

How did the world get here?

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[0 : 00] My thought was for the next few Sunday evenings to work out together how we could fulfill 1 Peter 3.14.

! And Peter is speaking to a marginalised, almost persecuted group of Christians and saying to them, Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear. Do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

So that's the thought for the next few Sunday evenings. God will help us to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[1 : 37] And really to try and encourage us, by God's grace, to be on the ball, ready to speak when there is an opportunity, either very explicit or perhaps even just an implied opportunity, to give an answer.

The word there is apologia, and I'll speak a bit more about that in a moment. Please notice what he says about the way we answer.

He gives a certain degree of boldness. He says don't fear what they fear. Don't be frightened. Don't be intimidated. And he says speak with gentleness and respect.

So he's not saying that Christians should be belligerent, picking arguments all the time, and being a bit obnoxious in that respect. He says I want you to speak with gentleness and respect.

And I presume he means respectful of the person that you're speaking to. It just crosses my mind that when Paul was up before the authorities for his gospel preaching, it was said of him he did not blaspheme, what does it say, did not blaspheme our goddess, I think it says.

[2 : 58] Paul was strong in his witness, but he didn't go out of his way just to annoy people. He concentrated on saying the things that would pave the way for the gospel.

So he says speak with gentleness and respect, and he talks about keeping a clear conscience. I think he's referring to the idea of the way we live, that the lives that we live as Christians should back up what we're saying, or indeed should provoke people to say, you know, why do you live that way?

Why do you put your time and effort into the things that you put your time and effort into? What's this hope that you have? So that's the thought as to what we're going to look at this evening.

Be prepared to give an answer. And I put here, which I think is a true statement, that to save other people, God is pleased to use people like us for his glorious work.

I think that's worth stopping to ponder. To save other people. That's what Christianity, I'll say it's about, it's more than that, but it contains this, that the situation that people are in without Christ is that they are not saved.

[4 : 29] Like Chris was talking about this morning, somebody drowning needs to be saved. It is a life and death situation. And I suppose in a way it's a mercy that we don't feel the full force of that because we'd be so transfixed, we'd be paralyzed.

But it is life and death. And to save other people, God is pleased to use people like us. I put pleased in there. My black pen didn't do it very neatly.

But it's not saying that God is reluctant. He reluctantly uses us. But God has so set it up that he is pleased to use people like us.

It pleases him. There's a load of perishing sinners. And God says, what shall I do? I'll send some other perishing sinners to tell them about Jesus Christ. God is pleased to use people like us. He knows our frame. He knows that we're dust. Now, to be sure, God gifts certain people quite remarkably.

[5 : 40] So we're thinking on Wednesday about Spurgeon, who was a very gifted man, whichever way you look at it, in his memory, in his eloquence, in his learning, in his ability to speak. He was very, very gifted.

But God doesn't only use, you know, the Spurgeons and the handful of great people. He uses ordinary people.

He uses people like us. But it is, he uses us to do his glorious work. So it's really he who's doing the heavy lifting.

We just happen to be involved and God chooses to bring us in on his glorious work. So I've got some more introductory things to say.

And really, I've only got one point. And then perhaps a little bit of backing up for it, depending on how the time goes. So let's think about God using us. So I thought of three different ways we could describe this.

[6 : 46] First, I thought about witness, the word witness, which in Greek is martyr. It shows you that it doesn't always mean the same in Greek as it does in English.

We are not witnesses in the sense that the apostles were, because they were eyewitnesses and earwitnesses. That's why scripture is so important.

They wrote scripture. And John says the things we have seen and heard, we pass on to you. We've written them down for you to believe. So we're not witnesses in that sense that we saw the resurrection of the Lord, or we heard him speak.

Not in that sense, but I think, no, in the book of Revelation, it talks about faithful witnesses, in the sense that Christians are faithful witnesses. They testify to the Lord.

There's the testimony of a supernatural human life, a consistent supernatural human life, that we live by the grace of God and by the power of God.

[7 : 56] And so that's a sort of testimony. And we can add to that the area of testimony, this is what God's done for me. So I'm thinking in the area of witness.

