

# ⇒ MY ⇒ PROBLEM *with God*

## Message 5 | Hasn't Science disproven Christianity?

Welcome Back to Mercy Church! What an incredible two weeks. Knight Theater was such a big moment for Mercy and thank you to so many of you who gave your time to make it happen. God is building something special here in this church here and I am honored to be a part of it and I want to take a couple minutes to just acknowledge the moment we are in. Didn't get to do this at Knight Theater but this is a big time in the life of our church.

I want to take a second and say thank you specifically to our launch team. This group...they took a leap. Over 40 of them moved to Charlotte and the rest moved from more comfortable situations to take a leap on an dream. The dream was a church motivated to see a gospel awakening happen here in Charlotte that gets carried to the ends of the earth. I am humbled by what the Lord has done in such a short time window. I looked at our church last weekend, all in one room at one time, and saw the dozens and dozens of people who've been baptized here at Mercy. Who were far from God and are now walking with him. I saw couples that I know were close to divorce and by God's grace are thriving in the gospel. I saw

addicts who've broken free through the power of God's spirit and remained free as they've come to know more of his love for them.

Week in and week out I see all kinds of Gospel Pioneers. I see moms and dads who've chosen to immerse into a church plant when, lets face it, that is hard as a family. We don't have facilities and things yet that we want but you've bought in to the mission. You are pioneers and the Lord has honored that. I had a prayer a year ago that was "God we want to reach families, help us!" and the Lord has doubled our number of kids from this time a year ago and I think that's just the beginning. I love that my kids get to grow up in Mercy Church.

And we've just begun to knock on the door of middle and high school ministry, we saw our 2<sup>nd</sup> high school student baptized this spring and I'm so grateful for that.

Some of you in your 50s & 60s have chosen to jump into a church filled with people your kids age. You are pioneers And because of that leap others have followed and we are fast becoming a uniquely multi-generational church. We are becoming the family the church is called by God to be.

Some of you represent minority cultures and you are pioneers. While we are still quite white, we are diversifying. A woman who had been coming for about 2 months told me the other day "My mom said why are you going to that WHITE CHURCH? She said, first the pastor is definitely white but he has street cred. But more importantly she said the gospel is preached here and these people love me so well and that's worth being

uncomfortable.” That’s the mindset of Gospel Pioneers. Many like her I’m so grateful for.

We are becoming the picture of heaven the church is called to be. The picture of redeemed people from all backgrounds now a family bound together by Christ. I love Mercy Church. I love your missionary heart for the people of Charlotte and the people groups of the world. I LOVE how many of you had friends come hear the gospel for the first time these past two weekends. So awesome.

Here’s why I’m taking this moment. It’s to say thank you to those who’ve been with us from day one. It’s to say thank you to you who have joined us in this mission God has put us on. We’ve grown from 80 to 325 MEMBERS in just 2 years and many more than that who worship with us every weekend.

Hey if you haven’t jumped in yet. I want you to. Not for our sake, but for yours. Church is not a spectator sport. Sometimes it can feel that way though if all you do is come, sit, then leave. But God created it to be a family of believers on mission together. We want you to jump in, serve others, and get on mission with us! Come learn about that at Starting Point. October 22. But the big thing I want you to hear: I love you guys and am honored to be your pastor. Ok lets go.

Hasn’t Science Disproven Christianity? This is a question I’m sure you’ve heard in a classroom setting before maybe by a professor or fellow student. Some professor seems to provide an argument that he or she claims “scientifically disproves” Christianity and you are

like...well they are pretty smart and I don’t know what to say...but I’m not ready to jettison my faith...soooo please don’t call on me? It feels in those settings like Christianity is being set up as the enemy to science and then you have guys like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens who reinforce that perception saying is intellectually impossible to be a scientist and to be a Christian.

Many times this question comes up around the topic of evolution. Someone considering the claims of Christianity pauses and says “Yeah but what about evolution?” And its posed as if to become a christian you have to ignore the giant ocean of data about evolutionary theory.

This is a very common objection to christianity in our skeptical culture. “Religion was useful in the days before scientific study, but after the enlightenment and the Copernican revolution we know now that there is a scientific explanation for everything so we really don’t need religion anymore. It’s a nice sentiment but when you want real undeniable truth, you go to the laboratory, not church.” Faith has been replaced with Fact as the barometer of truth and that’s how it is and you learn it from the time you are 5 years old.

Today, in our second to last week in the “my problem with God” series, we are going to talk about Scientific study and faith. Because many of you christians have been asked these questions and many of you are asking these questions. Great resource for today: **Belief** by Francis Collins – Considered one of the preeminent scientific minds of our day, director of human genome

project, first guy to map human DNA, and been the director of the National Institutes of Health.

