

Faith Need Not Be Blind:

The Role of Miracles in the Gospel of John's Theory of Spiritual Knowledge

By Eric V. Snow

The early Catholic writer Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225 A.D.) argued in favor of the doctrine that Jesus literally became flesh by declaring: "The Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible." For Tertullian, problems in believing in the incarnation were paradoxically a reason to embrace it, perhaps because its sheer intrinsic unlikelihood as a story for someone to make up to convince others to believe in. But on the other hand, the skeptical author Mark Twain (1835-1910) straightforwardly asserted that having difficulty in accepting a statement by faith was a reason to reject it: "Faith is believing something you know ain't true." Yet, would Jesus, as described by the Fourth Evangelist, agree with the sentiments of either man? What kind of evidence did the first Christians receive, if any, before they would place their faith in Jesus as their Savior from eternal death? Most remarkably, the Gospel of John reveals that Jesus didn't expect His earliest followers to follow Him blindly. Jesus provided evidence through His miracles and by His character that God the Father had sent Him to earth and had inspired His words to humanity.

The Gospel of John has deep running general epistemological themes, of which the relationship between Jesus' miracles to proving publicly the truth of His teachings is a subset. (Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the methods by which humans can reliably gain knowledge. It concerns itself with one of life's ultimate questions: "How do you know that you know?") Besides focusing heavily on the crucial issue of Jesus' essential identity and what His relationship was with the Father, John also deals with what is the ultimate authoritative source for reliable religious teaching. In his opening prologue, which reveals the general purposes and themes of his work, the Fourth Evangelist poetically reveals that the Word (i.e., Jesus Christ) was the source of spiritual knowledge but that mankind generally resisted it (NKJV normally used throughout): "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own [countrymen, the Jews] did not receive Him." John also made it clear that John the Baptist wasn't the supreme source of spiritual knowledge, but that he came to point out to others who was: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness to bear witness to the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." But spiritual light, knowledge, and truth were revealed by the Word of God, which Jesus both spoke and embodied personally (v. 14), including by the way He lived His life. When Jesus was on trial for His life, John's general epistemological theme forcibly erupts yet again near his book's end. In response to Jesus' assertion that He brought truth to humanity, Pilate, the skeptical Roman pagan, asked rhetorically (John 18:38): "What is truth?" And what else is "truth" besides human ideas and knowledge correctly corresponding with spiritual and physical realities? Jesus answered Pilate's question the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane while praying to the Father (John 17:17): "Your word is truth." So what the Father reveals to humanity via His Son's words and way of life is

spiritual truth. Before eliciting the Roman Procurator's disbelieving response, Jesus told him the purpose for His spiritual mission to earth (John 18:37): "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." And does the spiritual truth that Jesus brought to humanity yield practical, life changing results? Or is it just nice-sounding, sentimental religious speculation? Ponder now in this context the famous "Golden Verse" (John 3:16): "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." If Jesus' message is true, and you are called and then believe in it, you can gain eternal life, rather than just survive on earth in the flesh for (say) seventy years, and then be lowered into a hole in the ground. What could be more "practical" than finding a way to escape death? But now, how do Jesus' miracles relate to the mission the Father sent Him on which aimed to reveal spiritual knowledge to humanity?

Jesus sometimes provided a sign to witness that He was a prophet, the Savior, and the Messiah. For example, when God was calling Nathanael through Phillip (John 1:45-51), the latter said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." So then Nathanael asked skeptically, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip challenged him in response, like a true empiricist, to check out the One of whom he spoke: "Come and see." After Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He proclaimed his good, straightforward character, "An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" After Nathanael asked, "How do you know me?" Jesus revealed that He had seen Nathanael by vision just before Philip had met him: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." After this stunning revelation, which Jesus could only have known miraculously, Nathanael instantly drew the logical conclusion that what Philip had told him about Jesus was true: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" This miraculous revelation then was merely the first of many to come, according to Jesus: "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. . . . You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Jesus clearly didn't expect Nathanael to become His disciple based upon His or Philip's mere say-so. In Luke's Gospel (5:1-10), Christ similarly used a huge and miraculous catch of fish to witness to Peter, James, and John that he was a prophet of God when He was calling them to be His lead disciples. So He when necessary revealed His miraculous power to prove His identity to those skeptical or ignorant of it.

Jesus also willingly mentioned a future miracle to hostile skeptics as proof of His identity. For instance, in John 2:18-22, after He angrily cleaned out the moneychangers from the temple, the Jews asked Him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" Jesus responded: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They misunderstood Him here, by having thought He meant the great stone building in Jerusalem where they ritualistically sacrificed animals to Jehovah. But Jesus actually referred to the future resurrection of His physical body (cf. II Cor. 6:16; I Cor. 3:16), which was His own temple of the Holy Spirit, as His sign to them. After the Messiah rose from the dead, "his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." The sign of the resurrection witnessed to His disciples, not just to His critics, demonstrating that His words as a religious teacher were true. Interestingly enough, the First Evangelist reported Jesus' making a

similar point (Matt. 12:38-40). So Christ was ultimately willing to witness miraculously even to hostile critics, but would not do so right away at their request.