I'm thinking in the area of testimony. It's not quite the same way the words used in the New Testament, but there's that whole area. There's the area of evangelism. Evangelism is not saying, this is how God answers my prayers.

Evangelism is saying, this is the good news of what Christ achieved on the cross and by his resurrection. So evangelism is saying what God has done.

The focus is a little bit different. It's telling us what it says in the scriptures. Remember how Paul says, this is the gospel I spoke to you, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he was seen by people.

This is the gospel I preached to you by this gospel. You're saved if you hang on to it. Don't get moved away from it. So evangelism is proclaiming that. And then I've added another word, which I've put apologetics, which does not mean apologizing.

[9 : 14] It doesn't mean saying I'm ever so sorry I'm a Christian. That makes me very weak and foolish, and I'm really sorry about that. It's not apologizing, but it is defending and removing obstacles to other people's faith.

So I think that's the way that Peter uses the word apologia, apologetics, to give an answer. That's the word that he uses there.

So when somebody says, why do you believe that? Why are you a Christian? So he's saying there's answers that you could give that would perhaps come under this heading of defending the faith.

And of removing obstacles. So that's what we're going to be looking at. So one of the obstacles is all you Christians are all homophobic, which would be an obstacle to somebody, perhaps to believing in Christ and how we might answer that.

Okay, so that's a little bit more introduction. And there's even more introduction coming. You with me so far? Yeah. So I'm now taking that word reason and saying that the Bible does encourage us to reason, to have a reasoning or a dialogue, which is as well as assertion.

[10:48] Do you see the point that I'm making? Assertion is when you just have a conversation one way. Don't care what you think. I'm going to tell you how to be saved. And in a sense, Paul and the Lord Jesus did that.

They spoke in a monologue. So when Jesus spoke on the Sermon on the Mount, for example, he spoke and he told people what was what. And when Paul had the opportunity, he did that as well. But he also reasoned, which I, it's the word from which we get dialogue. Greek words don't always mean the same as their English equivalents, we know, but it is at least a two-way thing. So if you look in Acts chapter 17, according to my computer concordance, this is a dialoguing word, Acts 17 verse 2, where Paul, it is said, as his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

This, Jesus, I am proclaiming to you, is the Christ, he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. So I see Paul there. He certainly says he's proclaiming, but he's also reasoning and he's persuading people.

[12:23] So I take it that he has got this activity of saying, this is what I'm telling you, and then somebody comes back and says, no, that can't be right, Paul, because of this.

And Paul says, ah, well, have you thought of that? Look, this is what it says. And here he's reasoning from the scriptures. There's reasoning from the Old Testament. In the same chapter, verse 16, Paul goes to a place where it doesn't look as though there was a synagogue. Correct me if I'm wrong, it doesn't look as though there was a synagogue. In Athens, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see the city was full of idols. So he, no, I've got it wrong, didn't I?

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happen to be there.

That was the point I was aiming for there. He does reason in the synagogue, and there is a synagogue. I knew that because I read it yesterday. He reasons in the synagogue from the scriptures, but he also reasons in the marketplace.

[13:31] And I presume that he's not therefore saying such and such from the scriptures. Have you got the scroll of Isaiah with you? Let's look at it together. He's reasoning with them not from scripture, but from some other basis.

So, the Bible says we can reason with people.

We can talk to people. Indeed, we're encouraged to do that. And indeed, a failure to do that I think will weaken the engagement for the gospel that the church has with the world around.

So, this is not a denial of the Holy Spirit's work, but is done in dependence on the Holy Spirit's work. So, Paul reasons in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

And I think it would be a great thing to pray that the Lord would enable us to have that sort of witness. We've got the open market just down the road.

[14:47] We've got various places where people can be still permitted to stand, give out leaflets, and hopefully reason in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

And as Ben has a particular opportunity to do that, we should pray for Ben that he would be able to do that. I don't say that to let the rest of us off the hook as if Ben's looking after that so we don't have to bother.

But, this is a particular opportunity for reasoning. Now then, a little bit more introduction. Types of answer.

So, when we're engaged in a conversation dialoguing, reasoning, debating, whatever, I think there are at least two sorts of answer.

