

Why believe in God?

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[0 : 00] Do you believe in God? Why? Is it because everyone believes?

Maybe you grew up in a family where your parents believed in God. They took you along to church, just like I've taken my children along to church this morning. And so you've just always believed that there was a God.

Maybe there was a boy or girl at youth group. Maybe it was called youth fellowship in those days. And you started chasing them. And then you've just found yourself at church since then.

Does anybody want to admit to that? No? Okay, maybe later. Why are you in a Christian church? You know, with worshipping and singing to the Christian God.

You know, the Bible is an old book. Look, why do you believe what it says about God? Now these may seem like strange questions to be asked by your pastor.

[1 : 04] You know, you might just be expecting me to say, Shh, don't think too hard about why you believe in God. Just trust God. Don't use your brain. It's dangerous thinking too much.

Just trust me. It's fine. Trust me. Christianity is not just about believing really hard and ignoring the world around us. Believing in the God of the Bible is not just about closing our eyes to the facts and having blind faith.

I believe that Christianity is rigorous. It is a deep faith that can be studied and investigated. There's a famous saying about it that Christianity is shallow enough for a child to swim in, but also deep enough for an elephant to swim.

But if you believe in God, do you know why? And if you don't believe in God, do you know why? You know, I don't know, but you know, if you're in the office or, you know, over coffee or at school or in the playground, have you ever been asked, why do you believe in God?

Or why don't you believe in God? Do you have an answer to that question? Why do you believe in God? Is it possible that we haven't actually thought hard about what we believe in God?

[2 : 31] Maybe we thought about it years ago and we have just grown and matured with many assumptions. This season in church, we are looking at the foundational beliefs of Christianity.

We're looking at a statement called the Apostles' Creed. This morning after we sang, as we stayed standing, we said this thing called the Apostles' Creed. You may be familiar with it because here at St. Paul's, we regularly declare that we believe this expression of who God is.

Now, this creed dates back to about 300-400 AD. It wasn't written by the apostles, but it does reflect the early church's desire to express and summarise the faith given by the apostles.

The Apostles' Creed is short. I'm not sure if you've thought of it being short, but there's many other creeds that are much longer. The Apostles' Creed is fairly short. It doesn't contain everything that we believe, but it is a great summary.

It instructs and guides and defends what we believe. Now, Wendy, if you can pull up the creed that we had earlier, there's this repetition in the creed.

[3 : 51] It starts with, I believe in God. Skip over to the part about Jesus. I believe in Jesus. And then to the Holy Spirit.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Wendy. It's this repetition throughout the Apostles' Creed that we believe in something. We believe that there is a God.

We believe that there is a being who is so powerful that he could make the entire universe, that he is the judge, that he sustains everything.

And today we're going to investigate whether there is any reason we should believe in a God. So first we're going to question why we should believe at all.

And then we're going to be questioning about, well, why should we believe in the Christian God? So have your Bibles open. We're going to start in Romans 1, which Adrian read for us earlier.

[4 : 51] Starting in Romans 1, Paul, the Apostle, has sent a letter to the Roman church and he is talking about how God has revealed himself to all people.

So from Romans 1, verse 18. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

So Paul is talking about this phenomenon called general revelation, where God has revealed himself in a general way to all people on the earth that have ever existed.

God has revealed himself to everyone, not specifically, but generally. Paul can say that just by looking at the world around us, you can be convinced that there is a God.

[6 : 08] God has made it plain to us. And he points to the creation of the world which shows God's power. And so as we consider this world that there is, we're going to see at least four reasons.

There's four clues for us to believe that there is a God. Now this morning, this is a little bit of a different sermon. We're going to look at some science and some philosophy before we spend a little bit more time in the Bible.

A little bit different. Go with me. I know it's early, but you'll cope, I'm sure. We're going to look at four clues that there is a God. The first being the Big Bang. The second is that there are perfect conditions for life on this planet.

The third reason to believe that there is a God is that there is beauty. And the fourth is that we have morals. There are many more than these four, but these are just the ones I'm going to briefly be touching on this morning.

I'd encourage you to read this book that my wife is going to pick up and hold for me because I forgot to bring it up. It should just be on the floor or next to you somewhere. There it is. Thank you, Lulu.

This book that you might be able to see over there, it's called The Reason for God by a man called Tim Keller.

