

God for sceptics - the evidence

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 March 2024

Preacher: John Benton

[0:00] As it were. So, I'm going to speak to you. I'll try and keep to time. I'll try to speak for about 20 minutes. All right? To you. I hope it'll be 20 minutes.

Thank you for being here. I hope that you've come with a few questions in your mind and you're a little bit open to thinking about these things. So, at the end of the evening, there's a little book that I've written called God for Sceptics.

So, you might be a skeptic here tonight and please take one of those at the end of the night.

They're kind of on the table there. They're free, of course. Now, it may surprise you to know that many thinking people, I don't mean the secular media, but thinking people are actually beginning to consider Christianity again.

And, for example, a recent article in the Spectator magazine speaks of Western civilization under threat now from what it calls Putinism, you know, the man in Russia, Islam, and woke theology, which it says is eating into the moral fibre of the next generation.

And kind of people are beginning to hanker for the old Christian virtues that used to characterise this country. And they recognised that the kind of society we're becoming has so many problems, family breakdown, mental health problems, fewer and fewer people prepared to sign up, for example, for the military to defend the country, children not knowing whether they're male or female or whatever.

[1:47] Of course, the past wasn't perfect, but people are just beginning to think things have changed and things seem to be going wrong in some way.

And they kind of yearn for that kind of more stable, perhaps, society from years ago. But notice, they're doing so not because they think Christianity is true, but, to quote the spectator again, because it's useful and that Christianity made the West successful.

That's why some intellectuals are beginning to think again about Christianity. Now, I'm glad that people are beginning to think about Christianity again, but Christians would say, no, the reason Christianity works is because it's true.

It's not just, oh, it's useful, but no, it actually works. It is really useful because it actually matches reality. So that's where I'm coming from as I speak to you for a little while tonight.

Now, the point about our little time together, I mean, maybe some of you here are Christians, and under the constant bombardment of the secular media, which tells you that either God doesn't exist or if he does, he's irrelevant, perhaps, Christian, you're under pressure and you're thinking, why do I believe this?

[3:24] Well, I want to try and say to you, this is why, you know, you keep going, keep believing. But you may be someone here tonight who wouldn't call themselves a Christian, that's fine, and yet you are feeling that there's something, you know, there's something, maybe there's something about that, this thing, and that's what you're doing here tonight.

So, tonight we're just going to look, and you can, it's just part of what I'm saying this weekend, tonight we're going to investigate something of the evidence.

Perhaps that's, now that's particularly, what's the evidence for this? It's already what I was saying about this, what's the evidence for it? So, tonight we're going to look just for a little while at the evidence for God.

That's our agenda. Where should we look for evidence? Well, the Bible would tell us, just look around you.

Just look around you. Here's a Bible verse, it says this, So, it's saying to you, just open your eyes and look around you.

[4:40] So, briefly tonight we're going to look at three areas. Science, look around you. History, look around you. And experience, look around you.

First of all, let me talk to you a little bit about science. Generally, I want to encourage you to see that rather than science and God being opposed to each other, it was, in fact, belief in God which gave birth to modern science.

Yes, the Greeks and the Chinese and some Muslim scholars have made some headway, but real science, modern science, the stuff that we call science today, really took off during the 16th, 17th centuries.

Same time, same continent as the rediscovery of Bible Christianity at the Reformation. Is that just coincidence?

I want to say to you, no, it isn't. Why did those things coincide? Well, first of all, if you believe in a faithful, eternal creator, rather than a kind of random universe, you have reason to believe his laws of how things work are going to be the same all the time, everywhere.

[6:20] He made the world, he made the whole thing. He's a faithful God. His laws are going to be the same in all places at all times.

And that, if you think about it, makes science a viable pursuit. Suppose you had a situation where you did an experiment on Wednesday, but if you did the same thing on Friday, they didn't match up. You couldn't do science. Suppose you had a situation where, if you did an experiment in Cambridge, you got one result, but if you did it in New York, you got another result.

Or if you did it on the moon, you got another result, kind of thing. Science assumes that these laws are the same all the time, everywhere, and that matches a faithful God who made the whole thing. So the existence of God makes science, to begin with, a viable pursuit. Here's another thing I want to say to you as we begin to think about this.

[7:35] Why should we expect to understand our world? Have you ever thought about that question? Why should we expect to be able to understand our world?

