

Is it Reasonable to be a Christian?

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[0:00] Hello. Good morning, everyone, and Happy New Year to you all. If you've not met me before, I'm named Steve, the lead pastor here at St. Paul's. I hope that this year, 2026, is a year of you know God's richest blessings.

One of the things, I'm not sure what you have planned so far in your New Year's resolutions and what you're hoping for 2026, but one of the things that we can all look forward to in 2026 is that it is a census year, and so expect that at some point this year to have people knocking on your door and having copious amounts of questions about your life to fill out.

The last national census we had, happens every five years, 2021, revealed that 45% of our neighbourhood here in Chatswood have no religious belief at all. In fact, it is more than 10% higher than the average in New South Wales and across Australia, so we are a highly non-religious area where we are. We also rate much lower than the state and the national average.

For those who are claiming, those who do have religious belief, those who are claiming to have a Christian faith. So not only are we not religious, we are very low when it comes to the idea of those who would identify as Christian. And so as we kick off a brand new year in 2026, the question I'm asking is, is it reasonable to be a Christian? Not just in this area, but is it reasonable to be Christian at all? And so over the next four weeks, we're going to be unpacking that question.

And really, the answer to it, we're going to keep landing on is very much a resounding yes. As time goes on, more and more are resounding yes. We'll be exploring why faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable, why it's plausible, why it is good, why it is desirable, in fact. And so if you are, for instance, maybe an agnostic, tuning in over the next few weeks, I want to ask whether you are 100% certain that you want to stay uncertain about God. If you are a sceptic tuning in, I maybe want you to consider what kind of God it is whose existence that you would deem implausible. What kind of God would that be? And if you are a Christian tuning in, my hope is in the next few weeks, you become more confident in terms of hope in Jesus, but also that you would be more confident that it is good and plausible and right and desirable to continue to grow deeper in Jesus in 2026 and you'd have a plan to do so. And so this morning, what I'm really wanting to do is just to briefly consider whether it's reasonable to be a person of faith in an increasingly secular era and neighbourhood, and whether it is reasonable to have faith in God and particularly to have faith in Jesus.

[3:48] That's our journey this morning. So is faith reasonable? Now, history is full of famous and brilliant people looking at evidence for God's existence and moving in two totally different directions. At the one end, for instance, you might have the British mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell.

He was asked very late in life, you know, if he, what he would say if he discovered there was in fact a God after he died. What would you say in that moment? And his reply was, God, you didn't give us enough evidence.

That would be his reply. On the other hand, you've got other people on the other end of the spectrum, again, likewise, brilliant people, famous people, Elizabeth Anscombe, who may not be famous to you all, but in actual fact, one of the most famous philosophers in the English language, Elizabeth Anscombe, she actually looked at the evidence for God and moved from atheism towards and to Christianity.

So looking at the same evidence and at the same time as Bertrand Russell and moved in two different directions. And the list on both sides is long and distinguished. So how do we account for that? How do you account that you've got same people looking at the same or different people look at the same evidence and going in two different directions? Now, the more common argument used

today in our culture to solve that problem is that religious people, they ground their life in a thing called faith, but secular people ground their life in logic and reason and science. Hence, the title of this series is Let's Be Reasonable.

Religious people have faith and something deep inside of them that they need fulfilling and they therefore have a bias towards religion and an emotional need to believe in something beyond themselves. Secular people are just, well, they're just not, they're just unbiased. They don't have that bias, they're objective and they look at life entirely rationally. That's how it's generally argued in our society nowadays. And frankly, it's just simply not true. In his book, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor, what he calls this view, the subtraction story. This is where a person might say, well, you know, I used to believe in God and the supernatural, but because of science, because of reason, I just subtracted God. And now I just see things the way they actually are. You know, I'm just unbiased.

[7:10] It's a common view that, you know, you'll see an atheist will debate with a Christian. You believe in one God, what about everyone else who believes in multiple gods? You've deleted all those other gods and I've just gone one extra step and deleted your God as well. That's all I've done.

The same principle. That's how an atheist will argue with the subtraction of story. The reality is though, to move from belief in God to non-belief is a shift from one set of beliefs beliefs to an entirely new set of beliefs. It is not a move from belief to non-belief.

It is a move from one set of beliefs to an entirely new set of beliefs. One of the very first sets of beliefs a secular person adopts, an atheist will adopt, is called exclusive rationalism. And it's the belief that science is the only arbiter of what is real and factual and that nothing should be believed that unless it can be decisively proven with evidence and observation. Now, that sounds reasonable. It's, of course, it's actually irrational, but it sounds reasonable.

For instance, just take that statement on the board. What is, for instance, the observable proof? What is the factual evidence that that statement is true? That is, the very claim of exclusive rationality can't even meet its own criteria.

[9:09] That statement can't be proven factually at all. Even reason and proof must start with faith in reason and proof.