Miracles Don't Always Create Believers

Now Jesus' miracles convinced many to believe in His name, but that didn't prove they were personally loyal to Him or restrain their evil human nature (John 2:23-25): "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." For miracles by themselves won't necessarily convince everyone to believe and to obey God, as Israel's experiences during the Exodus and in the wilderness both demonstrate. Notice Nicodemus' statement, which implies many other Jews of high authority like him believed God had sent Jesus based on the miracles that He did: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Yet how many were converted? How many even were dissuaded from seeking Jesus' death and persecuting His followers? Early in the morning on Pentecost in 31 A.D., only about 120 people were totally dedicated to following Jesus despite all the healings and other miracles He did, let alone all He said as a teacher as well (Acts 2:15). Over 500 had seen Him after His resurrection at one point (I Cor. 15:6), yet only 120 were fully committed when the Holy Spirit came. Where were the other 380 plus? John the Baptist explained why this was the case (John 3:27; cf. John 6:44, 65): "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." So if people aren't called, miracles by themselves won't convince them to accept Jesus as Savior or His teachings.

Jesus' Miracle Convinces the Samaritan Woman of His Identity

As described above, a Jewish man, Nathanael, was convicted that Jesus was the Messiah by His ability to know personal details about him by supernatural power. The same process and result took place with a (gentile) Samaritan woman (John 4:16-30). After Jesus tested her by asking her to go call her husband, to which she responded by saying she had no husband, Jesus replied: "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." The woman answered that she perceived Him to be a prophet. She also asserted that the Messiah's identity included His revealing all knowledge, that "He will tell us all things." Later on, after this discussion with Jesus, during which He revealed that He was the Messiah, she went into town to tell others about Jesus: "Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" As a result, many came out to check Jesus out for themselves. Here Jesus' miraculous power to know about the personal life of this woman He hadn't met before helped to convict her and others from her city about His identity. His word, which may include His teachings or reasonings, while staying with them, helped persuade the others as well (John 4:39-42, NKJV):

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we

ourselves have heard Him, and we **know** [as a result—EVS] that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

Hence, Jesus’ prophetic power to know and state the especially personal experiences of others who would be strangers to Him helped convert others into accepting His status that He was the Messiah and Savior.

Nicodemus’ and the Samaritan Woman’s Same Spiritual Level

In this context, an important and general epistemological theme surfaced in Jesus’ dialog with the Samaritan woman that focused on the Jews’ spiritual knowledge of God exceeding the Samaritans’, with Jesus concluding (John 4:24), “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The Samaritan woman really missed Jesus’ spiritual point by literally interpreting Jesus’ discussion of spiritual water: “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v. 15). Likewise, in the prior chapter, Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews whose knowledge of God’s ways should have so greatly surpassed the Samaritan woman’s, still was perplexed by Jesus’ teaching about the new birth (John 3:4, 9). This Pharisee didn’t understand what Jesus meant by being born of water and the Spirit. Jesus told the incredulous Nicodemus (John 3:10-12): “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know [cf. John 4:22], and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Ironically both the sexually dissolute gentile Samaritan woman, a mere commoner, and the well educated, religiously zealous Jewish man, a ruler of the Chosen People, both mistakenly took literally Jesus’ teachings that used physical water to illustrate a spiritual truth. Likewise, the Jewish crowd in Capernaum, mere average folk, similarly mistook Jesus’ description of spiritual bread as literal bread (John 6:31-35). Nicodemus wasn’t ultimately in a spiritually superior position compared to the woman at the well; both lacked crucial knowledge that they still had to learn in order to be saved.

God so clearly wants people to have accurate knowledge of Him and His truths; guesswork isn’t enough to save someone. To do good works or to be a nice person isn’t enough to save anyone, whether pagan, Muslim, Jew, and/or Christian; correct belief about Jesus is also necessary for anyone to be saved, for “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and **truth**” (John 4:24). True, Jesus on the night before His crucifixion explained that knowledge wasn’t enough by itself (John 13:17): “If you know these things, blessed are you if you **do** them.” He also pointed out that “all [people] will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” To witness to skeptics, this love would have to be publicly observable and require practical sacrifice (cf. James 2:14-17; I John 3:16-18), not just be nice sentiments mouthed by some Christians publicly about some other believers. Humanity doesn’t have the freedom to worship God any way it chooses, in ignorance or in knowledge, whether done from sincere, self-sacrificing aspirations, or from base, self-interested motives. Instead, man’s duty is to get it right and correct, regardless of hindrances or limitations, or he ultimately won’t be accepted by God and so gain eternal life.

Jesus’ Early Miracles Create Belief

Jesus' first miracle was during the wedding Feast at Cana, where He turned water into wine. His disciples and His mother were with Him there (John 2:2-3). This miracle produced faith in Him among His disciples: "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). Jesus' second sign took place after He returned to Galilee from Judea while visiting Capernaum (John 4:46-54). An official's son there had fallen deathly ill, but Jesus healed him. After the official had begged Jesus about his plight, which showed he had some faith already, Jesus responded, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." The official persisted in his belief in Jesus by replying, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" Jesus then said, "Go your way; your son lives." This man believed what Jesus told him. After asking his servant about what time his son's recovery began, he discovered it corresponded with the hour Jesus said, "Your son lives." Consequently, this man "believed, and his whole household." Jesus here didn't ask the official to believe the Father had sent Him on His own mere say-so, but He provided a testifying work as proof of His mission (cf., Moses' signs convinced the children of Israel that he had met God in the wilderness, Ex. 4:1-9, 30-31; Moses was implicitly a type of Christ in Acts 7:35-39).