The first is the quick, appropriate, debating answer. I call it a debating answer. I think that's a fair description.

[15:59] So, this is almost a quick one-liner and that's what I want to look at this evening. There is space for a long, nuanced, careful answer.

Nuanced means sort of shading in the things that aren't black and white and saying, I'm going to tell you this, I want you to understand, it does say that and you mustn't think that that overrules this. you know, for example, I suppose off the top of my head if you're trying to explain the Trinity, it takes a bit of explaining, doesn't it? There are nuances. So, you know, if you're saying that Jesus is God, does that mean the Father isn't God?

Well, no, it doesn't mean that. So, I'm saying there are places for a longer, nuanced, careful answer. And I've got three examples, and I can't remember which one's which.

So, let's look at them and find out. Matthew 7, verse 6. Ah, yes. Matthew 7, verse 6.

[17:10] Our Lord Jesus here, in quite a short sentence, giving this advice. Do not give dogs what is sacred.

Do not throw your pearls to pigs. if you do, they may trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces. I've often wondered what that verse meant.

Not totally sure, I know, but I offer as a thought here, it's somewhat relevant to the idea of how you give an answer. So, if somebody says, you Christians are all stupid, aren't you?

you don't want to say, well, Turretin said in his third volume, concerning the Trinity, in the ontological fashion, or something like that, because you're daff, you're stupid.

You don't want to give a, you know, there is an appropriate answer in that situation and there's an inappropriate answer and don't throw your pearls to the pigs.

[18:18] I think that would be an example of what Jesus means there. So, Matthew 21, 24, I think this is an example of Jesus giving this debating style answer.

Matthew 21, 24. Yes, this is brilliant. Matthew 21, 24. So, this is in Jesus' last week, just leading up to his trial and crucifixion, and they come and ask him a question.

So, we're looking forward to an interesting dialogue here, and they say to Jesus, by what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority? Now, Jesus could say, well, of course, we have the doctrine of the Father, we have the doctrine of inspiration, we have the sending of Messiah, but Jesus actually does it a very shrewd and wise way.

He says, well, I'll tell you what, I'll answer your question if you answer my question. And he says, what about the authority of John's baptism? Where did that come from, from heaven or from men?

And this completely stumps them because they don't know how to answer that, and Jesus says, well, you don't give me an answer, I won't give you an answer. And I think that is just so brilliant because he doesn't get himself bogged down in something inappropriate.

[19:53] He does show the, if you like, the insincerity and the, I can't think of the word, the way that the questioners are not on strong ground themselves.

And he does it by this wonderful way of asking them a question. So, I think that's a wonderful technique that our Lord, of which our Lord was a master.

Matthew 22, verse 18, there's another one where they come and ask him about paying taxes to Caesar, and Jesus says, you're trying to trap me, show me a coin, and he says, and whose picture's on this?

And they say, oh, this is Matthew 22, verse 21, they say, it's got Caesar's picture on it, and he says, well, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

And it's such a brilliant, it's a sort of a one line answer, and it just, without getting into any complications, without getting bogged down about sphere sovereignty and the role of the state, things like he just really hits the nail on the head and sends them away with their tail between their legs, to use a mixed metaphor.

[21:19] So, something there about types of answer, and I think it would be a great thing if we could learn the right answer for the right situation.

So, anyway, and let me say one other thing, this is still introduction, and the point I'm going to make will go past so quickly that you will hardly notice it, but here's a bit more introduction about listening. We were at the Kerry Family Conference last week, we had a good time, some of us were there, and one of the sessions was about Francis Schaeffer, my black pen didn't know how to spell Francis Schaeffer, but he was a very significant Christian leader, originally from America, came to Europe to try and have an influence on Europe, so his strategy for this was to go way up in the Alps in some obscure French village called Huemo, and to pray, I simplify things slightly, but not hugely, and God sent all sorts of people to Francis and Edith Schaeffer with all sorts of questions, and Schaeffer's great talent and gift was to listen to the question and to give a really appropriate answer that really hit the nail on the head, sometimes the answers were long and nuanced, other times he seemed to get just straight to the heart of things, and God used him greatly, strange story isn't it, they chose,

