

How Do We Know God Exists? [Slide 1]

Read story about the painting, The Vision of St. John. The story of what happened to that painting is a fitting parable of what has happened in our culture. In many ways we have cut God out of the picture of modern life.

We continue our series on world views by considering the question: How do we know God exists? Every world view makes a decision about whether God exists and if so, what is he like? Today we want to consider the question of how do we know that God exists? I want to answer the question as if I were speaking to a person who is unchurched and hopefully open to considering the answer but who has no prior faith commitment.

So, I will eliminate some ways of trying to prove God's existence. I won't argue that God exists because the Bible says so. I won't use the Bible as an authority because the only way it is authoritative is if it is God's word, but we have to prove God exists first if we are going to use the Bible as an authoritative document. I can't just say, "Because the Bible says so and think that I have proven my point."

I will reference the Bible, but only as a historically reliable document, not as the Word of God. In another sermon I will provide evidence for how we know the Bible is historically reliable.

I won't use subjective personal testimony to prove God's existence unless I can provide objective concrete evidence to back it up. In other words, I won't argue that God exists because he communicates with me, I feel his presence, he has changed my life etc, because people in other religions can say those same things. However, if I have x-rays showing that my son has cancer and then a second set of x-rays a week later after we prayed for his healing, that show no cancer, then I can use that kind of testimony. Personal testimony is good supporting evidence, but most of the time someone is going to require something more objective to make the major life changes that come with following Christ.

[Slide 2] We have two sources of evidence for God's existence. Nature and the Bible. We talked about creation last week so I'm going to summarize that discussion and add a few more things. Scientists are pretty convinced that the universe came into existence at a point in time out of nothing. The law of cause and effect states that every cause produces an effect and every effect has a cause. The universe is an effect, a very big effect. It must have a cause. Nothing is not a cause so the universe must have something that pre-existed it that caused it. That something must be eternal and must be all-powerful to produce the universe out of nothing.

The Law of conservation of energy also requires that an effect can never be greater than its cause. The universe cannot be greater than its cause.

Intelligent life exists in this universe, namely us. We cannot be greater than what caused us so if we are alive and intelligent, then what caused us must be alive and intelligent. Mere chemicals and atoms and molecules no matter how cleverly arranged cannot be the cause themselves of intelligence or life. The origin of life is one of the unsolvable mysteries of Science. No one can come even close to scientifically solving the problem of how we got life from non-life because it is a true impossibility for non-life to create life. The cause of all things must be alive and intelligent.

Finally, we are also persons and moral beings. The cause of our existence cannot be impersonal. It must be a person. You can't give what you don't have. An impersonal object or

force cannot create a person. And we are moral beings. We have a sense of right and wrong. Our creator must also have a sense of right and wrong.

By observing both creation and ourselves we can infer that we were caused by an eternal, all-powerful, intelligent, moral, living being. The evidence of the universe and of us supports the world views of theism and deism. Both theism and deism believe that an intelligent, personal God created the universe. Deism believes that God created the universe and then stepped back and is no longer involved with it. Theism believes that God is still involved with man and the universe.

David writes in Psalm 19:1, "Read." David's point is that creation reveals to us that a glorious God created these things.

[Slide 3] The Bible is the second source of evidence. Let's consider the matter of fulfilled prophecy. Within the pages of the Old Testament lie numerous prophecies about the first coming Messiah. Somewhere between one hundred and two hundred specific predictions detail the life and death of the Messiah. The Dead Sea scrolls, dated one hundred to two hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, prove that the OT prophecies all were written down in the OT centuries before Jesus' birth. There was no writing of the OT prophecies after the fact.

I presented this information a couple of months ago in my sermon on Luke 24, but I will repeat it here. Peter Stoner in his book, *Science Speaks* took eight Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled and calculated the probability of all eight being fulfilled by one person by chance alone. Those eight prophecies are the following:

- 1) Micah 5:2 predicts that Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.
- 2) Isaiah 40:3 predicts that a person will precede Messiah who prepares the people for his coming.
- 3) Zechariah 9:9 predicts that Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a donkey
- 4) Psalm 41:9 reveals that Messiah will be betrayed by a close friend.
- 5) Zechariah 11:12 predicts Messiah will be sold for thirty pieces of silver.
- 6) Zechariah 11:13 predicts that the thirty pieces of silver would then be thrown into the Temple and ultimately used to purchase a field.
- 7) Isaiah 53:7 predicts that Messiah would not speak to his accusers
- 8) Psalm 22:16 and Isaiah 53:12 predict that Messiah would be pierced and die among transgressors of the law.

Stoner calculated that the probability that any man living down to the present time might fulfill all eight prophecies by chance alone would be 1 in 10^{17} . Here is how he described what that probability would look like in visual terms.

Stoner illustrates it by supposing that "we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of those silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say this is the right one. What chances would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time....

-----Cited by Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 175

Jesus did not just fulfill eight prophecies. He fulfilled many more. There is no natural explanation for him being able to fulfill all those prophecies. The only reasonable conclusion is that God exists and can predict the future.