In another case (John 5:1-15), Jesus healed the paralytic man by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, and told him to carry his bed on that day. The Jews were convinced this violated the Sabbath command. After all, hadn't the paralytic man waited 38 years to be healed? So why couldn't he have waited one more day? His medical condition plainly wasn't life threatening. Furthermore, why tell him to pick up a burden (cf. Neh. 13:15-18) on the Sabbath? So they persecuted Him. They got even more violently angry when He compared His work to the Father's, thus making them think He was blaspheming God also, not just breaking the Sabbath, as per their traditional interpretation of the Fourth Commandment (John 5:16-18). (Later on, Jesus ironically noted they wanted to kill Him for miraculously making whole the human body on the Sabbath while they still, in order to circumcise a baby on the right day under the law, approved of cutting off a piece of it on the same day! See John 7:20-25). Jesus' basic response to their accusations was to say the Father had sent Him, and what He said and did was what the Father wanted Him to do, that He had no authority separate from the Father's. He analyzed and criticized their skepticism, their unwillingness to believe He had come from the Father. For they had to accept the knowledge that the Father sent Him to be saved (verse 24): "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." He observed that they believed God had sent John the Baptist, who bore witness to Jesus and yet didn't do major miracles to convince them of the truth of his spiritual mission. He then pointed out some decisive evidence for them to believe in His relationship with the Father and why they should believe that He sent Him: His miracles (verse 36): "But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me." He wryly remarked they would believe someone else who came in his own name, but they wouldn't believe He who came in the Father's name! So Jesus' interactions with and response to the Jews who criticized His healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath showed that having correct knowledge about the Father's relationship with Christ was crucial to their getting saved, and that His miracles were evidence that the Father had really sent Him on His spiritual mission.

The Crowd Wanted Still More Miracles Before Truly Believing

Jesus was well aware that crowds stayed around to watch and/or benefit from His miracles (John 6:2): “Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.” Shortly before the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, He tested His disciples to see what they would say about buying bread for the throngs gathered near Him (John 6:3-13). After hearing Philip’s bold, blunt, and pessimistic analysis and Andrew’s pleading, questioning and wistful assessment, Jesus fed the crowd miraculously. As a result, they believed God had sent Jesus (John 6:14): “Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world!’” Shortly thereafter, He gently rebuked the multitude who pursued Him across the Sea of Galilee while seeking yet more bread (John 6:26-27): “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you; because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” Jesus told the crowd (John 6:29) that the works of God that they should do would be to believe in the One the Father had sent. Although surely many of them already had witnessed miracles that Jesus did or had heard others describe what He did to them, the crowd still then asked Him to provide (more) miraculous evidence that the Father had sent Him (John 6:30-31): “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” This crowd was focused still on discussing physical bread, which God had provided miraculously as manna while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. They wanted yet more evidence that Jesus was a prophet sent by God. Jesus replied by saying Moses hadn’t given them the physical manna but the Father would provide them with true (spiritual) bread from heaven that would give life to the world. The crowd wanted this bread physically, much like the Samaritan woman wanting actual water so she could avoid a return trip to the well (John 4:15). Both the (mostly?) Jewish crowd and the Samaritan woman interpreted physically a statement by Jesus that He meant spiritually.

Jesus’ well known response, which implied His Deity, to the crowd was (John 6:35), “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” He proclaimed He could perform a miracle greater than God’s providing physical bread to Israel that kept them alive in the wilderness, since anyone who believed in Him would have eternal life (John 6:58), for “He who eats this [spiritual] bread will live forever.” So the evidence Jesus gave at this point to the crowd’s request for a miracle was to mention obliquely the opportunity for them to live forever if they believed in Him. After all, their physical bodies ultimately could be preserved forever only after being transformed into spirit bodies (I Cor. 15:44-45, 49). But this declaration wouldn’t be verifiable until after they lived a lifetime of commitment to Him and had died, that they later would be resurrected. Christ then explained why they wouldn’t believe despite He had done miracles (John 6:36-37, 40): “I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. . . . And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” They weren’t called to believe in Him then, as John 6:44, 65 show: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . . Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” (See also John 8:43-48, during Jesus’ debate with another crowd; compare to John 10:3-5; 26-29). Later in

Jerusalem, Jesus commented that those who wanted to obey God would know whether Christ's teaching was from God (John 7:17): "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority." So Jesus while in Galilee explained why many in the crowd found His high claims too hard to accept, such as His saying that He was the Bread of Life that came down from heaven (John 6:42): "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" So Jesus' grand miracles weren't going to convert people to believe then unless they also already had been called by the Father.

Did the Crowd Have Enough Evidence to Believe Responsibly?