We just take that for granted, don't we? But such an understanding is not necessary, is it, for our survival? Do dogs and cats understand the world?

No, they don't. They just live by instinct and just get on with it. And they survive? Fine. So why should we think we're any different, that we should think we should be able to understand all this? Or again, in the random universe, you've got to just say, well, it just, I don't know, it just happens. Really? Whereas the Bible could come to you and say, no, no.

Here's this God who made everything. And human beings are special. They're made in his image. So in the words of the great astronomer, Johann Kepler, we can think God's thoughts after him.

[8:45] That's why you're able to understand much of the world. That's why science works for you. So that's kind of general stuff about science.

But let me get a little bit more specific. Take one example. Let's think, I hope some of you have done, you've been educated at school and things, so you'll have heard of this large, self-copying, double helix molecule DNA on which all life depends.

So it's kind of like a twisted ladder, but it's a very small molecule, but very long and large. And it self-replicates, and that's the kind of basis of life.

All life depends on it. If you don't believe in God, the creator and designer, you have to believe that this very complicated molecule came about just by chance.

Now, atheists say there are all these atoms floating around. Notice they don't tell you where they came from. All these atoms are just floating around. And by accident, this amazing molecule just happened to come together.

[10:02] Well, actually, mathematically, the chance of this happening is just way, way, way off the scale.

I borrowed a dice earlier tonight, and I've lost it. But if you can imagine the dice, you know, a six-sided dice, one to six. And, you know, when you throw a dice, you have a one in six chance of the number you chose coming up, don't you?

Because there's six sides. You chose, I don't know, number five. You have a one in six chance of it coming up. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it doesn't. Okay? But the chance of DNA happening by accident, like a throw of the dice, is not one in six.

It's not one in ten. It's not one in a million. It's not one in a million, million, million. The calculation was done about 40 years ago by a physicist called Sir Fred Hoyle.

And the chance is one in ten times itself, 40,000 times. Forget it.

[11:23] It is not going to happen. It really isn't going to happen. In fact, when the Daily Mail reported Hoyle's findings, I've still got a bit of paper from the Daily Mail, the headline was, There must be a God.

And that's right. Now, you can imagine that this finding of Sir Fred Hoyle didn't go down too well with the atheists.

So, 1996, Richard Dawkins, the great man, wrote a book titled Climbing Mount Improbable to try and get round what Hoyle had found.

He tried to say, yes, DNA couldn't happen all at once by chance. It would be like climbing a vertical, impossible mountain face.

He understood that, Richard Dawkins. But he said to himself, perhaps there's another way up to the top, a kind of a slow slope that gets there in the end. In other words, the DNA came together a bit at a time until eventually it got there.

[12:38] That was his basic argument. So, here's an analogy, kind of trying to just show what Dawkins was saying. Imagine you have 20 dice, right?

Imagine you have 20 dice and you want them all to come up sixes. So, if you throw all 20 at once and hoping they're all going to come up sixes, it will never happen.

But, Sid Dawkins, just hold on a moment. Just suppose you throw one, just one dice at a time until you get a six. You hold on to that. And then you throw the second dice and you keep rolling that until you get a six.

And you keep those two together. And then you come to the third and you keep doing that. And he said, you know, eventually you would get 20. And it's true, you would. But, the book cut very little ice.

Why? Because there's a flaw in the logic. You see, what are you doing when you keep the first six? And then keep the second six and so on.

[13:47] You're giving away the fact that you know what result you're after. But blind chance doesn't know anything about what it's after.

Do you see? So, what Dawkins was actually doing, perhaps he didn't realise, in proceeding along that line, what he was actually doing was introducing a bit of design through the back door.

Very underhandedly. It doesn't work. The logic doesn't work like that. No, it all either comes together or it doesn't. And it doesn't, you know, it's just a ridiculously small chance of doing it.

It's nothing. Life is no accident. Look around you. Where's the evidence that there's a designer, that there's a creator? But there's all this life, all dependent on this ridiculously difficult molecule, DNA.

And there are all these people walking around and plants and animals. There's the evidence. So, there's a bit of science. All right? Let's think about some history.

[14:55] During the last couple of months, the Prime Minister has had to admit, hasn't he, that he wasn't able to keep his promises on cutting NHS waiting lists, nor indeed on stopping the migrant boats crossing the Channel.

In his position, and he is obviously one of the most powerful men, he can't make things happen that he sincerely wants to happen.