[7 : 20] He is a pastor in New York. And that's a really helpful book to dive deeper into this, if you would like. So we're going to see these four clues.

The first of all, the first one is the Big Bang. And this really is questioning, well, why is there anything? Why is there something?

Why is there anything physical? Where did the sandstone, is this sandstone? Is this sandstone? Does anybody know? Is this actual sandstone? No, it's not.

I'm getting conflicting evidence. Oh, okay. It's fake. Okay. Where does whatever this is come from? Well, certainly it wasn't mined out of a quarry because it's not real sandstone. But where do any of these things around us that we see come from?

Well, maybe they were in the ground originally, but where does that ground come from? Where does this planet come from? Stephen Hawking, the scientist, wrote, and I should have these quotes on the screen.

[8 : 19] Thank you, Wendy. That almost everyone now believes that the universe and time itself had a beginning at the Big Bang. Stephen Hawking is making this big claim that everything came from something.

And so something sparked. There was a point where suddenly everything was and it flew through the universe that had now just been created and cooled and crashed together and became the origin of everything.

Another scientist, a man by the name of Francis Collins, questions the origins of that Big Bang. He wrote, We have this very solid conclusion that the universe had an origin, the Big Bang.

15 billion years ago, the universe began with an unimaginably bright flash of energy from an infinitesimally small point. That implies that before that, there was nothing.

I can't imagine how nature, in this case the universe, could have created itself. And the very fact that universe had a beginning implies that someone was able to begin it.

[9 : 35] Something had to make the Big Bang happen. It had to be outside of nature, outside of the physical reality. Parents know this.

If you've ever had a mess in your house and you've come in and there's several children there and you see the mess, you will say, where did this mess come from? And these children are very

convinced at this point that the Big Bang created itself because they will say, I have no idea. This mess just appeared. It wasn't me. And it certainly was not my sibling. It just created itself. This is the first clue that there is a God because something must come from somewhere. The second clue to believe that there is a God is that on this life, on this planet that was created, there is a situation for life to flourish. You know, the universe is here, there's planets. But to have the right conditions for life to exist is incredibly specific. For organic life to exist, there must be so many things perfectly right. [10:51] The speed of light has to be right. The sun has to be the exact right distance away from the earth, although it feels that over the last couple of days we've moved several hundred thousand meters closer.

But we haven't melted into a puddle. And we're not too far that we are too cold. Gravity has to be constant so that it's not changing, so that in one point we're not being dragged down to the earth and then at another point floating off.

We have the right amount of atmospheric pressure around us for liquid to be on the surface of the earth.

We have the right ingredients. We have the mix of heavy elements and organic molecules for life. We have the right mixture on our planet of water and land so that we have both continents and oceans.

Again, Stephen Hawking concludes, the odds against a universe like ours emerging out of the Big Bang are enormous.

[11:57] I think there are clearly religious implications. And then elsewhere he says, it would be very difficult to explain why the universe would have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.

It is as if this planet was created for human life. This is the second clue. The first clue is that something came out of nothing.

It must have been created. And this something has defied all the odds to actually be a place that could sustain life. Now, so far, the clues that we've seen to believe in a God have been scientific. Others will suggest that it is all just random. There are millions of planets in all of the galaxies. The one we are on just happens to have the right conditions.

If there is no God and all of this is an accident, you know, we are accidents and there is no purpose for anything. Belief in God is just a way for humans to survive and pass on our DNA to others.

[13:06] The question then is, what about beauty? What about our emotions and love? Are they just chemical reactions in our brains and nothing else?

So, is love real at all? You know, when I look at my wife, I missed you then, I was looking at Nick. He's not my wife. He's lovely. He's beauty itself.

That's fine. But when I look at my wife, am I feeling anything real? Do I have any love for her and my kids? Or is it just chemicals in my brain tricking me so that I have children and pass on my DNA to further our species?

Is there really no special significance to my wife and my kids? All of us experience some form of art, some ideas as profoundly beautiful.

They are a mixture of desire and a sense of longing. Now, some argue that beauty has its origin in practical things. You know, the need to display ourselves to attract a mate like a...

[14:20] What's the bird that does that with the big... I was going to say pelican, but it's not that one. A peacock. Thank you. Thank you. Am I just peacocking up here? Is that all that beauty is? It's just to find a mate.

