

September 5, 2010 Culture, Science, and Faith

Matthew 28:17

1. The text – “but some doubted.”
 - a. Some of what we in the church believe in is hard to believe – and it should be.
 - b. The text tells us the apostles met the resurrected Jesus on a mountainside in Galilee. Most worshipped Him, but “some doubted.”
 - i. That is a remarkable admission... especially with him standing right there!
 - ii. Matthew is telling us that some of the founding leaders of Christianity couldn’t believe the miracle of the resurrection.
 - iii. There is no other reason for this to be included unless it actually happened.
 1. We must proclaim the certainty of Christ in an age of unbelief.
 - a. Some still do not believe
 2. It tells us that doubt can be a useful tool leading to faith
 - c. This passage tells us some important things about faith.
 - i. It is not only our current generation that struggles with the idea of miracles.
 1. It is believed the ancient cultures were less refined and/or educated and thus more gullible and susceptible to ‘miracles.’
 - a. We think we are modern and refined – but in 100 years many of our great-grandchildren might look at some of our thinking and be shocked at our “primitive” way of thinking.
 2. But some of the disciples responded like any group of modern people – some believed their eyes and some did not.
 - ii. The text – the small few lines - is an encouragement to patience.
 1. All the disciples ended up as great leaders in the church, but some had a lot more trouble believing than others.
 - iii. It is important to note what the text tells us about the purpose of biblical miracles and faith.
 1. Miracles lead not simply to cognitive belief, but to *worship*, to awe and wonder.
 - a. Jesus’ miracles were never tricks designed to impress the crowd or coerce them into following Him. Jesus used miracles to heal the sick, feed the hungry, raise the dead.
 - b. We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order.
 - c. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also a foretaste of what He is doing with that power.
 - d. Jesus’ miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts.
 - e. Culture today believes science rather than the Bible.

Note: This week’s new accounts of Stephen Hawking’s book declaring physics (the study of properties, changes, interactions... of matter and energy) can account for creation and there does not need to be a

“God” for creation to occur. He claims, “Spontaneous creation,” something from nothing, is the cause of the universe.

We have always believed in the Big Bang Theory – God said let there be light and Bang there was light!

2. There is a war going on between science and religion.
 - a. Modern media gives publicity to battles between the scientific secular community and religious people over evolution, stem-cell research, in vitro fertilization and many other areas of medicine and science.
 - b. Many promote the idea that it is either-or situation; you can either be scientific and rational or you can be religious (thus meaning unscientific and irrational).
 1. Famed scientific atheist Richard Dawkins argues that you cannot be an intelligent scientific thinker and still hold religious beliefs.
 2. He argues that the more intelligent, rational, and scientifically minded you are, the less you will be able to believe in God.
 - c. Many people think science has disproved traditional religion because most major faiths believe in miracles.
 - i. Miracles are particularly important to the Christian faith.
 1. Each year we celebrate miracles – the Incarnation; Virgin birth of Jesus at Christmas; and the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead at Easter.
 2. The New Testament is filled with accounts of the miracles of Jesus.
 - d. Scientific mistrust of the Bible began with the Enlightenment belief that miracles cannot be reconciled to a modern, rational view of the world.
 - i. Belief in miracles is the ‘root’ of all scientific doubt
3. The premise is, “Science claims to have proven that there is no such thing as miracles; therefore the Biblical accounts cannot be reliable because they contain descriptions of miracles.”
 - a. Science is equipped to test for natural causes, but it cannot speak to any other causes.
 - i. Science proceeds on the assumption that whatever events occur in the world can be accounted for in terms of other events. A natural cause and effect.
 - ii. When studying a phenomenon, the scientist must always assume there is a natural cause. That is because natural causes are the only kind its methodology can address.
 - iii. Science cannot assert or prove that there cannot be anything other than natural causes. There are no experimental models for testing the supernatural.
 - iv. When science asserts “No supernatural causes for any natural phenomenon is possible.” It then becomes a philosophical presupposition and no longer a truly scientific finding.
 - b. The hidden premise in the statement that “miracles cannot happen” is “there can’t be a God who does miracles.”
 - i. If there is a creator God, there is nothing illogical at all about the possibility of miracles.
 1. If He created everything out of nothing, it would hardly be a problem for him to rearrange parts of it as and when He wishes.
 2. To be certain that miracles cannot occur today you would have to be equally certain that God does not exist, and that is an article of faith – not science.

- c. The scientific argument is “circular” (rather than linear – step by step) in that it depends upon its own conjecture.
 - i. Science, by its nature, cannot discern or test for supernatural causes, and therefore, it claims, supernatural causes cannot exist.
 - ii. There is no way to “prove” supernatural miracles – except by faith!
- 4. We are wading into water much deeper than I am tall. I have not tried to engage the full scientific debate... I am not qualified
 - i. Much damage has been done in times past by the unqualified making affirmations and declarations that expose their lack of qualification.
 - ii. I am in over my head... but there are those who are entering the debate.
 - 1. A growing number of scientists consider themselves deeply or moderately religious – and those numbers are growing because they have learned that science might not be able to account for everything about human existence to every thinker’s satisfaction
 - 2. Consider the result of studies and growing research into the existence of morals and moral standards.
 - a. We believe that genocide is wrong – but where do we get that moral judgment? Did the belief in “human rights” evolve as a natural evolution?
 - iii. Evolution cannot account for the origin of morals
 - b. Even though the concept of warfare between science and religion is popular, we should rid ourselves of the notion of being forced to choose between the two.
 - i. There is no necessity to choose between science and devout faith.
 - ii. Albert Einstein said, *“Religion without science is blind; Science without religion is lame... Religion without science is confined; it fails to be completely open to reality. Science without religion is incomplete; it fails to obtain the deepest possible understanding.”*
 - c. We can doubt, have serious questions; (just like the disciples did) we can dig and study.
 - i. The Bible is not an encyclopedia where we look up a topic and find an answer.
 - 1. The Bible is the story of God’s relationship with mankind. Of His loving care and ultimate goals and aspirations for his creation.
 - 2. The Bible helps build faith in the God of miracles who loves you.
 - 3. *“Biblical answers to questions about purpose and meaning can and should amplify glories of the universe revealed by scientific investigation.”* John Polkinghorne
 - d. If the church is going to transform the culture by being the body of Christ then we must intelligently address the cultural assumption that science disproves Christianity. We must believe the Word of God and proclaim its truths to all; including the scientific thinkers of this age!
 - i. We must point to the miracles as part of the unfolding story of the Bible.
 - ii. We must tell the old, old story – of Jesus and His love.