As human beings, we can't make or predict the future. We can't do it. But the evidence is there that this book does just what we can't do.

It does just that. Very often in the Bible, God uses this thing about predicting the future to say, hello, I'm here.

Remember, he says to his Old Testament people, Israel, remember, this is what's happening to you. Now, you know that I predicted this long ago.

[16:19] And it was written there in the Scripture. So, the evidence is that, so, let me just push on. When the Roman 10th Legion moved south

through the Judean desert after destroying Jerusalem in AD 70, a religious sect called the Essenes fell under threat and wanted their documents preserved.

So, they hid them. In November 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls, as we know them, were rediscovered in caves at a place called Qumran.

And these contained copies of more or less all the books of the Old Testament part of the Bible. So, the Bible's in two bits.

The Old Testament finishes about 400 years before Jesus comes, and then there's the New Testament. In those caves were found copies, ancient copies, of more or less all the books of the Old Testament.

And some of them, like the great Isaiah scroll, Isaiah was a prophet, Old Testament prophet, are dated, carbon dated, the kind of script being used, between 350 and 100 years before Jesus came.

[17:48] And then you just need to take the time to read some of those prophecies, and they predict the coming of the Messiah, where he would be born, how he would die, how he would rise again, what would happen afterwards.

And this is all at least 100 years, because we've got documents that say so, before Jesus ever arrived.

Here's the future being predicted. You and I can't do it. I can't tell you what's going to happen in 100 years' time, and you can't tell me. But there it is happening.

But you don't even have to go back 2,000 years, as it were, to Jesus, to see whether or not the Bible's predictions come true. Just look around you now.

Let me, three simple facts point to the Bible's truth, foretelling the future. These things are right in front of you. Number one, though most other ancient peoples have disappeared from the face of the earth, the Bible tells us that the Jews will be around until the end of time.

[19:11] And despite the Holocaust, despite all the anti-Semitism, these special people are still here, aren't they?

Or again, the Bible tells us that following the coming of Jesus, people from all nations would come to believe. And we see it.

Even in places where people try to stamp out Christianity, like in China. The church now numbers in millions, millions underground because they're persecuted, but growing.

Places like India as well. How does that happen? How is it predicted? How is it going on before our very eyes? Again, the Bible tells that the end time society, in the end time society, people will be, does this ring any bells?

People will be lovers of themselves. Lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. Does that ring any bells with you?

[20:27] We could say a lot more, obviously. The Bible couldn't have been written by human beings.

We can't do this kind of stuff. But here it is right in front of us. Open your eyes, the Bible would say. God would say. There's evidence. Look at it. Take it seriously.

Don't just ignore it. Don't just live your life kind of by being entertained throughout life and just never thinking deeply about anything.

Think about this stuff. There's science, there's history. Very quickly, experience. Once you get to know Christians, you'll find that Christians have many stories of what God has done in their lives. There'll be stories here that you could talk to different folk here who are Christians and they will tell you things about what God has done in their lives.

[21:28] Now I'm going to tell you perhaps the most remarkable one that I know. One of the most remarkable for me concerned a friend. Her name was Bunty.

She was a middle-aged woman with three adopted children. And she was in a wheelchair with an aggressive cancer that doctors could do no more for her.

That's how she was. But one morning, alone in her house, thinking that she was not long for this world, she surrendered her life to Christ, asking him when her time came to take her to heaven.

That's unremarkable. But then, something happened. She's on her own. Quite unexpectedly, she began to be aware of what felt like warm water being poured over her.

It wasn't warm water, but it just felt like it. And she wondered what on earth was happening. Astonishingly, within a few minutes, on her own, no one else there, she got up out of the wheelchair.

[22:54] She'd been healed. When her husband, John, used to play football for all the shot town. When her husband, John, came home, his first reaction was, oh no, does this mean we've got to go to church?

Well, it did. And later, he became an elder at our congregation in Guildford. Bunty lived for many more years.

She's gone now. But her adopted children are still in the church. And she lived for many more years, used her home for hospitality. Our own children very often would go around there and have an evening meal with her and John.

And they could tell you about her story as well. Now you can dismiss such experiences and say, oh well, sometimes strange things happen.

Oh well, just forget about that. We know sometimes there are kind of blips and we don't understand. Well okay, you can, you know, brush it away like that.

[24:03] But can you see that actually that fits with science points to God is there. History being predicted points to God is there.