I say that because, in case you didn't know, I am not a scientist. I like to see how wood reacts to fire, how fire ants react to water, and how dishes & laundry react to being ignored. So, I dabble. But I'm no professional. So I'll be leaning on Collins and others for some things today.

We gotta set something straight to begin with: The apparent conflict between scientific study and faith many people battle is actually a product of a deeper issue and that is...what do you do when you have doubts? Modern Scientific Study is built on the premise of doubting everything until it can be empirically proven.

We've said throughout this series that all thoughtful people have doubts. Sometimes we feel a little bit ashamed of our doubts in Christian circles like...does having doubts about some aspect of our faith mean we aren't actually Christians? And what we've said is doubt is like a foot ready to take a step. Doubt is actually a good thing as it creates the opportunity to draw closer to God through investigating him and the world he created.

So today, to help us navigate this apparent conflict between science & Christianity, we are going to turn to perhaps the most famous doubter of all time. Definitely the best known one from the bible. We are going to John chapter 20. Here, right in the middle of the resurrection of Jesus story, you are going to see one of Jesus' closest friends doubt whether he really rose. His name is Thomas, he's one of the 12 disciples, and he doubts Jesus. And the reason he doubts is basically because

rising from the dead is scientifically impossible. So if you've ever had a twinge of doubt when it comes to Jesus, you should be able to relate to him.

[24] Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. [25] So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless **I see** in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas is the guy nobody wants to publicly admit they like, but inside they are cheering him on. Kind of like Charlie King with Justin Bieber. Publicly Charlie is all "ehhh I'm not a fan of his music. But Privately he's all "Despacito."

Like Charlie with the Biebs, we secretly like Thomas because we relate to him. Thomas hears about Jesus getting out of the grave and his instinct is...finish this phrase for me all together outloud..."I'll believe it when...see it..."

Thomas went through something most of us go through today. The worldview he is operating from doesn't have room for a Savior-King to die at the hands of his enemies and it doesn't have room for dead people to rise again. So he doubts it.

And that's big because sometimes we think that now, here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are the enlightened era and so we no longer believe in fairy tales like our ancestors did. Rah The Egyptian Sun God didn't really create the world from an egg, Zeus really didn't rule over a set of

Gods and demi-gods who controlled the world, The Easter Bunny...well that one is just weird. But Jesus gets lumped in with those as fairy tale or legend.

In fact, like I've said earlier in this series many people who consider themselves skeptics carry that label as a burden. They WANT to believe, but in the face of the evidence, they feel they can't be intellectually honest and believe it. Maybe back then when we weren't as enlightened...And What you are seeing with Thomas is that no, even in that day, Jesus had doubters because resurrection didn't fit into most people's understanding of the laws of nature. Watch what happens:

[26] Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." [27] Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." [28] Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" [29] Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We all relate to Thomas...and deep inside we are all a little jealous of him right? Man, if Jesus showed up at the foot of my bed tonight and said "touch my hands where they nailed me to the cross & my side where they stabbed me. See, its me!" Then we'd believe! And the person who thinks that way, that is exactly who Jesus is talking to. And That's why, I believe, God has you right here today listening to Thomas' story. Because you have

not seen. You haven't seen the risen Jesus. And Jesus says you will experience the blessing of God when you believe in that which you have not seen. And that frustrates you.

you hear that and think...sure, blind faith. I'm not going to have blind faith. I'll believe it when...I see it. And Until then I must doubt whether it is all true.

So What do we do with this doubt? I'm going to borrow a concept from Tim Keller's book that I mentioned in week one...Making Sense of God...one concept he puts forward there is to **doubt your doubts**. Here's what he means: When you doubt something you doubt it because the worldview you operate by suggests to you that whatever the thing you've heard or seen simply cannot be true. Think about Thomas. He'd never seen someone rise from the dead so in his worldview that CANNOT happen. But was he correct? No he wasn't. So what happens when he sees Jesus? This evidence he sees crashes his worldview. This is the point of the Thomas Story: you must be willing to doubt your doubts when you are faced with compelling evidence. In fact the point gets clear in the next two verses:

[30] Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John, the author, knows that the resurrection may not be possible according to your worldview. That's what

Thomas is in here for. To help you begin to doubt your doubts. To help you see that if you believe the lab is the only place where absolute truth can be known, What you are actually doing is making a **faith** claim. A big faith claim in fact about the power of mankind's deductive reasoning to be the judge and jury of all truth. So I want to look two big, commonly held "doubts" that maybe you are carrying around like Thomas was. They are often used to pit science and Christianity against each other in our day and I want to show you how instead of being in conflict, they are actually on the same team revealing truth in a powerful, complimentary way.

And the point in all of this is going to be:

**Do you believe the universe gives evidence of a supernatural being behind it, and is that being the God revealed in Jesus?**

That 2 part question is the prize you gotta keep your eye on today. Is there a God behind all this, and is it Jesus? That's my cards laid out on where we are heading. Now, let's look at these two doubts

DOUBT # 1: Hasn't the theory of evolution disproven Christianity?