Does the classic Catch-22 statement of fideism correctly describe the crowd's spiritual reactions to Jesus' actions and words? (Fideism is the teaching that God's existence should be believed in only by faith, not by reason). That is, to believers, nothing will make them stop believing, but to unbelievers, nothing will make them believe. For those not called (say) when Jesus walked the earth or during their first lives on earth will receive their opportunity later (as many faithless Israelites will, Eze. 37:11-13); no one from conception and birth is predestined inescapably to the lake of fire and annihilation (Malachi 4:1, 3). As Paul explained (I Tim. 2:3-4), "God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." If the almighty, all-knowing God really wishes **all** men and women to know enough about Him before accepting or rejecting Him, wouldn't He undertake practical actions so that they would actually gain potentially saving knowledge about Him? Would He ever so casually let billions of ignorant Chinese and Indian peasants who never heard the name of Christ get thrown into an eternally burning hell over the millennia? Anyway, isn't it a disproportionate punishment to horribly torture for trillions of unending years the ignorant for idolatry, adultery, lying, and other sins during their brief human lifetimes averaging (say) twenty five years? Furthermore, to His disciples called then, Jesus' miracles and character supplied powerful and personally experienced evidence promoting their belief in Him and the Father's having sent Him. After all, people today, such as in their choices of a career, a college major, or a mate, routinely make major life-changing decisions with far less evidence than most in this crowd had for accepting Jesus as their Savior. So why would they hesitate then? The skeptical Twain, quoted above, hailed from the "Show Me" state: Is seeing believing then? To use only an empirical epistemology, however, wasn't enough to convict this crowd to commit themselves permanently to Him. Jesus knew seeing wasn't enough to believe (John 6:36): "You have seen Me and yet do not believe." Was their skepticism merely because His "hard sayings" about being the bread which came down from heaven and about eating His flesh (John 6:41, 52, 60, 66) countered and overwhelmed the evidence stemming from His miracles?

If people given such evidence don't believe, their lack of assent and commitment may stem from emotional and irrational causes, not an intrinsic lack of proof that would make it morally irresponsible to believe. For example, if someone told me Martians had beamed him up to their spaceship last night, performed surgery on him, and then beamed him back in time to go to work the next morning, it would be irresponsible for me to believe his tale based on his mere say-so. That would be true even if he had been a good friend (i.e., wasn't an unknown stranger) and hadn't ever told any fanciful tales before (i.e., had proven himself reliable previously). But if he was able now to extend and retract implanted antennas from his head and demonstrate

otherwise someone else's superior technology, it would be irresponsible for me to reject his story casually. According to the Old Testament, God did give Moses the power to do signs that showed to Israel that he had met God at the burning bush, Ex. 4:1-9, 30-31. The difference between called true believers and uncalled unbelievers (or false believers) then largely if not completely depends on which ones God miraculously grants repentance to, and which ones He doesn't (Romans 2:4; 11:7-8). The spiritual opening and transformation of a previously closed carnal human mind is a miracle rivaling Jesus' healings. But even among the called, many refuse to commit themselves to believing and living the truth, as Jesus explained (Matt. 22:14): "For many are called, but few are chosen." Jesus chose Judas, but he wasn't ultimately loyal to Him (John 6:70): "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Those disciples who rejected Jesus' new revelations during this dialog with the crowd in Capernaum's synagogue may have either been true believers (i.e., the actually called) who fell away or false believers who wouldn't have endured anyway (John 6:60, 66; Luke 8:6-7; 13-14). Knowing many were offended by His teachings (John 6:61), Jesus asked that if He would rise to heaven whether that would convince them of His teachings (John 6:62-64): "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? . . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." The spiritual Catch-22 that makes the quality and amount of proof for belief totally irrelevant to commitment and non-commitment at best only partially agrees with Scripture since, unlike what classical Calvinism teaches, even the called/the elect can still choose to not believe.

Jesus' Skeptical Brothers Challenged Him to Do Miracles

Challenging Him to do more miracles publicly, the half-brothers of Jesus clearly didn't believe in Him (John 7:3-5): "His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea [for the annual festival, the Feast of Tabernacles], that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.'" The comparison here with the family of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith is fascinating, for three of the purported eight witnesses to the plates were Smiths. Jesus, as a true prophet of God, ironically got less family support during His earthly ministry than Smith, the ridiculous charlatan of a false faith, received! Now many people in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles reasoned that the Messiah would do many miracles, so then Jesus likely was He (John 7:31): "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?" They also considered discounting Him as the Messiah since they thought they knew where He was from (John 7:26-29; cf. 8:13-14), which showed they didn't understand who He was correctly. Jesus replied to this reasoning by mentioning He didn't come on His own accord, but that the Father had sent Him (John 7:28-29). Once again, Jesus' identity in this text is closely tied to His relationship with the Father and His being sent by Him. The Fourth Evangelist's running theme (see also John 8:12-19, 25-29) about people needing to have correct spiritual knowledge about Jesus and His relationship with the Father plainly appears here.

The bottom-line result for belief in Jesus and that the Father sent Him is for the believer to gain eternal life. As Jesus told a crowd whose members were debating with Him about His identity (John 8:51): "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." But, of course, this crowd of unconverted Jews could have thought, "Why should we

believe in Him? What evidence has He given?” Earlier, during this same dialog, Jesus addressed those who believed in Him and His mission (John 8:31-32): “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” At this point obedience, that is, living Christ’s words, would precede gaining greater truth and gaining freedom from sin (v. 34-36). His words about speaking what the Father had commanded Him had particularly convicted this group of (nominal?) believers in Him (John 8:28-30): ““When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.’ As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.” But as He explained, the crowd’s members who couldn’t bear to hear His words or understand them were of Satan, not the Father (verses 43, 47): “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. . . . He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.” Spiritual ignorance and error clearly aren’t sources for salvation, but correct religious knowledge is.