And oh yeah, this would actually fit then, wouldn't it? It would actually be part of the puzzle that fits together. Christianity does good in many ways.

You look across the world, much of the beginnings of hospitals, education, all kinds of things, dignity for women and things like that, started as the Christian faith was taken to different parts of the world.

It does a lot of good. It works in many ways. But what I want to say to you tonight is it works because it's true. Because it's true.

So I'm going to stop there. 24 minutes I think I took. Okay. Thank you for listening to me. As I say, there's a book to take.

[25:10] Now the thing is I will take some questions but I think it's probably good if we just break for a few minutes. You might need to go to the loo, you might want to chat to each other and then I'll take some questions. All right?

We'll do it like that. Okay? So just really fair enough. Okay? Okay? Is that right? Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[27:01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You might come up with something I don't know.

Thanks, John.

[29:01] Thanks, John. We had a little discussion on our table. You said about science. Being particularly born out of a Christian worldview.

Yeah.

What would be your response to the fact, well, the Babylonians weren't Christians. They invented 360 degrees. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Chinese weren't Christians. Yeah. I did say there'd been some kind of progress.

But the great thing about modern science is what is called scientific method. That's the kind of science. That's the kind of cornerstone of what we would call modern science.

So this is kind of observation, you know, under definite conditions and, you know, doing the experiment and, you know, seeing what happens and recording. That whole thing.

And that is the cornerstone of what we call, that's what everybody does these days, isn't it? You know, you have research institutes and all the rest of it. And that is what the ancient folk didn't get to.

[30:04] You know, they had some ideas. They obviously saw some stuff, but they didn't have that. And in particular, it's interesting, in particular, the Greeks, some of them are marvellous thinkers, you know, Archimedes and all these folk.

Tremendous thinkers. But very often those thinkers thought that actually doing stuff like getting your hands dirty, as you would with an experiment, was below the intellectual.

And that's really why they didn't get anywhere. Whereas, once the Bible comes, and you can, once the Bible comes, the Reformation, you find, oh, the first man gets his hands dirty.

God makes him a gardener. When the Son of God comes, what does he do? He's a carpenter. He's involved with the world. He does stuff. Here's the great apostle Paul.

And what does he do? Well, besides preaching, he's a tent maker. He's a practical man. And so this whole thing of getting your hands dirty, getting involved with things, which is necessary for doing experiments and science, that became legitimized.

[31:20] It became, oh, OK. This is OK for an intellectual person to do this kind of stuff. And I think that's really where the whole thing took off. Against the background of, here's a God that's made everything.

He's faithful. He doesn't keep changing his mind. It's not around. That's the kind of, against that background, experiment got going. And if you want to read more about this, there is a book called, I can't remember.

There's a book called Religion and the Rise of Modern Science by... Hoikas. Hoikas, that's right. That's his name. That's his name.

It was published by the Open University, wasn't it? There you are. There you are. So I think that's the kind of answer. I don't know all the answers, but that seems to kind of make some sense.

That's what I'm trying to say. You're a copy. OK? Thank you. Thank you. Yes, there's another question here. This could get into a very academic discussion, but...

[32:27] Please don't. I think... Yeah. I mean, what is interesting, actually, is that, I mean, partly as you say, that blind watchmaker and climbing mountains, improbable are so ridiculous that people actually lost confidence in the new atheism.

That's right. You're actually seeing now a collapse in scientific consensus. I mean, you get people around who... I mean, for instance, just today there was a report on people wanting to analyze whether fetuses were sentient or not.

And the opposition to it was not that you couldn't do it scientifically, but that this was... It was ideological, the opposition to it. And I think... I mean, even when I was teaching, I might be tired about 12 years ago now, but you're beginning to find even then that there was a lack of confidence in science.

I mean, it's actually more of a... Around now, it's... Of course, quantum physics doesn't help either, because that sort of... Oh, okay. I mean, I can see what you're saying in the sense of what's tended to happen with modern science is it's cut itself free from any moral framework.

So, you know, if we can do it, let's do it. Now, the thing is that, you know, a lot of stuff that's been brought about by science, you know, has obviously been good, but very often it's also brought very difficult side effects.

[33:53] You know, the atom bomb, plastic pollution everywhere, you know, the carbon dioxide from... So, people are thinking, well, this science, yeah, but there's often a negative to this, and hence, sometimes people are not so keen on science as they used to be.

