

The End of Hypocrisy

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Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 00] I think it was around 2004 that the famous atheist Richard Dawkins released his book, The God Delusion. It was a book that was designed to argue that there was no logical possibility that a God of any form existed.

His premise was that anyone who believed in God was deluded or stupid or any other list of names that he proceeded to call Christians and the like.

It was a fairly uninspiring book and since then a whole bunch of prominent atheists have kind of distanced themselves from it because it turns out that really his book was more anti-Christian propaganda than any kind of logical discussion.

And so more thinking atheists have kind of separated themselves from him and his attack. But what struck me about this book when it came out and about its content was the irony of the title.

So Richard Dawkins was eager to prove basically that there was nothing and no one other than himself that he was accountable to.

[1 : 07] So essentially what he was arguing was that he was his own God. Now those aren't his words but the possibility of there being a God was held up against his personal logic or his personal experience or his personal understanding and his philosophies of right and wrong and then rejected because it didn't fit his perception.

It could be argued that Dawkins has his own God delusion of sorts. He's made himself God and perhaps that delusion is more dangerous than the one that he was seeking to mock and argue against.

But the scary thing about this particular delusion is that it's one that you and I share with him. The idea that the world revolves around me, the idea that I'm the final arbiter of truth, that I decide what's right and wrong, even though we don't articulate it like that, is evident in so many of our lives.

And the problem with this delusion is that it's not just arrogant but it's ignorant as well. I mean firstly it distorts our perception of reality.

We love to use language like the world is your oyster, you can do whatever you want, you can do whatever you set your mind to. But that's just not true, is it?

[2 : 32] Have a look at verse 13. Now listen, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money, well you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. You can make plans all you want but you actually have no idea what's going to happen.

You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, let alone next week or next month or next year. There will always be external forces or factors that affect the things that happen in our life.

There's always going to be things that are beyond our control. Four weeks ago I came back from a few days away of planning with the senior staff here at St. Paul's. It was a good couple of days, we've got some exciting things in store for next year.

And I was about to head home and pack for a trip because me and Sal were heading away for her cousin's wedding. And I was sitting there in my head thinking about how am I going to dodge the traffic, how am I going to pack in the five or ten minutes that I'll have when I get home before we leave.

[3 : 42] You know, I was looking at restaurants on my phone about where I could take Sal and you know, my head was completely in the things that we were going to be doing. And about an hour later I was in hospital with two broken legs and the prospect of six weeks of rehab for me, let alone the stress on Sal.

Now I had no idea what was about to happen. I had no control over what was about to happen. I had no control over when it was going to happen and neither do we. And yet, so often in ignorance we live and talk and plan as if we're in control.

As if we can absolutely influence everything in our life. Like the ultimate defining factor is what I want and when I want it. The delusion that we're in control is arrogant because it presumes power that we just don't have.

And it's ignorant because God's rule is not dependent on us acknowledging or recognising it. One of the great parenting challenges in our house at the moment is trying to teach an increasingly competent and coherent three-year-old about who's in charge.

So now if I ask Bailey to do something that he doesn't want to do, he can respond with, no, I don't want to do that. In fact, it's the only time that he responds politely and says, no thanks, I don't want to do that.

[5 : 07] Maybe hoping that that might win the argument. And if I insist, he responds with phrases that are scarily familiar. Like, daddy, I said no.

Or, daddy, you're not the boss. Now of course, when this happens, I respond with gentleness and grace. No, that's not true. I react.

Because my authority is being challenged in that moment. My rightful authority as his dad is being challenged. And there's this understanding for him, even at three years old, that he wants to be the master of his own destiny.

He wants to be his own decision maker. He wants to be his own king. And of course, the problem comes when you have two masters or two kings in the same domain. Two kings, two self-proclaimed kings in the one house.

Because whenever there are two people competing for authority, two people claiming authority, one of them has to be rejected. See, when we think or speak or act or plan like we're the ones in control, like we know everything that's going to happen, in effect, we are arrogantly saying to God, I'm king, not you.

[6 : 28] I'm in charge, not you. I'm in control, not you. It is arrogant and ignorant to say to the creator of everything, I'm more powerful than you.