The Parable of the Sower Also Explains Spiritual Blindness

Outside the Gospel of John, Jesus similarly explained why His disciples could understand the parable of the sower but the crowd didn’t receive an explanation (Matt. 13:11, 13): “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the crowd] it has not been given. . . . This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” The words He cited from Isaiah as a fulfilled prophecy merely reinforced the point that uncalled people can’t be saved since they don’t understand the spiritual truths required for salvation (verses 14-15; from Isaiah 6:9-10): “You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.” But Christ’s disciples were in a different category, so their minds were opened to receiving spiritual truth (v. 16): “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.” Therefore, Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the sower also sheds light on why the crowd hearing His words in John 8 couldn’t accept them. They may have been in the first of the four categories, in which the devil steals immediately the word sowed in their heart by the gospel’s proclamation (Matt. 13:4, 19). The Gospel of John may emphasize more than the Synoptic Gospels that spiritual knowledge is a source of salvation instead of practical obedience, but since the parable of the sower appears in all three of them, they hardly ignore the former’s importance.

The Blind Beggar’s Healing Witnesses to Spiritual Blindness

The case of the man born blind’s being healed (John 9) demonstrates how important miracles were to proving the Father authorized Jesus’ mission, a point Jesus later made again during His Passover night discourse (John 15:22-24). The disciples asked whether the beggar or his parents had sinned as a cause of his blindness, a view the Pharisees later directly affirmed in anger (vs. 2, 34). Jesus totally denied this explanation, but said his blindness gave Him the opportunity to demonstrate God’s (miraculous) works (verse 3): “It was not that this man

sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.” Because Jesus healed the beggar on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees interviewing him disputed among themselves about whether God had sent Jesus (vs. 16-18). Some said, “This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath,” according to their traditional understanding. But others wondered, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” When asked for his opinion, the formerly blind beggar had no doubts about what conclusion to draw from Jesus’ miracle about His identity: “He is a prophet.” Later summarily dismissing Jesus as a sinner for healing on the Sabbath, some Pharisees interviewed the formerly blind beggar again. After he asked them if they wanted to become one of the disciples of Christ, they derisively replied about why they thought they should be followers of Moses (vs. 28-29): “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”

Are Miracles a Sufficient Foundation for Religious Authority?

The Pharisees’ dismissal of Jesus’ religious authority in John 9:29 raises the foundational issue of what our ultimate source of religious authority should be. Jesus used His miracles to witness to others that God had sent Him, much as Jehovah gave Moses the ability to do miracles to demonstrate to skeptical Israelites that He had appeared to him (Exodus 4:1-9; cf. God’s witness to Gideon, Judges 6:36-40). Therefore, if the Pharisees’ ancient ancestors had accepted Moses as being sent by Jehovah based on his abilities to turn a walking stick into a serpent and back again into a rod, his hand leprous and non-leprous, and/or to turn the Nile’s water into blood on dry ground (Ex. 4:30-31), why shouldn’t they similarly have accepted Jesus’ miracles as proof that God had sent Him? Perhaps their inconsistency came mainly from how they thought Sabbath should be kept as per the oral law tradition, which was further developed and codified in the Talmuds. They thought non-life-threatening medical care shouldn’t be administered on the Sabbath. After all, couldn’t have the man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:9-14), the woman bent over (Luke 13:10-13), the man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-4), and the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:5-9) have waited a few more hours until sunset Saturday to be healed? But Jesus obviously chose to heal people on the Sabbath precisely as a witness that the Pharisees’ traditional understanding of how to observe the Sabbath was mistaken (cf. Matt. 12:1-8; Luke 13:13-17; Luke 14:5-6; John 5:10-12, 16-18). Indeed, a major reason various leading Jews sought to kill Jesus was over His Sabbath day healings (John 7:20-25; Mark 3:6). Now the Old Testament does warn against accepting the words of a prophet who does signs and wonders yet who teaches that false gods should be worshiped, i.e., denies a previous revelation from God (Deut. 13:1-5; cf. Deut. 18:20). After all, the Bible also reveals that Satan and his followers can do miracles (Rev. 13:13-14; 16:13-14; II Thess. 2:9; Matt. 24:24; Ex. 7:9-12). So how could we sort out God’s miracles from the devil’s? By examining the teachings and character of the prophet whose mission and identity are in dispute, we could check if they agree with what God had revealed about His truth and character previously. Another solution is to look for a specific kind of miracle, successful predictive prophecy (Deut. 18:21-22), which arises in the context of a Scripture (Deut. 18:15, 18) cited by Peter (Acts 3:22) and Stephen (Acts 7:37) in the New Testament as a prophecy of Jesus’ coming. As God through Moses explained how to sort out false from true prophets (Deut. 18:20-22), “‘The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word which the Lord

has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him.” By implication here, God wouldn’t allow this specific kind of miracle, that is, a priori potentially falsifiable fulfilled prophecy to be systematically performed by Satan’s servants. By this criterion, Jesus’ own life and mission on earth fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies and types. (See James Smith, What the Bible Teaches About The Promised Messiah (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 66). Jesus also specifically and successfully predicted that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2, 15-20; Luke 21:20-24), which no Jewish Zealot nationalist seeking to overthrow Roman rule would have made. For the Pharisees to accept Jesus’ miracles as proof that He was a true prophet of God, they would have to change much of what they believed doctrinally. They had to realize that Jesus’ violations of their oral law tradition wasn’t proof He was a false prophet, but that His reasonings on their errors in Sabbath-keeping were grounds for reconsidering the reliability of “the traditions of the elders” (Mark 7:3). They would also have to reconsider the sources for their religious teachings, and accept Jesus’ in place of these traditions. Their great spiritual downfall came from not letting the Sabbath-healing miracles of Jesus become an impetus for reconsidering their beliefs, but ironically His miracles became an excuse to accuse Him of being a false prophet, to deny His new revelations, and to plot to kill Him.

