

**A Critical Reading Journal Analysis of the Centrality of the Resurrection and Christian
Faith**

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A core tenet of the Christian faith demands that believers must accept the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as true or else believe nothing at all. Being a Christian, despite what might be believed, is not an easy task, and defending one's faith is harder by orders of magnitude. For a Christian to not believe in Jesus' death on the cross at Calvary is to believe that sin is still in charge of their life. Further, for a Christian to not believe that Jesus resurrected after three days is to believe that sin was never defeated, and that Jesus died for nothing (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:14). With such a vital part of faith dependent on this single topic, it makes sense that Christians would rise to defend it. Those opposed to Christianity would seek to destroy it. To this end, authors Habermas and Geivett have created the work *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*. This article is intended to approach the first few sections of this work and analyze some of its key tenets, specifically the importance of the resurrection and some critical approaches to miracles.

Jesus' Resurrection and the Christian Faith

If one attends almost any protestant church in the US and abroad, there is a decent chance they will experience a baptism or perhaps several baptisms in a single sitting. A baptizer will be standing in some form of water (perhaps a tub, pool, river, or lake) and bring a person (the baptism candidate) into the water. Often, the baptizer will ask a few questions to the candidate, such as, "Do you believe Jesus died for your sins?" and "Do you believe he rose again?" and finally: "Do you want Jesus to be the Lord of your life?" The candidate will often answer with an emphatic "yes" to each question. Shortly thereafter, the baptizer will dunk the candidate underwater (if they practice baptism by immersion) and then bring them back to the surface after saying a variation of, 'Based on your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Buried with Jesus in death and raised to new life!” Hopefully, this will be followed by a round of cheers and claps by the people gathered to witness it.

Baptism is such a critical part of the life of a believer because it is intended to show they have accepted Jesus’ salvation and wish to live their lives for God. Additionally, baptism is intended to show solidarity with Jesus by ‘dying,’ ‘being buried,’ and ‘rising again.’ All these items reflect Jesus’ resurrection, so it is no wonder that such an event is critical to the faith¹. There is little doubt that the importance of Christ’s Resurrection is the most important aspect of the Christian belief. After all, when Paul was explaining the importance of Jesus’ resurrection to the church in Corinth, he went as far as to say that without Jesus’ death, everything Christians do would be meaningless: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17, HCSB).

In Habermas’ work, he advises that confident believers who agree that the resurrection was a miracle and part of God’s plan further validate the reason for the plan. After all, when Jesus was nearing the end of his life, he told his disciples that God would restore Jesus in three days (cf. John 2:19-21). When Jesus did, in fact, rise again three days later, this served not only to prove Jesus’ claim but also to show God validated that claim². Thanks to God’s divine and completely unusual plan’s success, all believers can now affirm that this greatest miracle validates all the pain and suffering that comes with being a Christian (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:35-38). But this also means that Christians should expect the necessity of supporting the case for miracles.

¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), viii.

² *Ibid.*, x-xi.

Common Criticisms of Miracles

As mentioned in the early portion of this article, the importance of miracles, especially the miracle of the resurrection, are some of the prime targets for skeptics, naturalists, and scientists who wish to discredit Christianity. A valid discussion of the Christian faith is incomplete without at least some mention of the miracle of the resurrection, among a few others³. It follows, then, that many critical approaches have been created to combat the belief in miracles, and Geivett and Habermas' *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* addresses six of these critical approaches, including miracles as myth, miracles as sense experience, and miracles as interpretation and to these items, this discussion now turns.

Mythology of Miracles

Miracles are, by their own definition, supernatural occurrences. For a miracle to occur, it would require a dispensation of rationality⁴. The first critical approach to miracles this paper addresses is the lack of a rational basis for miracles. Those who wish to deny miracles might argue that a miracle is not plausible simply because there is no rational reason for miracles to exist. While the argument may seem effective at first, many other things are accepted as fact with even less support. The simplest example can be taken from the fact that oxygen is real. Though human eyes cannot see oxygen in its purest form, its existence is mandatory for life to exist on Earth. Other than the fact that the ecosystem produces air through a cycle in nature, there is no rational reason for oxygen to exist, but humans (even those who disagree with Christianity) breathe air.

³ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), x.

⁴ R Douglas Geivett and Gary R Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 16.

It's All in Your Head – Sense Experience

Another common criticism of miracles is that they exist only as a sense experience⁵. To better understand this, it is to say that the only reason people experience what they would call miracles is because of how they perceive an event that occurred through their own experience. In a simple, if somewhat crass, example, people who are interviewed about being abducted by aliens will explain outrageous claims that cannot be proven by anything other than their own experience. One could argue that miracles are the same. Scientists argue that if something cannot be felt, touched, seen, etc., there is no way to prove it is true. In a humorous dichotomy, scientists with experience in various theoretical fields cannot prove that something actually exists other than their methods indicate that it is possible, not necessarily probable.

I Believe, Therefore It Exists

The final criticism of miracles this paper will address is that a miracle is only a miracle because it is interpreted as such⁶. This train of thought indicates that miracles such as the resurrection happened so long ago that there is no way to prove that it actually happened with society's current lens. An argument regarding this approach would explain that the entire life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus happened two thousand years ago, so there is little that remains to prove it happened. This seems like a very difficult argument to defend against on the surface, but it is not as hard as might be believed. The Bible has been around in some form or fashion for at least 1,800 years or more (depending on which historical evidence one chooses to support). The stories in the Old Testament have been around substantially longer than the New

⁵ Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

Testament. Yet, believers have continued supporting the truth of scripture with no breaks in this period. Meanwhile, the scientific method only became readily accepted during the 16th century and would have been lost to time had it not been for the actions of Francis Bacon and his students⁷. It could be argued, then, that belief in scripture and miracles outdates science.

Conclusion

So, what is a believer to do with this information, and why does it matter? Christians must be willing to stand up for what they believe in. There will always be people who wish to deny Christianity and speak of believers as ignorant. Often, scientific heavyweights such as the late Stephen Hawking or Albert Einstein were prone to quote the idiocy of religion or belief in something ‘beyond’ all human understanding. Yet, when one reads the science materials, it does not take long to reach a point where the science books essentially state that something just *IS*. Just as scientists are quick to support their beliefs, Christians should also be willing to support theirs.

⁷ M. Castillo, “The Scientific Method: A Need for Something Better?,” *American Journal of Neuroradiology* 34, no. 9 (2013): 1670.

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