Or to somehow assume that his power is dependent on my willingness to submit to it. The Bible describes Jesus as the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things.

Without him, nothing exists. The New Testament tells us that there will come a point where every knee will bow, where every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, is King.

Either by force or by choice, everyone will one day acknowledge that Jesus is King. And yet we, as Christians, as people who claim to willingly choose Jesus as our King, shamefully remove him from his place and act like we're in control.

Plus, the delusion of control for us foolishly ignores eternity. When we think we're in control, we start to live life like this, here and now is all that there is.

[7 : 44] And so suddenly we are consumed by the desire to accumulate stuff, to get things, to gather pleasure, as much as we possibly can. And if you're a Christian, and remember that this letter in James is written to the church, it's written to people who claim to be following Jesus, who as far as we know are following Jesus.

If you're a Christian, and you've forgotten about the eternity that your life is a part of, then your life is pitiful.

1 Corinthians 15 says that if you only have hope for this life, then you are to be pitied above all men. Because the Christian life, the Christian hope recognizes that we are made for more than just a bit between our birth and our death.

The Christian hope yearns for something that is more satisfying than the fickle treasures and pleasures that we do enjoy in this life. Our lives in the scheme of eternity are a mist that appears and is gone.

And it is arrogance to assume that what we could accumulate in our short breath of a life can even vaguely compare to the eternity of goodness that God has prepared for those who love him.

[9 : 13] And yet, we pour out our lives in a vain attempt to satisfy ourselves, to gather pleasure, to gather things, to make ourselves happy.

This passage isn't saying that our lives have no value. What it means, what it's talking about when it says that your life is a mist is it's giving you the context in which your life can flourish.

It's giving you the purpose, the environment in which you can get the most out of the mist, the breath that God has given you. And that context is eternity.

To quote Russell Crowe, the modern day prophet from the movie Gladiator, what we do in this life echoes in eternity. The way we live, the choices we make, the things we pursue, the things we dream about, need to reflect our understanding that God has indescribable goodness for us beyond this life.

And that he has already purchased that for us by sending Jesus. The way we use our time and our energy and our money must reflect our awareness that everything we have in this life comes from God and is entrusted to us for his purpose.

[10 : 47] Have a look at verse 1 of chapter 5. Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted and moths have eaten your clothes.

Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look, the wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men who are not opposing you.

The issue here is not with the fact that these people are rich. The problem for these rich people and remember we've been reminded that we fall under the category of rich people.

The issue is how they got rich. The issue is what they've done with their wealth. The issue is most importantly where their hearts are. See, their unbridled commitment to hoarding wealth for themselves at the expense of others, even in the oppression of others, by not paying wages, reflects an ignorance that their life that they live now and everything that they gather now is but a mist in the context of eternity.

[12 : 12] They have forgotten that there is something bigger that God has prepared. Their wealth is corroding and even condemning them because it testifies to their desire to be in control.

They hoard wealth to look after themselves, to protect themselves, to create the illusion of safety. It testifies that they have rejected God as king.

They have rejected his purposes in their life and we need to be warned because we are the rich. We need to have our hearts and our eyes fixed on eternity.

We need to see everything that we have and enjoy now, the transient treasures, the good things that God has entrusted to us as just that, things entrusted to us for his purpose.

Nothing we have is ours. Every good thing we have comes from God, James 1 tells us that, but nothing we have is ours or for our discretion.

[13 : 22] Everything we have is from him and for him. In a couple of weeks' time, we will be in our commitment series and something that we do as part of our commitment series is we pledge financially to the work of ministry for the coming 12 months.

It's something that we've been doing for several years and many of you are in the habit of doing. But I wonder in reflection on what God is challenging us here tonight, given that we have to recognise that at points in our lives and in areas of our lives we live like God is not king, like we are king, what would it look like as you reflect on the resources that God has entrusted to you, financial and otherwise, as you dream about how to give them to the work of ministry, what difference would it make if your starting point was everything that I have in my hand, every dollar, every resource, every ounce of energy is not mine, but is God's, entrusted to me for his purpose.

purpose, how might that change what you commit to doing, what you commit to giving? See, when we place ourselves at the centre, when we delude ourselves into thinking that we are in control, we take the good things that God gives us and elevate them above the one who gave them in the first place and that is sin at its heart.