Jesus’ miracle of healing the man born blind set up a deep irony. The blind man came to see spiritual truths following when Jesus gave him physical sight, but the Pharisees, possessing physical sight, remained in spiritual darkness after rejecting Jesus’ witness to them. Recognizing Jesus by His voice after He found him after the Pharisees had excommunicated him, the formerly blind man chose to believe in Him because of his being healed by Him (John 9:35-38): “Jesus . . . said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He [the formerly blind man] answered and said, ‘And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him.” On the other hand, the physically seeing Pharisees were spiritually blind (John 9:39-41): “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who did not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.’ Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, ‘We are not blind too, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” Importantly, Jesus held the Pharisees spiritually responsible for the knowledge Jesus provided to them that they rejected. The miracles He did, in conjunction with the message He had for mankind from the Father, made the Pharisees fundamentally morally responsible.

The Reaction to Jesus’ Analogy of the Good Shepherd Shows Miracles Don’t Produce Saving Faith in the Uncalled

Jesus’ analogy of Himself as the Good Shepherd leading His sheep (disciples) provoked some of His fellow Jews to reject Him based on His teaching in this parable (John 10:19-20): “There arose a division again among the Jews because of these words. And many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?’” But others, citing Christ’s ability to do miracles, refused to reject Him based on teachings that were hard to accept based on what they had heard others teach them before (verse 21): “Others were saying, ‘These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?’”

Apparently soon thereafter, during Hanukkah in Jerusalem, Jesus' countrymen gathered around Him and asked (John 10:24), "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus responded by noting His power to do miracles hadn't convinced them of His true identity because they weren't called yet as part of the elect (John 10:25-26): "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." Christ's comments about the called sheep following Him, listening to His call/voice, and being not snatched out of His or the Father's hands clarify what He meant by part of the Parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:3-6, 27-29). After the Jews listening to Him accused Him of blasphemy for saying the Father and He were one (John 10:30-33), Jesus sarcastically asked why they wanted to stone Him for the miracles He did as the Father helped Him (v. 32): "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" Jesus' later replied that His miracles were proof that the Father sent Him (John 10:37-38): "If I do not the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." Therefore, the Jews who rejected their countryman, Jesus, as the Messiah despite knowing about His many miracles were fundamentally spiritually responsible for their error. Unlike nearly all gentiles, they weren't ignorant of the Old Testament and its descriptions of God's wonder-working activities as proof of God's visits among them. But other Jews understood their responsibility after hearing about or witnessing Jesus' miracles and words. Despite knowing John the Baptist did no miracles, they still accepted his statements about Christ since they were proven true by their experience (John 10:41-42): "Then many came to Him and said, 'John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.' And many believed in Him there." So Jesus' miracles witnessed to unbelievers about His identity and His being sent by the Father, but they still rejected Him anyway since they weren't (yet) called to believe in Him as His sheep were.

Jesus' Resurrection of Lazarus as Proof the Father Sent Him

After Martha and Mary had Jesus informed that their brother Lazarus was sick, He responded (John 11:4): "This sickness is not unto [lasting] death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." But how would Lazarus' illness glorify Jesus and His Father? After Lazarus died, Jesus explained some to His disciples why He let that happen (verse 15): "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." Jesus plainly allowed Lazarus to die as a means to provide Him with an opportunity to do a miraculous work that would make His disciples believe in Him more fully. (Likewise, the man born blind was made that way (John 9:3) so God through Jesus could perform a wonder-provoking sign by healing him). After He arrived at Bethany, Martha expressed faith in Jesus' miraculous power (verse 21-22): "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (Mary later echoed (verse 32) this view). Martha then even hinted at His ability to resurrect the dead: "But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give you." She confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, who came into the world to give eternal life to believers based at least in part on His ability to do miracles. Other onlookers, knowing about Jesus' track record of wonderful works, asked (v. 37), "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Despite she just confessed her faith in Jesus, Martha still doubted when telling Him not to move the stone at the entrance to the tomb, noting that her brother would stink by now (verse 39). Jesus responded (v. 40) that people have to believe in order to see God's glory manifested among them. Human doubt can cause God to refrain from doing miracles (cf. Matt. 13:57-58), which ironically helps keep the skeptical from ever seeing them. But human skepticism obviously doesn't intrinsically prohibit God from acting miraculously. The general lack of faith prevailing in the presumed near future (Luke 18:8) will not prevent God from unleashing the awesome, world-shaking, end-time events narrated in Revelation. During His brief prayer before resurrecting Lazarus (John 11:40), Jesus asked the Father to allow this miracle as proof so others would know that He sent Him: "And I know that You always hear Me, **but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.**" Once again this running theme of the Gospel of John, that Jesus did miracles to witness to people to prove that He had a special relationship with the Father, arises during the narrative about Lazarus' resurrection. And this miracle generated the expected result: "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him." Indeed, after the Pharisees and chief priests heard reports about this astonishing miracle, they concluded that Jesus' power to do miracles posed a direct threat to their continued rule of Judah under Roman supervision: "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place [i.e., the temple] and nation." In response, the high priest Caiaphas obliquely proposed a deeply ironic "solution" to the threat Jesus posed: "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Obviously, he said this while thinking it would be ruthlessly pragmatic to sacrifice Jesus in order prevent the Romans from harshly punishing a would-be rebellion done in His name. But a dual meaning rises at this point, for God also used Caiaphas's statement as a prophecy about Jesus' role as the Savior of humanity after dying on its behalf: "Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death." (See generally John 11:45-53). So Jesus' awesome miracle in resurrecting Lazarus occurred not only to witness that the Father sent Him, but it also directly lead to the Jewish leadership's conspiracy to have Him executed, which made Him a sacrifice for all of mankind's sins so that everyone could be saved.