But when we find something beautiful, it is often not functional. But because it reflects the one who made it. It's a recognition that the world around us was made good, but it has been corrupted.

Ugliness is not inherent, but just as Paul said in Romans 1, God's invisible qualities are seen in his creation. His goodness and desire to have us enjoy beauty is for the sake of beauty.

I have not chosen to find the sunrise beautiful because it helps me in any particular way, but because it reflects the one who made it.

People in politics often talk about the pub test. Have you heard of the pub test? The pub test is just our gut feel. What do people...

[15:27] What does a random group of people think? They talk about the pub test when it talks to politicians. Oh, you know, this guy's policy fails the pub test because it just doesn't follow common

sense. I don't think that thinking about beauty from just an evolutionary standpoint passes the pub test.

I don't think... I'm not happy just to say that everything I do and the way I love my wife and the way I find beauty, and, you know, you look at these stained glass windows and you think they're beautiful, or the way I love my children, I don't think that that could just be chemical reactions.

I don't think it passes our experience. Those we love are more than what our brain could be tricked into doing. I think this is the third clue that there is something beyond the physical, that there is beauty that we find which can't just be connected to evolution.

The fourth reason, the fourth clue to believe that there is a God is that we have morals. We give humans dignity and we fight for human rights.

But where do our beliefs about what is right and wrong come from? Have they just evolved with humans and are now about taking care of the community?

[16:49] All human beings have moral feelings. We call it a conscience. When we consider doing an act that we think would be wrong, something in our brain, something in the way we are made, will encourage us to refrain.

It doesn't mean we always do it, but we have an inbuilt sense of what is right and what is wrong. But these standards also sit outside of us. So 1939, when the Nazis went to war, when they were killing Jews, they didn't think there was a problem.

They didn't think there was a moral issue. They actually thought it was morally right to do that.

Everybody else, however, seemed to have an issue. You know, England, the United States, Australia, didn't just sit back and go, well, your morals are fine for you, you have created that system of what is right, you do that.

We went, no, no, no, no. It is not right to kill a person just because of their ethnicity. And so World War II happened. We don't care if they felt there was a problem with us enforcing our morals on someone else.

Morals sit outside of us and a war was fought. Evolutionists would argue that morals have helped to help us take care of our own so that our species continues.

[18:15] But when I walk past a person who is not from my community, say a homeless person, who is not from my community, I feel an obligation to help them, a moral obligation.

Even though it is not going to help me or the continuation of my community, those who are outside, I still feel an obligation. In evolutionary biology, they speak of the violence inherent in it.

If a species is to survive, it is only because it will kill other species. Violence in nature is totally natural. And so why isn't it okay for strong humans to kill weak humans?

It seems disgusting to even suggest that. If the world was made by a God of peace and justice and love, then that is how we know that violence and oppression and hate are wrong.

If you believe in human rights, then it makes so much more sense to believe that there is a God who He has created us in His image, in His beauty and that is why we are valuable.

[19:35] This is the fourth clue that there is a God, that we consider humans of more worth than animals. Now, I've only briefly touched on all of these. Please, talk to me later if you want to look at these.

Get Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* to investigate these. But maybe the Big Bang caused itself to happen. Maybe we're just in a world that won the lottery when it came to odds and it's just really convenient that this world had the right conditions for life.

Maybe beauty is meaningless. Maybe morals aren't a good enough reason. But all of these are questions that we have to wrestle with. I think it actually takes more faith to believe against these. People often say, I wish I had your faith to believe in God. I wish I had as much faith as you. I just don't have that kind of faith. I wish I could believe in God like you but I just don't have that much faith.

I actually think it takes more faith. I think it's a bigger leap of faith to believe that something could come from nothing. I believe that it's not consistent with everything we see around us.

[20:49] It's still a really big leap of faith to think that the earth just so happens to have all the exact conditions for life to flourish and function just by pure chance.

I think that's a really big leap to take. It's a big leap of faith to think that beauty and morals are part of an evolutionary advantage. Believing that there is a God takes less faith than believing there is not.

I think there is more reason to believe in God just by looking around the world as Paul said to us in Romans 1. Instead of the Christian closing their eyes to science and just being a blind faith I believe it's the opposite.

I believe that all the evidence points to a God. But that is just an argument to believe in a God. Why should we believe in the Christian God?