I'm going off track now, but they chose to operate by prayer, so they didn't put out huge appeals for money, they simply prayed, and they said if we do this, this will be one way, not the only way, but

one way of showing that God is real, and there are many stories in the Schaeffer's biographies, I say many, I'm thinking of one, where they badly needed whatever it is amount of money, I don't know, let's say it was 700 Swiss francs, I forget exactly how many it was, and they didn't have it and they prayed, and by the deadline they had 711 Swiss francs, they never knew why God had sent the extra 11, but God had sent them the money they needed, and read the story, it's got all things in it like that, anyway, this is my, I did go off track, Francis Schaeffer said, if I had an hour to talk to somebody about the

Lord, if I had an hour, maybe I'm on a railway journey, and I'm in conversation, I know the railway journey is going to last an hour, I would spend 45 minutes listening, and 15 minutes speaking, which I think is interesting, so he would listen and say to the first note, just tell me about what you believe, tell me what your thoughts are, and he would draw that out of them, try and understand how to aim his answer, answer, and I think that's, it's encouraging, isn't it, at least it says to us, we don't always have to jump in with both feet immediately to say something, it's not such a bad idea to take time to listen, so that is the end of the introduction, question, okay with all that, is that right Tim, is that about right what Schaefer said, of course you've been there, haven't you, so, this is one of the

[25 : 16] Schaefer things about the questions that people asked, and so, Schaefer would say many people come and they say, you know, they have questions around where does the world come from, and where do people come from, so I'm trying to draw that in the broadest possible brush strokes and say, we live in the world, don't we, you're sitting on a chair, there's a sky above you, there are stars, people around you, can't deny that, how come it's here, how come it's here, what, what's the, what sort of explanation can you give to the fact that the world is here, that there is something rather than nothing, and the something that we have isn't just black gunge, but it is spaces, and light, and growing things, and this particular part of the cosmos is full of life, how come that, it's a most profound question, and one that you can't escape really, how come it's like it is, and then the second question, how come people are like they are, how come we have people, and all the things that people, they're involved with that, so, the fact that, people write, reviews of football matches, and they get passionate about football, why do they do that, pianos don't do that, chairs don't do that, koala bears don't do that, the

Himalayas don't do that, but people do, and that's not all they do, they write poetry, and they look at the stars and they say, wow, and they look at the sun and the sunny day and they say, it's beautiful, and people get worked up when there's cruelty, how come, why is it like that, so there's two big questions about where does the world come from, and where do people come from, so Schaeffer would have called it, the second one he would have called the question of the mannishness of man, I don't think, quite whether you can say that in this century, he would have said that in the 70s, the mannishness of man, now then, how does that topic crop up, what sort of things would people say in asking a reason for this, so I've had a stab at this, and I'm sort of guessing, but I think people might say evolution disproves

God, that's, we just got here by chance, completely disproves your Christian theory, or they might say science disproves the Bible, as if science is the answer and the Bible can't, is contradicted by that, or somebody might say to you, to us as a Christian, you have faith in myths, and faith is believing things that you know aren't true, whereas I believe in facts, I just know facts, might come out in that sort of way, and Schaeffer, who is a lot cleverer than, or was, has been a lot cleverer than I am and most of us here, he would say what we're talking about is a particular view of the world, a particular understanding, a world view, I don't know what your world view is this evening, but you might well be pondering those same things, how did we get here, why is the world like it is, why are people like they are, and I, this evening

I just want to give one debating quick answer that, certainly that Schaeffer used, and that you might be able to use, I might be able to use, which is to say to the questioner, you are telling me that time plus chance equals people, I admire your faith, that's my point for this evening, you are telling me apparently your answer is that time plus chance equals people, I admire your faith, it's a quick debating answer, but I think it covers the point, doesn't it, how could it possibly be, that this world, with all its complexity, just got here, by itself, and how could it possibly be, that if you add up lots of chance happenings, which is what evolution is all about, isn't it, you add up lots of chance happenings, you end up with people, unless we're all crazy, and what we think of as people are just rather sophisticated lumps of jelly, and I think if you believe that, you'd believe anything, wouldn't

you, we know what people are, we know the complexity, we know that people are special, made in the image of