According to John, just before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the resurrection of Martha's brother not only put Jesus' life at risk, but also Lazarus' (John 12:9-11): "Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus." The Jewish leadership so hated the faith-producing evidence that Jesus' miracles presented to their nation that they wanted to silence that witness by ruthlessly eliminating the innocent man resurrected as a product of one of Jesus' most spectacular wonders. The disciples didn't initially comprehend the spiritual significance of the triumphal entry's events in fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, but later they did after the crowning miracle of Jesus' resurrection (v. 16): "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to him." Similarly, Jesus later directly told the disciples that they would only understand later what

He was doing on the night of the Passover (John 13:7): “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” Now people in Jerusalem followed Him or at least inquired of Him because of the awesome attesting sign He had performed in resurrecting Lazarus: “Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.” His resultant popularity frustrated the group whose members included those plotting to kill Him: “The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, ‘You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!’” (See John 12:16-19). After others heard a voice sounding from heaven that confirmed Jesus’ declaration about glorifying the Father’s name, He pointed out why this occurred (John 12:30): “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.” That is, this miracle took place in order to prove to them that He spoke with authority from God. It didn’t come about in order to increase His faith, but to increase their faith. Ironically, however, much like their ancient ancestors wandering in the wilderness in the Sinai and Arabia, Jesus’ miracles had created little faith in Him by them (John 12:37): “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him.” According to John, this happened so that two texts from Isaiah (53:1; 6:9-10) about their lack of belief and understanding would be fulfilled. The Jewish nation’s disbelief in their Messiah was prophesied in advance, so that their rejection of their fellow Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Messiah, paradoxically serves as a proof of His Messiahship!

Jesus Not the World’s Judge Because He Relays the Father’s Message to the World

At this time, Jesus proclaimed that what He spoke was what Father wanted Him to speak, and that he who believed in Him believed in the Father (John 12:44, 49-50): “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. . . . For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. . . . Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” Soon thereafter, on Passover night, Jesus told His disciples (John 15:8): “All things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” In Gethsemane He made a similar point while praying (John 17:8): “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You have sent Me.” Likewise, as a precursor of what He told Philip (John 14:8), He said earlier (John 12:45): “And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.” Because He was the Messenger for the Father, and just relaying the Father’s words to those listening to Him, Jesus wasn’t their judge, but those words were: “And if anyone hears My words, and does not believe, I do not judge him . . . He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” So because Jesus was the Father’s Messenger, Christ’s role in the drama of salvation at this time was to be the world’s Savior, not its judge (John 12:47): “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”

Jesus’ “Verification Principle” from Successful Predictive Prophecy

The night before He died, Christ prophesied that His betrayal by Judas Iscariot would ironically be a reason to believe in Him! It would be a successful predictive prophecy later fulfilled during the disciples’ present human lifetimes (John 13:18-19): “That the Scripture may

be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.' Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He." Later on that night, Jesus cited Psalm 69:4's description of people hating Him as further paradoxical evidence as a reason to believe in Him (John 15:24-25): "But now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'" After predicting that His disciples would be persecuted, Christ said they would then remember that He had told them so (John 16:4): "But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them." Jesus also said for Him to predict successfully His own death and resurrection would be proof that they should believe in Him (John 14:29): "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe." Here Jesus' reasoning rebuts the application of the logical positivists' infamous "verification principle." These twentieth-century philosophers argued that what they couldn't possibly check out currently using their senses had no operational meaning. They reasoned that any religious statement or truth claim, such as "God is love" (I John 4:8), makes no more sense than a toddler's doodles since their present experience can neither confirm nor deny it. But by doing various miracles, including by setting up the groundwork for successful predictive prophecy, Jesus gave plenty for His listeners to verify if they so chose to do so and if they were called by God to have their minds opened to accepting spiritual truth. Liberal higher critics commonly argue that Rome executed Jesus merely for organizing a rebellion to gain Jewish national independence. But if this was true, why did Jesus predict the temple's and Jerusalem's destruction (Matt. 24:1-3, 16; Luke 21:20-24; cf. Matt. 23:34-38), i.e., a mission failure? How many rebel soldiers could a would-be nationalist general mobilize if he publicly predicted a military disaster from the get-go? After describing specific historical events relating to Christ's death, John then cites two Old Testament texts showing Jesus' participation in them was proof that He was the Messiah (John 18:33-37). The most powerful evidence for the Bible's inspiration is successfully fulfilled prophecy, such as found in Daniel, of which Jesus' predictions of Judas' betrayal, of His death and resurrection, and of the destruction of His nation's capital, are a subset.