First of all it's really helpful that God has revealed himself. Jesus came to make this unknown God known.

[22 : 00] We see God revealing himself throughout the Old Testament but then he reveals himself fully in Jesus. The God who created the universe the one who made this planet with the right conditions to live the one who made beauty the one who made morals who made us in his image Jesus came to make this God known.

Now we're going to read from John 14 verse 1 and it seems I've forgotten everything this morning I left my book down here I left my last couple pages of my sermon down here Thank you Lulu Lulu's trying to read it for me So please we're going to read from John 14 verse 1 and 2 Do not let your hearts be troubled You believe in God believe also in me My father's house has many rooms if that were not so I would have told you I was going to prepare a place for you So Jesus has been with God for eternity He says that he is going to prepare God's place his house which has many rooms he must have been there Jesus must have been at God's side to know what it was like and this is why Jesus repeatedly calls God his father he has a unique relationship with him he has known him for eternity and has come to reveal him to us and Jesus makes this really exclusive claim in verse 6 of John 14

Jesus answered I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me if you really know me you will know my father as well from now on you do know you do know him and have seen him I typed that up wrong Jesus is the way the truth and the life now you might remember this from Sunday school this is one of those Bible verses that stick in our heads Jesus is the way the truth and the life but Jesus is the truth because he is the ultimate revelation of God himself he is God's word made flesh words are how we communicate ourselves you know me you know the things that I like and my preference because I speak you can know what I like what I don't like you can know my character whether I speak the truth or I speak lies whether I put down other people you can know me by my words and this is who

God is Jesus is God's word and that helps us that reveals him to us we know who God is because he has spoken to us in Jesus he speaks and reveals himself to us in Jesus and now Jesus is not just the way to God he doesn't say follow me I know where God is come and follow me and I'll take you to him he says I am the way itself he is the way not a way he is the only way to God so if we ignore Jesus we ignore God you can't know God if you don't know Jesus we can see all of those reasons that we've seen before we can look at all those clues that there is a God behind this universe but unless we believe in Jesus we won't know the God who has made it you can't know God if you don't know

Jesus he has spoken and made himself known now at this point you might be thinking why should we care about Jesus even if there is a God why should I care about Jesus who lived 2000 years ago and I think that's a really good question that's a really valid question and all of this hangs on one part of the Bible one part of the story it's called the resurrection Jesus God himself came to make his father known to us brutally murdered on a cross placed into a tomb and was dead killed by the Roman experts in killing three days later he was alive what do we do with this how do we account for this if Jesus was really raised from the dead then you have to accept what he said if he wasn't raised from the dead then you can ignore him and you can see these clues that there is a [26 : 36] God and just think oh that's interesting there must be a God but if Jesus was raised from the dead it proves that he is the revelation of God and that God is the one who has made the universe and made us Jesus was placed into a tomb and yet this tomb was found empty and Jesus was seen by hundreds of people after his death if the resurrection happened it means there is hope we are not just accidents on a universal scale maybe you say just an accident but you know I still love you we are not accidents if the resurrection happened we are not just ants lucky to be living on the only rock in the universe that could hold us if Jesus was raised from the dead then it means that there is a God who designed this whole universe to contain life that even though this life us humans would try and live without our creator he would enter into it himself taking on human forms suffering humility weakness and death so he could redeem his people if

Jesus was raised from the dead then it means that God has made us like him one that delights in beauty a people made to love like their creator and if Jesus was raised from the dead it means that God values us he has made us have higher dignity than animals that humans should be protected and preserved because we have a God who loves us believing that there is a God is the best way to understand this universe around us and believing that the Christian God also makes the most sense of who Jesus is he is God's word come to reveal God so that we could know him pray with me heavenly father we thank you so much that you have indeed spoken to us that even though we could see the world around us and be convinced of you that we don't have to question and wonder and ask who you are that you have made yourself known that you have spoken to in Jesus heavenly father we ask that you would convince us of this that when we are asked why do you believe in a God we can answer with full confidence that you exist father we may have doubts we may continue to have doubts but we thank you that there is so much evidence father we thank you that having faith in you is not irrational but it does make the most sense of the way you have made this universe father we thank you for the gift of faith that we can believe in you please make us like you make us to love other people make us to love beauty but not abuse beauty and father we ask that you would grow us knowing and loving you each day that we live until we see you and we ask this in your son's name amen