God, and the only other alternative, or at least the alternative that we're presented with is, you're telling me that time plus chance equals people, I think if you believe that, you'll believe anything, it's a quick debating answer, just take it a little bit further, so spell it out a little bit, what we're being asked to believe then is time plus chance produces morality, we know there is morality, we know there is such a thing in the world as ought, because we have consciences, and we all know that our conscience tells us what we ought to do, sometimes it gets it wrong, but we know what it is to say I'm going to do this, but I ought not, I've saved all my money up for,

[32 : 56] I don't know, saved all my money up to paint the front of the house, and I ought not to spend it on this iPod, or whatever it is, spend it on the iPod anyway, you know, the ought, where does that come from, from time and chance, the fact that there is an ought, the fact there is a beauty, such a thing as beauty, from which we almost instinctively feel gratitude, there is a famous atheist in Brighton, whose name just momentarily escapes me, who is the grandfather of one of the church workers that we know, I think the last time I heard he was in Eastbourne, and the family all got together, including this famous, well-known outspoken atheist, on a sunny day, they were sitting in the garden, and the well-known atheist was sitting there, and he really had to stop himself, because he was saying, oh, what a lovely day, we need to be so, well, it's just a lovely day, and I mean,

I'm making a bit comical, I think it probably was a bit comical actually, but we appreciate beauty, we feel grateful for it, where does that come from if it's time plus chance, and then the whole matter of caring about things, things that are evil, the idea of justice, the idea of caring about it, where on earth does that come from if it's just time plus chance, and the thing is that everybody, no, I won't say everybody, but it's common for people to feel that they care about things, in RMP, whatever you might or might not think about her politics, is certainly a woman who cares about things, I mean she cared about page three, didn't she, to stand up in the houses of parliament and say this is wrong, it ought not to happen, and she's showing that she cares about something which is about dignity, well where does that come from if we're just products of time and chance, where does that come from, and the way that

Schaeffer, and I think he's on to a good thing here, is to say okay, you're telling me time and chance, but your life isn't consistent with that, how is your life consistent with what you say you believe, you say we're here out of time plus chance, but there you are, saying some things are ethical, so we're going to have down the road here an ethical supermarket, some lovely ladies that are in charge of that, the, just thinking of it now, the supermarket is going to be called how it should be, isn't that interesting, how it should be, his be, Ruth and Amy, two sisters running that, very enthusiastic, lovely people, but I should ask them someday, why should it be that, where does the should come from, is your life consistent with what you say you believe, so people say such and such is unacceptable, that is a code word which means wrong, except we're not allowed to impose our morality on other people, so we use the word unacceptable instead, so fracking in Balkan, is unacceptable, so when people care about it, why do they care about it, if it's just time and chance, so that's, that was my single point, and I've sort of spelled it out in a couple of other bits, and I will just say one other thing, and then I'll stop and see what you have to say,

I put down some theological arteries that connect to this, and we'll just look at one of them, which is the importance theologically of the reality of the creator, and in Romans chapter 1 verse 20, chapter 1 verse 20, it's, it's, it's, it's a very fundamental thing that we have been made by our creation, and we, it's, it's fundamental to understanding the gospel, it's fundamental to understanding our spiritual condition, Romans 1 20 says, 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, that's the basis of our need for Jesus

Christ, because we have a creator, we live in his world, he gives us everything, and we're obligated, excuse me, we're obligated to him, and you might be saying, well I don't need Christianity, don't feel much need for it, I'm perfectly happy as I am, and to which the reply comes, well you might be perfectly happy as you are, that's not what it's about, the fact is you're made by God, and you're in his hands, and he made you, and he has the right to judge you, did you notice when God created, he judged things, he says that was very good, or he says that was good, excuse me, that was good, that was very good, it's the assessment of a judge, and we'll all be assessed by a judge, that's why

we need Jesus Christ, and in Romans 2:16 it says, there will be a day when God will judge men's secrets through

[39 : 29] Jesus Christ as my gospel declares, that's absolutely fundamental, and so I stop there and see if people have any comments, or observations, or questions.

things.