You can almost hear the defence of the people who are reading this passage for the first time. It might be the defence that you're rehearsing in your mind even now as I speak. What's wrong with planning or working hard?

I still go to church, I still pray, I still do good things? But this is where this God delusion becomes really dangerous.

[15 : 19] when you're the centre of your world, when what you want matters most, you actually lose the ability to even understand what sin is.

Sin becomes just a list of things that I'm not supposed to do. Or maybe a list of things that I am supposed to do. Hence the defence, I'm not so bad, I'm ticking the boxes.

But only when Jesus is in his rightful place at the centre, can you begin to see the impact of not just the specific actions that you do or don't do, but the impact of your allegiance, of your affection.

creation. Because if you're loving something else, something other than Jesus, who loved you and gave himself for you and sits on the throne as the rightful ruler over all creation, if you are loving anything more than Jesus, that is sin, that is serious, that matters.

And so verse 17 tells us, anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. The good that you ought to do, the good that you know about as someone who follows Jesus, is that the world and your life and everything in them belong to Jesus, belong under his rule.

[16 : 49] The good you ought to do is to love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. the good that you ought to do is to offer your life and everything in it for his purpose and not your own.

But when you live with a God delusion, when you live with yourself at the center like the world is your oyster to do with as you please, you float along in ignorance, oblivious even to the good design that God has for your life.

You become unwilling to submit to his direction because you're convinced that your life will go better if you stay in the driver's seat. The command here in verse 15, the alternative to having a God delusion, instead, you ought to say, if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

The alternative is to submit to the Lord's will, to ask that question before every decision and action, if it is the Lord's will.

That's a really significant phrase. We need to pause and just reflect on that for a second. It's a sentence that's maybe been emptied of its gravity, of its meaning, because it's the sort of thing we throw into prayers to make ourselves sound godly.

[18 : 20] Dear God, please make me feel better, if it's your will. It's become something that's a bit of a cliché or maybe a lip service to God. But the problem in this passage and in our lives is not that we have rejected God, it's that we've reduced God, we've diluted him, we've tried to tame him, we haven't sent him away, we've just reduced his authority and his power over us to the point where he's still king, but just not over everything, he gets a little bit.

He's kind of a vice king to my ultimate kingship. And so I will follow wherever God leads, as long as it fits in with where I was going anyway. I'll go to church, I'll read my Bible, I'll do my best to be moral, but I'm going to decide what I do with my money.

I'll submit to your rule, Jesus, but I decide where I live. I decide what job I have. Because we've shrunk God down so much, we become ignorant to what his will even is, to the point where we've begun to make his will our will.

And so when I've talked to people about areas of their life that don't reflect God's will, that don't reflect the Bible, that don't reflect a love for Jesus above all else, and if I'm honest, I've heard these phrases in myself as well, the phrases that sometimes come out when we've twisted God's will to be our will is, I can't imagine a God who wouldn't want me to be happy.

I can't imagine a God who would care which suburb I live in. I can't imagine a God who would bother interfering with my love life, or my work.

[20 : 16] When we reduce God, we just make him like us, so it's easier. And so we think that following God's will will only be good, because that's our plan for us.

We can't imagine a scenario where God would actually put something difficult in our lives for our sake and for his glory. And yet when Jesus prayed, your will be done and not mine, he said it in tears as he prepared to go to the cross.

Following Jesus is an all-consuming reality. It redefines your whole life. It replaces every ambition and every treasure.

It demands that we lay down the things that we had hoped for ourselves and come empty handed, ready to go wherever we are sent, ready to do whatever is asked, ready to serve in whatever way he requires.

It demands that we let go of the treasures that we previously held so that we can grab hold of the better treasure that is Jesus, that is forgiveness, that is hope.

[21 : 35] Submitting to God is better, God is will. But when we delude ourselves into thinking the world is about God's will is.

Jesus is the ultimate picture of what it looks like to submit to his father's will. Through his whole life he gives himself to everything that is asked of him, even his death. Taking the penalty for our sins is in obedience to his father's will.