Charles Darwin's landmark book *The Origin of Species* laid out the case that current life evolves from a more primitive form of life and such evolution has happened over billions of years since the world began. The modern world as we know it is the product of evolution, or natural selection, and we can see small evidences of it today comparing various animal species to their fossilized ancestors.

In light of this evidence, some suggest, there is no way the creation account that Christians hold to can possibly be true. After all, Genesis 1 says the world was created in 6 days by God speaking everything into existence. And that seems very different than the theory of evolution. So...the question is posed...which one is it? And many skeptics will say it is much more intellectually satisfying to ditch the bible and go with Darwin. This is exactly what Rickard Dawkins meant when he said: "although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."<sup>1</sup>

This is a big problem for many people. So, the question to you Thomas, is there reasonable evidence for you to doubt this doubt? Let me give you a few evidences why I think you should doubt this doubt:

The origin of the universe is a faith question. We talked about this a little bit in week one, but lets say you give 100% of evolutionary theory the way some of these more aggressive atheists like Dawkins & Hitchens do. Let's say for a second we will believe it whole hog (southern expression for 100). The question still sits: where did it all come from in the first place? Very few serious scientists, none that I could find, believe in the spontaneous creation of the universe. In other words: few believe that Nothing x nobody = everything. That's silliness. And even Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* says that Darwin's theory "works for biology not cosmology." And then gives no answer to the question of the origin of the universe. So even if you accept 100% of the big bang & evolutionary theory you still are completely in the dark

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, (W.W. Norton, 1986), 6.

with how it all started. “It started with a big bang” ok what started the bang? SOMETHING. What is that something? That my friends is not a question the scientific method can answer. It is a faith question.

“When evolution is turned into an all-encompassing Theory explaining absolutely everything we believe, feel, and do as the product of natural selection, then we are not in the arena of science but of philosophy. Evolution as an all-encompassing theory has huge holes and inconsistencies.”<sup>2</sup>

The desire for human rights in an amoral universe. The catch phrase for the theory of evolution is the same as it was for my middle school: “the survival of the fittest.” Which means the stronger species survive and adapt while the weaker species get acne & braces... die off. The problem is, something in each of us is very uncomfortable with that when we apply it to the human species. Because we believe that all people *ought* to be treated with dignity regardless of their lot in life. We hold so tightly to the idea that there must be some basic universal human rights, which means something you deserve simply because you are human, that nations will band together to topple regimes who do not give them to their own people. But listen, if you believe that survival of the fittest is an all encompassing worldview that explains how we got here, then you must be perfectly ok with the weak being overpowered by the strong, with self-preservation being more important than self-sacrifice. Because there is no morality in play in a world governed

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<sup>2</sup> David Atkinson, *The Meaning of Genesis 1-11* (IVP, 1990) 31. As cited in Tim Keller, *Reason for God* (Dutton, 2008) 94.

by the laws of evolutionary theory. Just strong eating weak.

And that’s where most ardent atheists lose the masses. Because nobody wants to take “survival of the fittest” to its logical application with the human race. It is brutal & there is no virtue in it. And that’s what makes it not work for us.

But our only other option is a higher law. One that gives meaning and value to you and to all people. If you believe in a purely natural world you have to suppress any desire to care for someone who is not going to improve your own situation. Even beyond that you have throw out “right and wrong” all together. And that just doesn’t mesh with the way we feel the world “ought to be.”

The real issue isn’t **how** the world was created, but **who** created it and **why**.

Back to Genesis 1 & 2. It says God created the world in six days. There are really smart Christians who interpret those words very differently because its tough to tell what kind of literature genesis 1 & 2 falls into.. Some, like Dr. Collins, or my old Seminary Professor John Sailhamer, see Genesis 1-2 as a poetic description of creation events which matches with other couplet writings in the OT like Judges 4 & 5 or exodus 14 & 15. They say it is part of a structure Moses put together like a poetic intro to the entire Torah. And under this theory you could give allowance to almost all of evolutionary theory because you still have the WHY behind the created world. But then there are really bright scholars in the Intelligent Design Camp who believe the world’s complexity reflects the design of an incredibly complex and other worldly

creator. To them, Genesis 1 & 2 reads like a historical record.

Who is right? That's a great question. And scientists and scholars need to keep trying to figure it out. ***BUT, what I'm trying to tell you is that it isn't a question that needs to determine your faith.***

The question is: Is there a God behind creation, however he did it, and is that God revealed in Jesus Christ?

