

DOES GOD EXIST?

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20

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You've heard of the famous Wall Drug? Its founder, Ted Hustad, tells of a bachelor who seldom left his home place, lived with his mother and was particularly fond of cats. Once he traveled to New York. After his arrival, he called home and asked his butler how things were. The butler immediately informed him that his best cat died. *"You spoiled my entire trip!"* the bachelor said angrily. *"You should not have given me such bad news."* The butler was bewildered. He asked, *"What should I have told you?"* The bachelor instructed:

Well, the first day I called you might have said the cat was not looking well. The second day you might have stated that the cat was on the roof; the third day you might have told me that you had taken the cat to the vet, and on the fourth day, you might have broken the news to me that the cat had died.

The butler responded, *"Well, okay, boss, I'll remember to do that next time."* Then the bachelor said, *"Oh, by the way, how is my mother?"* The butler answered, *"Well, she's on the roof."*

We have a love-hate relationship with truth. Sometimes we want to hear, and sometimes we don't. Occasionally, we hear only what we want and believe only what we want. We explored that last week. A spiritual victory must be won to believe. Logic alone doesn't get it done. A veil must be lifted. In my doctoral studies I found that certain communities are ready to believe and

others are not. It's not just an individual thing. You can actually walk from one community to another and your mood and receptivity to the gospel will change. Where the church is growing explosively, believers are lifting the veil from their neighbors' eyes through intense and continuous prayer.

That is happening here right now. As we meet, believers are praying for you and me. They are lifting the veil for us. Therefore, though I cannot argue you or anyone else into faith, I believe you will find compelling the following reasons for belief in the God of the Bible.

I brought two things with me this morning. The first is a florescent light bulb. This light bulb is made of glass, gas, and certain elements. It's not that complex, but I don't know how to produce it. Do you think this light bulb just happened? Do you think it is a quirk of nature? Everything about this light bulb suggests that it is not an accident. The nature of this bulb suggests there was a designer with knowledge, ability and resources.

The second item is a book, a classic entitled **The Odyssey**. Is this book an accident of nature? Is this book a chance occurrence or the work of someone? Its creation is credited to the Greek writer Homer. For the thoughtful reader, this book reveals its author. It shares the author's imagination, values and outlook. The book is not only a creation of an author; it is also a revelation about that author. It doesn't reveal all, but it does reveal his existence and some of his intelligence and ability.

Look around and ask yourself if this world really is an accident. The tilt of its axis, the spin of its rotation and the route of its orbit are all so delicate, all so crucial to life. Ask yourself about the atmosphere, the vegetation, the animals and humanity? How complex! Are they really accidents, the work of chance? King David wrote:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge.*

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

David saw the sky above and the world about him, not as accidents but as gifts. The more you understand the gift, the more you admire the giver.

The apostle Paul agreed with David and believed that God is just in judging all because God has revealed himself to all people in the creation he's given us. He wrote:

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities -- his eternal power and divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Paul declares that everyone is accountable because God has revealed to everyone the truth of his existence, power and goodness in the gift of this world, even as Homer revealed himself in the gift of his book. The creations reveal the creators.

Did you know that there were atheists before Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution? They were not called atheists. They were known as Deists. They could not argue successfully against God because the evidence about them in the world was too overwhelming. The complexity of the world pointed to a great and good Creator. Instead, they contended that once God made everything, he pulled out and was no longer involved or relevant. The adage "*God helps those who help themselves*" was the saying of a prominent Deist, a pre-Darwin atheist, who thought prayer was a waste of time. The Deists refused to believe or submit themselves to the God of the Bible but they had great difficulty explaining the world without a god. The theory of natural selection and naturalistic evolution gave them an alternative creation story. Finally, they could reasonably erase God from the margin of their thinking. However, in this world I see God's goodness and greatness every time I open my eyes. I view his imprint and signature every waking hour. **I cannot breathe in air, or look into the sky, or feel the grass**

beneath, or gaze into the mirror without being both thoroughly convinced of and impressed with our creator. Yet, there is so much more reason to believe!

God did not fall silent after six days of creation! God inserted himself into the life of our world. Anyone doubtful of God needs to explain the phenomenon of Israel. How do you account for the faith and history of Israel? Jewish history defies every attempt to rationalize it. In the Ancient Near East, all peoples had a creation story. Many cultures had a flood story. Folklore told of people or gods with mystical powers. However, every account, the creation, the flood, the miracles, all mirrored the behavior of humans and the cycles of nature. For example, creation happened through the mating of gods. Each spring's planting was influenced by their sexual behavior. There was no history among these people, just the repetition of the seasons.

In that milieu arose a people who believed in not many gods but just one. God was totally different from them, physically, morally and spiritually. Out of that environment arose a people who spoke of God doing something in their past and planning something for their future. Their faith birthed the notion of history, a concept non-existent before then.

Unlike the cultures around them that had miracle stories with no time frame, no real persons, and gods acting like humans, the Israelites testified with amazement to events witnessed by specific people at specific times. Often, the biblical writer comments, *"Those rocks are still there today,"* or *"that village continues to carry that name."* The worldview, the beliefs, the testimonies, and resulting morals were all unique and different from the world around them. Anyone who dismisses the Old Testament as myth needs to account for it. How can you have literature so radically different? To this day, Israelite faith and history have been supported by archeological findings wherever correspondence could be achieved.

God has spoken in history. He has shown himself in history even as the writer of Hebrews has said:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

I believe not only because I see God in the handiwork of the world; I also believe because God has spoken unmistakably in human history.

Professor Thomas Arnold, chair of Modern History at Oxford University, examines and weighs evidence to establish historical facts as profession. He writes about Jesus:

I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.

Anyone who doubts the existence of God needs to consider the world about them, the history of Israel and also the person named Jesus of Nazareth. Explain *the claims of Jesus, the empty tomb, the testimony of those eyewitnesses and the rise of the church*. How do you explain what Jesus claimed? How do you explain the empty tomb? Explain why the early church didn't focus on ethics, values, philosophy or philanthropy, but a single message: Jesus Christ, crucified, dead, buried and now raised as Lord. The greatest missionary of the early church was a Jewish rabbi. He once opposed the resurrection message and shed the blood of its heralds. Living in Jerusalem he was privy to any evidence that the resurrection could be false, yet he converted.

Explain why the eyewitnesses shed their blood rather than renounce their testimony! As the saying goes: *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church!* They validated with their blood what they said with their lips!

Is there a God? Absolutely. He has shown himself in creation, history and in Jesus. He reaches out today. The great God of the universe calls to you individually. "I love you. I've

sent my Son to liberate you. I've come in my Spirit to reach you." God has "p-mailed you." He has person-mailed you. He has sent you letters in the lives of some of his children. They are letters from God to you. Are you reading those letters? Do you believe?