In some kind of concept, exclusive rationality depends on the belief that human senses, our eyes, our ears, our minds, our memories, are not tricking us in any way.

It has to start with that assumption. Observation and scientific evidence can neither prove that there is a God nor disprove that there is a God.

They can't do either of those things. And so all varieties of secularism are set to beliefs, not just simply the absence of a belief or the absence of faith.

And therefore, it needs to be proven. I saw an interview between the comedian Ricky Gervais and US comedian, talk show host Stephen Colbert.

[10:32] Gervais is an agnostic atheist. Colbert is a confused Catholic. So they go well together.

And Gervais was explaining how his entire worldview relied completely on science. That was it. Completely on science, evidence, fact, logic to explain all things.

He made it clear that he was not a person of faith. He had no faith at all whatsoever. He was just purely a person of logic and fact. He then made a comment in the course of the interview about how the universe started from this freakish, minuscule burst of light that happened billions of years ago. And Colbert, in this moment, was very sharp, very quick. He jumped in and said, can you actually prove that statement? Can you actually prove that statement?

He said, aren't you just relying upon what Stephen Hawkins himself was, declared an opinion? And at that moment, you can see Gervais was really thrown back a little bit.

[11:56] And then Colbert jumps in and rescues the thing. And they had a bit of a laugh and they moved on kind of stuff. But in other words, what he did was, it was actually a step of faith. It was actually a step of faith.

His entire worldview was began with a step of faith, with a belief in something. You see, theism nor atheism can be 100% proven by data.

They are systems of thinking and believing that need to be compared to one another to determine which one makes the most sense, which makes the most sense of our experience of things we know and need to explain, which one makes the most sense of our social experience and addresses the problems we face in living together as human society.

And which of these is most logically consistent internally as a belief system, without importing ideas from other worldviews and systems?

Which brings me to the second point. Is faith in God reasonable? If, therefore, we can establish that all people exercise faith to some degree, is it reasonable to have faith in a God?

[13:25] Believers in God have argued that God's existence cannot be proven empirically empirically as if God were like a physical object that you can put in a science lab and test.

But the existence of God can be logically inferred. Logically inferred. And, in fact, many scientific theories work on exactly the same principle, the logical inference that something is true.

Physics is mainly based on logical inference. And Christianity suggests there are very significant clues that point to the existence of God.

Psalms 19 in the Old Testament tells us that God has put his fingerprints everywhere in the universe.

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 reveal knowledge. They have no speech. They use no words. No sound is heard from them. And yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

[14:47] So what I'm going to do is I'm going to mention just two clues. There is at least more than 30 big systems of clues.

They're big systems of clues. I'm going to just mention two very briefly. There is the cosmic wonder clue. Modern science is completely insufficient to explain the existence of the world.

Because there are two unavoidable questions. Two unavoidable questions that need to be asked.

First of all, how did the indescribably variety of life in this universe come to be?

You know, there's more than 900,000 species of just insects. How did all of that variety come to be?

How did we go from a single-celled life in prehistoric soup to mosquitoes and giraffes and the billions of other things in between?

Now, there's an infinity of articles or books or conferences or TV programs or PhD theses. Studies have been devoted to that topic.

[16:11] And it's a widely discussed topic. And the general view is a thing called evolution. And that is it all happened by accident and it's just kind of evolved from there.

It's become, it's no longer a theory, it's become regarded as fact. But the second unavoidable question, and biologists want to talk about evolution all the time, but the second unavoidable question is this one.

What happened to bring life into existence in the very first place? What happened there? And that question is very rarely ever asked.

Much less is it answered with any scientific credibility. How does, and this is the massive question, the massive question, how does life come from no life?

How does that happen? In 1952, at the University of Chicago, two scientists tried to replicate what you might call the Big Bang, to get life from no life.

[17:43] It became known as the Miller-Urey experiment. It's quite a famous experiment. In 1952. And they were able to produce a change in four elements.

But they weren't able to produce life. And certainly not able to produce life that would produce life itself. In the end, in 1952, it was a failed experiment to produce life from non-life.

That's 1952. Think of the scientific advancements that we've had since 1952, in the last seven decades. I could rattle off a long list.

Initially, I did have a long list of everything that's happened since 1952 in scientific advancement.

And the Miller-Urey experiment has never been advanced upon since 1952.

No one, no scientist, has been able to go take life out of no life. And this is the question that science, frankly, cannot answer and their entire worldview hinges on it.

[19:12] That an atheist worldview hinges on this one. You see, what Christians have been saying for centuries is that the existence of God is inferred from the existence of life itself.

Life must come from something that is already alive. It cannot come from something that is dead, that doesn't exist.

In his book, *The Language of God*, scientist Francis Collins puts it like this. We have this very solid conclusion that the universe had an origin, the Big Bang, 15 billion years ago.