In fact Francis Bacon said it best...and Francis Collins talks about it in his book. He said God gave us two books. The book of nature and the book of scripture. They aren't in competition with each other but quite the opposite, they work in harmony together revealing the one true God behind them both. So when you feel like you sense a contradiction, just press harder on them. The truth will out.

There are faithful Christians along the spectrum of *how* God created the present world who believe the God revealed in the bible created the universe and that salvation from our sins is only available through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Don't get lost in the intramural debate about the origin of the world when the Superbowl you need to worry about is "is Jesus who he says he is?"

**Hebrews 11:3**, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." That God was behind creation. The question of faith is not all the nuances of how he did it... Richard Dawkins says this in *God*

*Delusion*, "The quarrel is not between evolution and creation, but between naturalism and supernaturalism." RD and the Bible agree? That has to be right! <sup>3</sup>

Ok real quick on the DOUBT #2: Aren't Miracles Scientifically Impossible?<sup>4</sup>

This is often the first defeater people put forward against Christianity. Because after all Christianity is pretty dependent on Miracles...the intervention of God into the natural order. Just the virgin birth and the resurrection for starters.

Maybe you have asked, like my kids have, "Hey dad, Why would GOD become a baby? And how would a God Baby fit in a human belly?...you can see those wheels churning...wait... Was Mary really fat?"

Now we gotta pause incarnational theology to talk about how we never ask about a woman's weight, especially not a pregnant lady.

But back to the question. Aren't miracles scientifically impossible? Here are a couple responses. Along with the scientific age came a mistrust of the bible because the bible contained records of miraculous events that were 'impossible' according to the discoveries made by science. Scientists like John Macquarrie said "Science proceeds on the assumption that whatever

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<sup>3</sup> Dawkins & Bible Agree!? – from J.D. Greear sermon "But Science has disproved the Bible" preached in the "Why I'm Not a Christian" series in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> I leaned on Keller's chapter "Science has disproved Christianity" from *Reason for God* for this section on miracles. The chapter is brief but hope-filled and well sourced.

events occur in the world can be accounted for in terms of other events...just as immanent and this-worldly. In other words, if a chair falls over, we can look at the situation and deduce that the person beside it pushed it. Cause & effect.

So...Miracle is irreconcilable with our modern understanding of both science and history.” In other words: miracles are impossible because science can't verify them.

The PROBLEM with his idea is that he is saying a supernatural cause is impossible because it cannot be naturally proven. In other words: Something Supernatural cannot be proven, or disproven, by a process already closed to the supernatural.

Well OF COURSE Something Supernatural cannot be proven by a method confined only to the natural. That'd be like dropping your car keys at night on your way to your car and insisting that they must have fallen under the streetlight and they COULD NOT POSSIBLY be in the dark because...you just don't want to look over there. To be **sure** that miracles cannot occur you would have to be sure beyond a doubt that God didn't exist, and now you are making faith claims.

But listen, I don't want to come across too hard on those who struggle with the idea of God intervening in the natural order. “Miracles are hard to believe in and they should be.” Matthew 28. And I've read this passage ya'll about 20,000 times. It's the great commission. And I always overlooked this part but its so perfect for today.

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

[17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, **but some doubted**. Matthew 28:16-17

Here is the author of one of the four gospels telling us there were some of the founders of the church doubting, right there on the scene looking at him with their own eyes and touching him and doubting whether the resurrection really happened. Why put that in there? Because it happened. And it tells us a couple of things: First it tells us we aren't the first era of humanity to doubt God because he doesn't line up with our natural view of the world. We should realize people have been skeptical of Jesus' supernatural claims long before Darwin came on the scene. And some of them were future church leaders! Which reminds us we should have patience with people who struggle to believe God could raise Jesus from the dead. Which leads me to the most important thing this shows us:

The purpose of miracles, all miracles, was not just to lead people to cognitive belief, it was to lead people to worship. When the disciples saw him they worshipped him. Jesus' miracles were never random acts of showing off. In his miracles he fed the hungry, made the blind see, the deaf hear, he freed the oppressed. Miracles weren't a suspension of the natural order, they were a restoration of the natural order.

Remember the 4 movements we looked at in week 1? The bible says we weren't created to have disease, hunger, & conflict but those things are the product of sin corrupting our world.

Jesus' miracles aren't just proofs that he has power, but wonderful foretastes of what he's going to do with this power.

That's why Thomas' story is in scripture.

[31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Don't get lost in the intramural debates. Jesus explains what life is all about. And some of you have been searching hard for God. For meaning and purpose and today I'm telling you that the great news is when you look at Jesus what you are going to find is that Jesus has been looking for you. He looks at you like the lost son or daughter he loves so much and desires desperately to come home.

The more you search the stars and study the microscope the more you'll see God has put something incredible together. And he's done it all to point your heart and your mind back to him. And that God wants you to give your life to him. You can do that today. You need to do that today.

Invitation & **COMMUNION**