - they get by and can be very happy and well without taking miracles seriously.

What is worse? Never being satisfied with the amount and quality of evidence for the paranormal and miraculous? Or being too easily satisfied. The first is the best because it is not going to affect our lives badly. The second puts us at risk of credulity and being misled and taken for fools. The mere fact that one says the paranormal or miraculous happen shows that one is violating the rule, "Supernatural belief should be abandoned if there is the slightest chance that it could lead to harm".

With the resurrection of Jesus, you cannot show that God was behind it and performed it. You only see the results. The resurrection brings us to a mystery but not to God. It is beneath divine dignity to say he performed the miracle.

Extraordinary claims need exceptionally good evidence. Religious people would be the first to say that if magic works or if magic cures work that you need really good evidence because this is a strange and anti-natural claim. Yet religion tends to look for evidence for the miracles it wants to believe and ignores the evidence for the ones it does not want to believe. For this approach to be fairer (if it is sensible to call such a biased approach fair!) the evidence needs to be shipshape and so good that anybody who challenges it will be plainly seen as a fool or as unreasonable. The evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus is too flimsy.

The visions of Jesus do not prove he rose from the dead. The resurrection story tries to cheat us into thinking that they do.

If the return of Jesus was inexplicable that would not have to mean it was supernatural or miraculous. There is no way to

tell if something appears to be a miracle for some unexplained reason or if it really is.

Religious people are only guessing what is a miracle and what is not and they have the audacity to criticise those who suspect all miracles are really not miracles at all as being biased. They even accuse them of refusing to admit the evidence for miracles. But that is exactly what they do themselves! If you do not let the evidence tell you what is a miracle and only judge something a miracle if it suits you and your religion that is blatant disregard for evidence. It is better to be dissatisfied with the evidence for miracles like sceptics are than to take the religious approach. The religious only use evidence as window-dressing not as a reason to believe. So who is the most honest? The religious person or the sceptic?

Religion says that if we reject miracle testimonies such as the resurrection, we may be sceptical then about all human testimony and might as well be. That we have to depend on human testimony and not hard evidence is not an encouraging sign. Besides we know that the problem is not the testimonies but the claim that one can know that the testimonies truly speak of miracles. As we have seen, this claim is based on arrogance.

However, if religion is serious about its argument then it follows that we must check the testifier for sincerity. The more sincerity the better. The trouble with that is that the more bizarre the claim, the more sincere the person may be! To accept the resurrection is really to make a god of the witness testimony and to imply that weirdness is a virtue!

Even if you prove that Jesus being alive three days later is a miracle you still cannot know what exactly the actual miracle was.

Richard Swinburne (see page 171, Philosophy of Religion for A Level, OCR Edition, Anne Jordan, Neil Lockyer and Edwin Tate, Nelson Thornes Ltd, 1999) argues that water becoming wine or somebody recovering from a serious illness is not miraculous but it is miraculous if it happens in a rapid timescale or in an instant of time. This would mean that the miracle is not the water becoming wine or the recovery but the speed at which the change occurs. It would mean that perhaps Jesus really was buried in a deep coma as some say. His resurrection then was not a resurrection but an accelerated healing.

If something is natural but happens faster than what is naturally possible then we must start saying for example, "This water became wine in seconds. Should we change our belief that natural law says it takes weeks?" Believers in God say that we can still say dead men stay dead though Jesus rose - they make out the law is that dead people stay dead but that Jesus was an exception. But why do we say it is the law? Why do we need to say dead people stay dead? Is it so that we can function in the world? No it is more than just a practical matter. It is about truth as well. We sense it somehow protects and aligns with truth. We may not explain how but our instinct tells us to uphold it as the law. It is a warning that we must not be too keen on accepting miracles. The person who believes reluctantly is the wise one.

If excellent evidence shows a miracle happened, the miracle is useless information. We still have no excellent evidence for a resurrection. If we have to assume the resurrection then there is no point in caring if there is evidence for a miracle or not.

Believers are only assuming the resurrection and pretending that they care about evidence.