The universe began with an unimaginable bright flash of energy from an infinitely small point. That implies that before that, there was nothing. I cannot imagine how nature, in this case, the universe, could have created itself.

And the very fact that the universe had a beginning implies that someone was able to begin it. And it seems to me that had to be outside of nature.

[20:24] And so, ironically, for the rickage of aces and so on of this world, science itself has given us a strong case that there is something beyond the natural world that brought it into existence.

And which even now upholds the existence of this universe. universe. That's the first clue, the cosmic wonder clue. The second one, which builds on that one, the second clue for God's existence, is the fine-tuning design of the world.

At one point, the most famous atheist in the world, a guy named Christopher Hitchens, admitted that the fine-tuning of the universe argument was an argument that was not trivial.

The most difficult one, you had to think about it hard, the most difficult one to actually get over. And so, the fine-tuning argument is kind of like this.

Think of existence as a set of dials. Every one of those dials must be at exactly the right point, precisely at the right point for life to exist.

[21:45] Even a slight variation on any one of those dials, on any one of them, would be enough for life to no longer be able to exist.

On any one of the dials. And the irony is, it's with the advance of science that we're discovering that this clue is getting stronger and stronger and stronger.

The scientist Carl Sagan once said that there are only two parameters for life to exist. In other words, there's only two dials on the deck. With the advance of the decades, science has discovered literally hundreds of parameters, hundreds of dials that need to be fine-tuned perfectly, not just in this world, not just in human life, but also in the universe for life to exist.

And the possibility that those dials came to accidentally be set at exactly the right spot, at exactly the right time for life to begin, and to have stayed statically in those spots for life to continue to go on existing is a massive leap of faith.

And it's also a rejection of scientific evidence that shows the universe is not static at all. You see, believers in God suggest the fine-tuning of physics makes much more sense in a universe in which there is a creator and a designer who constantly has his hands on those dials.

[23:38] To quote Collins again, if any one of those constants, one of those dials, was off by even one part in a million, or in some cases one part in a million million, the universe could not have come to the point where we see it.

Matter would not have been able to coalesce. There would have been no galaxy, no stars, no planets, all people. And so it would be more reasonable to conclude it was something intended and designed.

Even the famous atheist Richard Dawkins says that the characteristics of our world is the characteristics of design, even though he himself rejects a designer.

Is that conclusive proof? Not at all. Because it suggests only that it's more likely that there is a God than there is not a God.

But even those two cannot just be dismissed. The distinguished physician Lewis Thomas wrote, I cannot make peace with a randomness doctrine.

[25:00] I cannot abide the notion of purposeless and blind chance in nature. And yet I do not know what to put in its place for the quieting of my mind.

So there's just two of the at least 30 extensive clues for the existence of God. Now none of these clues are so strong by themselves as to false belief.

But they do make it entirely rational, entirely rational to believe in the existence of God.

And in actual fact, with the advance of science, and it is rapidly advancing, it becomes more and more irrational to be an atheist based on scientific evidence.

evidence. I can cope with an agnostic, but an atheist to say that they are rational is to deny the scientific evidence. Now the clues for God not only do not prove God's existence, but all they really do is they get us to a point where there's a potential for some abstract God out there.

[26:22] what Christians believe is that the main way we know specifics about this God is that this God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

And so is faith in Jesus reasonable in 2026? Now God has not revealed himself, not first through our thinking, but through God or through our assumptions about God, but that God has specifically spoken to us.

He speaks to us according to Psalm 19 in the Creator, all his fingerprints everywhere, but he speaks to us very specifically, very specifically in his Son, the Lord Jesus.

Hebrews 1, read out to us by Janet, is referring to Jesus when it makes the claim that Jesus Christ is the final and decisive communication of God to humanity.

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors 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 also he made the universe.

[27:45] The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. And so it's not surprising if that's true, that there is a God and this God has revealed himself by sending his Son, the person of his Son, the second member of the Trinity into his world so that we might know God.

If that is true, it's not surprising why Christians would call Jesus Christ the single most influential person who has ever lived. A greater percentage of the world's population than ever before is Christian.

And Christianity adds to its ranks just under 19 million new Christians every year. And Christianity is the one major religion in the world that is most equally distributed throughout all the continents of the world.

No other faith has so extensively crossed cultural divisions of humanity and found a place in so many diverse cultural contexts, from the intellectual elites to the uneducated, for the poor to the rich, from the west to the east, everywhere.

Why has Jesus affected so much of humanity? The answer to that question can only come by looking at his life, his words, and his actions.

[29:27] You see, in Jesus, we see the qualities and the virtues that we would ordinarily consider, incompatible in the same person.