I think that's the way I'd... I don't know whether that kind of... Well, yeah, that's not true. I mean, I was just thinking that... John Lokes, he's what Cosmic Chemistry says, you know, do God and science mix on the front.

I think a better question is, can God save science? Because it's... Well, I think that's right, and I think if people went back to the original framework that bore science, in other words, you know, that God is there, I think we would probably have a much better use of science than we have at the moment.

I think that we... Sorry, someone at the back there. Mine isn't a question.

I just wanted to thank you for the way that you broke up history... What were the other two?
LAUGHTER Science and experience.

[35:11] Science and experience. And the way you explained it... That's very kind of you. ...was very... It was so good.

OK, thank you very much. Thank you. Can I just say, of course, there are other questions that we're not getting to tonight. So, the problem of evil, obviously, is a really difficult question.

We'll try and deal with that tomorrow morning here. All right? So, you know, if you've got that question... Well, this is all very well, this business about God, but look at the world. It's such a, you know, difficult place, and, you know, children with cancer and all...

Which is a right question, a good question, and you've got... So, as I say, we'll try and look at that kind of thing tomorrow morning, and then perhaps tomorrow evening we'll look at the evidence for Jesus himself and think a bit about that too.

So, if you're there and you're thinking, well, yeah, he's kind of done that bit about evidence for God, but there are other questions. Well, please, you know, come again. You know, come again and see where we get to.

[36:18] All right? I don't want to pump you into... Are there... If there's another... Yes! Come on, there's another question there. That's good. There is. Oh, Ashwin. Let me just say, I don't know all the answers.

Yeah, but it's that when engineering and science kind of deals with research, as you've said, there's a question of moral and ethical problems.

There are. But most often, research progresses because they are curious to find out where it leads to. Right? As someone who believes in faith, where do you draw the boundary?

Or... So, right now when I sit in my room, I trade through many different ideas. Sometimes I just strike the idea down because I feel like morally it might not be right.

Or sometimes I want to pick my curiosity and try to push forward in an idea. Okay. But how do you make that moral decision? Okay. So, obviously, as a Christian, I believe, you know, we have God's word, the Bible.

[37:23] And I believe that God's moral words, especially the Ten Commandments, kind of give us a... I mean, I know the Ten Commandments are not liked, but they're kind of like a...

They spell out a boundary. There's a lot of, you shall not, in the Ten Commandments, right? So, if you imagine the Ten Commandments as kind of setting out a boundary of a free area, God is saying, don't do that.

Don't go across the fence there. But within this, you're free to use your creative abilities to think, to explore, to investigate.

So, when it comes to those... I mean, I'm not saying all these things are easy. But when it comes to those kind of questions, should we cross human beings with animals?

Well, that might be possible. But then God didn't do that. Is that really going to help us? Probably not. Let's stay away from that.

[38:34] So, you know what? You understand what I'm saying. So, we want to say, let's do science. But let's do it within sensible moral framework.

I mean, you know... Obviously, mankind needs to kind of come together and some consensus. You know, nuclear power, yes, it can be used for good.

But, hey, we don't want atomic bombs. We don't want that kind of stuff. It's terrible. So, you know, we've got to... But science tends to kind of want to break itself away from any moral kind of constraint.

And that's where we get ourselves into difficulty. I mean, does that help? Maybe it does, to some extent. Okay. Can I... All right, are we done? I reckon we are.

Thank you, John, so much for coming. As John said, tomorrow... We're working John hard this weekend. Tomorrow, John is preaching at the church that meets here in this building, Calvary Church.

[39:38] Tomorrow morning at 11 o'clock. You'll be really welcome to join us. And then, likewise, he's speaking again on the subject, Is Jesus Real? Tomorrow afternoon, 4pm, at Grace Church.

You're on Richmond Parade, isn't it? That's where to find Grace Church. So that's tomorrow at 4pm. And just to say that if you can't get to those and you want to ask the questions about evil, and, you know, there's stuff in here about it, so you can read it yourself.

Yeah. Great. Yeah, do take those books away. Thank you so much for coming. Thank you so much, John, for speaking. Can we give John another round of applause? Thank you very much. That's very kind. Thank you. And do enjoy chatting to one another. At some point, we'll start clearing tables and chairs away. But don't feel you have to leave right this moment. Thank you so much for coming. Thanks for having me. Thank you.