Listen to Philippians chapter 2. It says, Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

The path that he chose in life was the path of obedience to his father. And what happened? God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus always did his father's will, for our sake. He always did what was asked of him, and his father lifted him up. He was not left forsaken.

[23 : 02] Jesus models what it is to give yourself fully to God. And James is calling us as Christians to imitate that wholesale commitment, that uncompromising, undiluted, every minute of everyday commitment to our father's call.

He calls us to have as the starting point to every decision in life, to every day that we wake, God, here I am. With everything that you have given me, what would you have me do?

Not, God, I've got this stuff planned, is there anything you want me to do while I'm getting it done? But to start every decision about what job we'd have, about what house we'd live in, about what ministry we'd be involved in, about what money we would give, what money we would save, about everything that we would do, with the heart position of your will be done because you are king.

This is a scary prospect. This is a scary demand. What about the things that you're looking forward to? What about the things that you really love?

What if you have to give up something that you really enjoy? I mean, if I give up control, if I stop trying to be God and entrust myself to God, how is that going to work out for me?

[24 : 32] That's the fear, isn't it? That's why we try and hold the wheel, isn't it? Because we're worried that somehow we'll lose if we let go.

Jesus is more than just a model for us to imitate. Jesus is the foundation that gives us confidence to trust God, confidence to submit our lives to His will and know that it will always be good.

Listen to the words of Romans 8. Verse 28 says, We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. How do we know? Verse 32. He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things.

The cross is the proof that God's will for you is always good. Sometimes difficult, sometimes painful, but always good.

Always given to you out of love, always given for your benefit, always given for His glory. The fear that our lives won't be as good, won't be as satisfying, won't be as fantastic, or that we'll miss out on something is obliterated by the cross, because at the cross God gives you the thing that He cares about most.

[25 : 54] He pays the highest price for you. And He proves that He is in control. He proves that His power and His goodness combine to give us security when we trust Him.

To know that He is good and He is in control, and He is working for our good. And so I want to ask you tonight to reflect on your own life. Right now, is there anything in your life, is there any part of your life that you are holding on to and trying to control?

Are there dreams and ambitions in your life that you're holding on to so tightly that you would not let go if God asked you to? Are there things that you're sacrificing for, that you're prioritizing, that don't reflect the one who bought you with the blood of His Son?

What is it that you're pouring your energy into? What is it that you're sacrificing to get? What is it that you're dreaming about in your life? Because God's will for you is that the answer to all those questions would be Him.

That the thing you dream about is Him. The thing you sacrifice for is Him. The thing you pour your energy into is Him and His purpose and His kingdom and His will.

[27 : 23] His desire is that you would be so satisfied in Him that you would joyfully empty your hands of the temporary, inferior joys that the world is trying to sell us.

God alone is God. God alone belongs at the center of your world. He alone has mapped out the best path for your life.

God alone has a life. God alone has a life. God alone has a life. God alone has a life. God alone has a life. God alone has a life full of good gifts entrusted to you for His purpose.

Instead, you should say, if it is the Lord's will. Let's pray. Father God, we want to acknowledge and recognize that we elevate ourselves, we place trust in ourselves that is misguided, that we try and control things even when we know we can't logically.

We still refuse to throw ourselves on you and your goodness. But God, we ask that you would open our eyes to see in the cross the guarantee that your will is good, that your will is unstoppable, and that there is much joy and much blessing in living the life that you have designed for us.

[29 : 07] God, I pray that you would open our eyes to see the things or the areas of the passions in our life that we are keeping for ourselves. Things that we are elevating above you.

God, I pray that tonight you would shine brighter for us, that we would recognize that you are the true treasure, that we would let go of things that we might grab hold of more of you and be more satisfied in you.

God, we pray for us as a church that as we begin to give ourselves, give our whole lives, give everything that we are and have to you and your cause, that you might use us mightily, that you might draw others to come and know the hope and purpose that you have ordained for your people.

We pray that people would see a difference in us, see a contentment, see a security that cannot be found elsewhere. We pray that in our difficult times and in our prosperous times that we would still hold firmly to the truth that you are king, that you rule, that you are worthy.

Father, please open our hearts, enable us to love you as you deserve so that you might get the glory. Amen.