That is, Jesus combines both high majesty with the greatest humility. He joins the strongest commitment to justice with astonishing grace and mercy, and he reveals a transcendent self-sufficiency and yet an entire trust in and reliance upon his heavenly father at the same time. We are surprised with the person of Jesus to see such tenderness but without weakness, boldness without harshness, humility without an uncertainty, indeed accompanied by a towering self-confidence.

He's unbending convictions but complete approachability, his insistence on truth but always bathed in love, his power without insensitivity, integrity without rigidity, passion without prejudice.

That's his life and it's perplexing, it's a paradox. People who have read and pondered Jesus' words, his deeds, his life have groped for good ways to explain it and to try and describe what they see in the person of Jesus.

[31:07] And many throughout the history of this world and 19 million people a year continue to realise that the remarkable claims that Jesus had about himself is the only way that you could land with the person of Jesus.

You see, what is so surprising about Jesus is that his claims were so entirely self-focused, self-centred, but his character and his actions were so completely unself-centred, other-person centred, we never see him pompous or offended or standing on his dignity, he's approachable to the weakest person and the most broken person, we don't ever see him moody or irritable, there is an unsurpassed moral and spiritual beauty about his character and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Houston Smith in his book, *The World's Religions*, he wrote there that only Buddha and Jesus so impressed their contemporaries, so impressed their contemporaries, that their contemporaries were asking the question, not just simply, who are you, but what are you?

Your life is not normal human life, what are you? Only those two figures had characters that transcended ordinary human life to the degree that that question was necessary.

Buddha asserted with absolute clarity and with a deep, deep emphasis that he was not divine in any way, that he was not an angelic being in any way whatsoever, he was fully human.

[33:07] On the other hand, Jesus repeatedly and continually claimed to be the God who created all things.

Jesus made that claim of himself clearly and that creates an enormous challenge for us because Jesus is one of the very few persons in history of humanity who founded a great world religion.

He belongs to a very, very small group of people who have founded a great world religion, who have had a massive impact on millions of people largely because of their brilliant teaching, but also because of their admirable lives and characters.

But the difference between Jesus and the others in that small group is that he was the only one who claimed to be God.

God, the only one who claimed to be the God who created all things. Buddha emphatically said that he wasn't.

[34:32] Muhammad, of course, would never ever have claimed to be Allah and nor did Confucius. Jesus is the only one, God, but he's also part of a second group of people who claimed to be God.

Of course, there are plenty of nut jobs out there, isn't there? And what makes him unique in this group of people, what makes in fact this whole group of people unique, apart from Jesus, is that the members of this group, this small group of people who claimed to be God, were only able to convince a very small group of people, that they were in fact divine, that they were in fact God. So why did Jesus succeed? Succeed as the only person who ever claimed deity and founded a major religion, in fact the largest one.

How was he able to do that? Firstly, because his life was exquisitely beautiful. It is extraordinarily difficult to claim to be God, to claim to be perfect, to claim to be divine, and then at the same time get everyone you live with to be convinced of that truth as well.

God. I mean, his disciples were with him for three years.

[36:17] On the most part, if we had 12 people who lived with us for three years, you wouldn't get past lunch on the first day and your claims to divinity would be crushed.

The evidence is there for all to see. The other reason that Jesus was worshipped by Jews as God very significantly is that he in fact came back to life after he was crucified on a Roman cross.

And so in Jesus Christ is a man who claimed to be God, yet who lived a life so great that he became the only person to convince a sizable part of humanity and continues to do so, that he was in fact who he said he was.

And what that means is that none of us can be indifferent to that claim. No one can be indifferent to that claim. It's not just for people of faith.

We cannot resolve the issue by saying he was only a great teacher, good bloke. work because all of his declarations of what he said about himself do not allow us just to land at that point.

[37:42] We can't say, well, he never really made those claims about himself because all the historical evidence is there. We cannot be content with the explanation that he was deranged or that he was a fraud because of the clear evidence of his wisdom and his greatness and the impact of his life on his followers and because of the historical case for his resurrection.

And that leaves us with the final possible explanation, namely, that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be.

And that is the creator God coming into earth, siding with us to reveal the God who made it all and who sustains it all.

You see, as the creator of the universe, he makes claims on every single one of our lives. And what he said to Thomas in John 14, and it's a little verse that came straight after what was read, still stands for your life and for my life.

This is still the claim over your life now. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[39:12] And no one comes to the Father except through me. And so in the next three weeks, Nick and I and John, we're going to be unpacking each one of those claims.

Jesus is the way, he's the truth, and he's the life. And as hard as it is to believe that he is God, come to earth, the more you investigate, it becomes harder, much more difficult not to believe it. It is, in fact, reasonable to be a follower of Jesus in 2026. And I invite you, if you're someone who does not know him, I'd invite you to explore him, make that as a massive priority for your life in 2026.

2026. And if you do know him, to make a plan to go deeper to know him more in 2026. as Thank you.