It is not necessary to believe the Bible is the word of God in order for it to be used as evidence. All you have to do is believe that the eyewitnesses to the life and death of Jesus told the truth and that the human authors faithfully recorded their testimony. All you have to accept is that the Bible is historically reliable. But you cannot before the fact assume that naturalism is true and that miracles cannot happen, because then you are not being open and honest. You will have precluded any evidence for God because you automatically dismiss anything that might suggest a miracle.

[Slide 4] That brings us to what the Apostle Paul considers to be the lynchpin of Christianity: the resurrection of Jesus. Most of the prophecies about Jesus' first coming are not predictions of miracles. If you look at the eight predictions, they describe maybe unusual events but not miraculous events. However the predictions of the resurrection are predictions of a miracle.

Consider the four step proof of God's existence that I have listed on your outline. Jesus claimed to be God. I have listed some of the Scriptural references for you. Let's consider a few. In John 8:58-59 Jesus applied the divine name to himself. Read. In the OT Moses asked Yahweh what his name was so that Moses could tell the Israelites which God was leading them out of Egypt. God told Moses to tell the Israelites that "I am" was his name. So, when Jesus says that before Abraham was born, "I am", he is claiming the name of God for himself. He is claiming to be the same God who delivered Israel out of Egypt. The Jewish leaders understood exactly what Jesus was claiming because they picked up stones to stone him because the legal punishment for blasphemy was stoning.

In John 14:9 Jesus said "He who has seen me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father.'" Jesus said, "When you look at me you see God, you don't need to look anywhere else." That's pretty clear that he claimed to be God.

That Jesus claimed to be God is not completely unique. Jim Jones claimed it. Sun Myung Moon of the Moonies came close to claiming it. Certain Indian gurus have claimed it. Numerous characters in mental wards have also claimed it. But none of these people exhibited the character of Jesus, the lasting wisdom and teaching of Jesus, and they all leave corpses behind when they die.

Second, Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection. Again, I have listed Scriptural references that you can check out on your own.

Third. There is no natural explanation for a resurrection from the dead. If Jesus was raised from the dead that would prove the supernatural exists. It would validate his claim that he is God.

Fourth. Jesus was raised from the dead. All the eyewitnesses agree that this indeed did happen. Paul even says that the risen Christ at one setting appeared to 500 people. There are certain key facts that are not disputed by friend or foe of Christianity. First, it is undisputed, except by the Muslims, that Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate. Second, it is undisputed that the tomb was empty and that the body of Jesus was never found. Third, something changed the behavior of the disciples from cowards to men who boldly confronted their opponents and died for their beliefs. Fourth, the disciples shortly after Jesus' death proclaimed that they had seen Jesus alive after his death. Fifth, a man by the name of Paul who had been an intense persecutor of the church, did a complete turn-around because he claimed he had seen Jesus resurrected. Those five core facts are indisputable. They are not denied by any serious student of the Biblical

record. Even those who do not accept the resurrection as true concede those five facts. Those five facts lead to only one reasonable explanation, that Jesus was raised from the dead. And if Jesus was raised from the dead, then he is God and God does exist.

People have set out to disprove the resurrection only to be convinced that it actually happened. For example, not believing in miracles and wanting to get to the truth about Jesus, lawyer Frank Morrison studied the trials, crucifixion and then the resurrection accounts of the Gospels and concluded that Jesus did rise from the dead. He wrote the book *Who Moved the Stone?* based on his experience. John Singleton Copley, one of the great legal minds in British history and three time High Chancellor of England wrote, "I know pretty well what evidence is, and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet."

Professor Thomas Arnold was the chair of modern history at Oxford University. He wrote this about the resurrection:

I have been used for many years to studying the histories of other times, and to examining and weighing the evidence of those who have written about them, and 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.

Some people say that Christianity requires a leap of faith. That expression, leap of faith, in my mind pictures this great jump you have to make from the known to the unknown, from facts to hope. I picture an athlete running down the track and making a great leap into a sand filled pit.

Faith is necessary, but I don't think we are talking about an Olympic size leap. I think we are talking about a hop or a step beyond the evidence. The evidence is there. It is not sufficient enough to eliminate the need for faith, but it is substantial enough to make the decision to exercise faith a reasonable decision. We go beyond the evidence to believe but not contrary to the evidence. I would argue that the Christian faith is the most reasonable explanation for the origin of the universe, for the origin of life, and for the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. I argue that the competing explanations actually require a greater leap of faith, a leap that is often contrary to the evidence we have.

[Slide 5] What are the consequences of the Biblical world view? It means that I belong to God and owe him my existence. It means that he holds me accountable and will ultimately judge me. It means that God determines what is right and wrong, not me. It means that God has me here for a reason, there is purpose to my life, there are things that God has planned for me to do and to experience. It means that God is the center of existence, not me. It means that I have the potential to accomplish significant and lasting achievements. It means there is more to reality than the material world and that life continues after death. If God exists, then everything is different and so it is. Let's pray.