Believe in Jesus Based on His Miracles If You Don't Believe Based on His Special Relationship with the Father

After they had eaten of the Passover supper, Jesus' disciples occasionally punctuated His long discourse with their questions. Since Jesus gave no exciting pep talk about His leading an imminent military success against Rome's legions as a would-be Conquering Messiah, an ominous, gloomy atmosphere soon weighed down the little gathering's high hopes. During this time, Philip asked skeptically (John 14:8): "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Philip, ever the true empiricist (John 1:46; 6:5-7), had trouble seeing how the way the Father had worked through Jesus was proof of His relationship with Him. After all, during the previous three and a half years, how many amazing miracles had Philip seen? How many deep spiritual insights had he heard His Master speak? So Jesus reminded Philip and the other disciples (John 14:8-12) about their experiences together as proof that the Father had sent Him: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Once again, Jesus explains that the Father gave Him the words He spoke: "Do you know believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who

dwells in Me does the works.” Jesus then responded to Philip’s skeptical challenge by saying His miracles were a minimalistic but sufficient reason to believe that the Father had sent Him on His mission to earth: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, **or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.**” Furthermore, faithful disciples would gain confirmation that Jesus was who He said He was when they did miracles even greater than His own: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father.” Later on, Jesus told His disciples that His resurrection would be proof that the Father had sent Him: “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. **At that day you will know** that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” So Jesus plainly challenged His disciples that if they didn’t believe in Him based on the words He spoke that were originally the Father’s words, and based on His general character and way of life being God’s character and way of life (see also verses 6-7), then believe in Him based on the miracles He had done or would do, including His resurrection to come.

Jesus the night before His crucifixion briefly repeated certain points that had earlier arose out of the incident during which He healed the man born blind (John 9). Because He had worked various wonders, those who rejected Him and who denied his relationship with the Father were spiritually guilty. Since the Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes had enough knowledge based on His miracles that they had witnessed or had heard reliable eyewitness testimony about, they were spiritually condemned as a class (John 15:22-24): “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. **If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin** [compare John 9:39-41]; but now they had seen and also hated both Me and My Father.” So in principle ignorance was at least a partially sound excuse for sin, but these Jews, unlike the pagan gentiles, had way too much verifiable knowledge to claim they couldn’t have known Jesus’ identity and teachings. Given the evidence provided by His miracles, it was irrational for them to deny that His teachings had full authority from the Father and to deny that He was the Messiah sent by God redeem their nation from sin. Jesus’ miracles were sufficient by themselves to serve as proof that the Father had sent Him, as Nicodemus, the Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, had observed years earlier (John 3:1-2).

The Miracle of Jesus’ Resurrection Was Positive Proof that He Was the Messiah

When the hostile Pharisees and scribes demanded a sign from Him, Jesus in figurative language said His resurrection would be proof of His teaching’s spiritual authority (Matt. 12:39-40): “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Now the disciples generally were spiritually foggy, even blind, that Jesus’ resurrection would follow His death (Luke 18:34; Mark 9:32). Ironically, the Pharisees understood this sequence (Matt. 27:63) better than the disciples! Even after His resurrection, some still doubted (Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:11, 41; John 20:9). But after hearing the women’s reports, the first (male) disciple to believe was John, for when he observed the empty tomb and the conditions therein (John 20:8), “**He saw and believed.**” Notice that the Fourth Evangelist willingly

believed that this miracle had occurred without actually seeing Jesus alive again. He deemed the empty tomb with the grave clothes ever so carefully arranged to be sufficient proof, along with the women's reports. He wasn't as empirical as doubting Thomas was. Jesus later visited ten of the remaining lead disciples on that same Sunday, but Thomas wasn't there. What the others had seen and then told him Thomas very skeptically denied (John 20:25-29, NKJV): "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Thomas here was much like Philip, a solid empiricist! Seeing was believing for him! After suddenly appearing a week later, Jesus gently challenged Thomas: "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." The stunned Thomas then exclaimed to Him, "My Lord and my God!" By seeing Jesus alive again, Thomas instantly affirmed Christ's awesome greatness as His identity. Then, in a statement full of meaning for all Christians who have truly believed down through the centuries, Jesus kindly rebuked Thomas' absolutist demands for empirical proof that He was alive again: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We today are in the latter category: We ultimately believe based on a historical written record, although various spiritual experiences, including gaining the Holy Spirit, help confirm our decisions to believe as well. Bear in mind also that Thomas had personally witnessed Jesus do many miracles. Perhaps in a briefly blasting shaft of spiritual enlightenment, he once had clearly understood that He would die (John 11:16). In this regard he apparently was unlike the other disciples, who still mainly thought of Jesus as a Conquering Messiah (cf. Matt. 20:17-28; Luke 22:24-30) despite their Master's warnings (Luke 18:31-33; Matt. 16:21-22). In the context of experiencing three and a half years' worth of various miracles, why should he have been so skeptical that the One who had raised the dead would be resurrected Himself? Given the overall context of John's Gospel as described above, Jesus' gentle reproof of Thomas's skepticism shouldn't be seen as all out fideism, but merely a rebuke of all out empiricism. God will grant us a certain level of miracles and other evidence for belief, but not enough to overcome all skeptical doubts and challenges that seek to "explain" this or that event away based on naturalistic, materialistic presuppositions.

As shown above, as part of its general epistemological themes, the Gospel of John records that Jesus did miracles to prove to people that the Father had sent Him on a spiritual mission to earth, to demonstrate His spiritual teachings were reliable and authoritative, and to help confirm that He was who He said He was. By remembering this and other themes in John's book, its readers can have a "handle" for more easily understanding and recalling the recorded statements of Jesus and others. Although God requires faith from people so that they can gain eternal life, He plainly doesn't require from us a blind faith that discounts the need for any and all evidence. We should take comfort in the reality that God doesn't test our faith beyond what is intellectually credible, even potentially by the standards of autonomous human reasoning. So let us rejoice that Jesus' miracles bore witness that He is our Savior and that belief in what He said saves us (John 20:30-31): "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."