



Nagging Questions series: "What if there IS a god?"

1. Have you known people who have largely lived as if there is no god, but eventually/inevitably voiced their doubts with you?
2. *The question of God's existence is THE most important question in all of life, because, depending on the answer, it changes everything!* True? Discuss.
3. Given the importance of the question, why do so many spend so little time on this?
4. What were some of the reasons Kevin explored for why God doesn't seem to be more obvious?

You may like to refer at this point to some of the verses Kevin took us to: Job 23:8-9, Isaiah 45:15, Isaiah 48:13, Acts 17:27, Exodus 13:20-22; Numbers 14:14, Nehemiah 9:12

5. Given the signs of the pillar and fire and God's provision of food, what was the result both within Israel *and* the surrounding nations?
6. Kevin suggested that God could do a lap of the earth in a fiery chariot every hour of every day and people will still find ways of ignoring him. True?
7. Of course the clearest sign of God's existence is Jesus Christ - God on earth!
Read Matthew 16:1-4. This is of course after all the miracles Jesus had been doing. Kevin said "he was effectively saying the death and resurrection of Jesus is enough of a sign for those who are earnestly seeking God... and no sign will ever be enough for those who aren't." True?

Read Acts 17:22-31.

8. How has God created us and the world so that we should seek him (vv26-27)? Do you see evidence of this in unbelievers you know?
9. What were the past ignorant times God 'overlooked' (v30)
10. What is the ultimate sign that Jesus is who he said he is and will return to judge the world? (Note the two ultimate reactions in vv32-33 and how we see the same today!)
11. What if there *is* a god?

WHAT IF THERE IS A GOD?

If God DOESN'T exist, and you're not a Christian, then there's absolutely no problem, just keep living the way you're living. If, on the other hand, God DOES exist, and you're not a Christian, then you're in big trouble and you need to do something about it before it's too late.

I could stop there. But let me extrapolate a little further. If God DOESN'T exist, then death is the end, there is nothing more, and there is no ultimate moral accountability beyond this world. You are your own boss, and you can live life your own way. But if, on the other hand, God DOES exist, it means that we are not free moral agents who evolved from slime by chance and who can now do whatever we please. Instead, we are the loving creation of a Creator God who calls us into relationship with himself, who has given us clear moral guidelines by which to live, and who will one day hold us to account for the life that we have lived.

The question of God's existence is THE most important question in all of life, because, depending on the answer, it changes everything! It's a bigger question than who you will marry and what job you will do and where you will live. It's the *ultimate* question, because it has *eternal* significance. This is the one thing that atheists and Christians are in complete agreement about: the question of whether or not God exists, changes everything.

And yet, it astounds me that so many people give so little time to even thinking about it. Most people trundle their way through life, barely giving God a thought, apart from using his name as an expletive. OMG.

I suspect there are many reasons for this; the immediacy of the physical world, the tyranny of the urgent, the perception that it's an unsolvable question, and finally, avoidance – the uneasy feeling that if they think too deeply about the issue they may have to change their life.

CHALLENGE:

This morning I'd like to ask you to seriously consider the implications of this issue for your own life. Maybe you are one of those people who struggles to believe in something or someone you cannot see. Let me say, you're in good company:

- Bertrand Russell, famous atheist, *"If I do come face to face with God when I die, I will demand an explanation as to why he made the evidence for his existence insufficient"*
- The Bible acknowledges God's allusiveness: *Job 23:8-9 "If I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him."*
- *Isaiah 45:15 "Truly, you are a God who hides himself"*
Isaiah is speaking here, not as a skeptic or an outsider. Isaiah was one of God's special ones. He enjoyed a special relationship with God. He heard from God from time to time; and God spoke through him to the nation. Yet even the great prophet Isaiah lodges this complaint with God. "God, why are you so often silent and invisible? Why do you hide

yourself from humanity. Why aren't you more obvious? It'd save a whole lot of heartache, Lord, if you just made yourself more obvious! Then a whole lot more people would believe in you and follow you! Isn't that what you want?!!"

Have you ever felt a similar frustration? Not just for the sake of those struggling to believe in God, but on your own account as well? Have you ever prayed and prayed and prayed and you've got nothing back from God. And you find yourself asking God "Why are you so silent? Why are you hiding? Why don't you speak to me?"

If you've ever had feelings like that, then you are in good company. You and Isaiah will have a lot to talk about when you get to heaven, and I'll be right there with you!

1. God's allusiveness is partly due to the fall.

- It's quite fascinating to me that Michaelangelo's famous painting of the fall on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, has, over time, developed a stress fracture in the most remarkable of places, exactly separating the hand of man from the hand of God. This accident of degenerative plaster is an extraordinary metaphor depicting the enormous gulf that was created between the physical and spiritual realms when mankind rebelled against God in the beginning. In the words of the old saying, "If God seems distant, guess who moved." You and I, as mature Christians, know that Genesis 3 is *foundational* for our understanding of the apparent hiddenness of God today.

This explanation is, of course, entirely unsatisfactory to the average skeptic. "You mean God isn't talking to me because of something someone else did 6,000 years ago? He needs to get over it! That's a long time to carry a grudge! Here I am willing to talk to him, and he's still sulking! Get over it!"

So the explanation of The Fall and it's consequences, really doesn't cut the mustard for your average person on the street. They're not interested in ancient mythology. They want real answers in the real world.

• 2. God's allusiveness is also partly due to His nature.

The Bible says, God is spirit, and he is infinitely immense in every sense of that word and his hiddenness, our lack of ability to perceive him clearly is, to a large extent, a product of that immensity.

- **Isaiah 48:13** says God holds the universe "*in the span of his hand*", not to infer any inherent physicality in God's being, but simply to point out that should He decide to manifest himself in a physical form, he could quite easily encapsulate the entire universe with it's billions of galaxies within the palm of a single hand.

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- As Paul says to the Athenians in **Acts 17:27**, "*God is not far from any of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being*". Our planet, our solar system, our galaxy, our universe resides within God. He is simply too big for us to see.

o Classes: "Do you believe that something can be too big to see?" ...

- *** Red blood cells in my body.
- **Acts 17:27, "God is not far from any of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being".**
Mankind's insistence that we should be able to see God at our miniscule level extraordinarily naïve, and illustrates how completely inadequate our concept of God is. The God who is capable of creating the entire universe, with it's billions of galaxies, is not going to be someone we will bump into down the pub, or in the checkout queue at Coles.
- Carl Sagan, the notable astronomer and atheist, who was responsible for the design of the plaque that was attached to the voyager spacecraft ..., once satirically asked, "*Why doesn't God place a glowing cross in the night sky to serve as irrefutable proof of his existence?*"
- Of course, God did basically do this at one point in history. For a period of 40 years
- Pillar of cloud and fire Exod 13
- Surrounding nations all saw it too and were convinced Num 14:14
If you'd asked them "Does the God of the Jews exist?" they would have said "Of course he does! Just open your eyes and look! There he is!"
- So amazing was it that Nehemiah was still talking about it 100s of years later ... Neh 9:12
- And not only was God visually present, but he also sent manna and quail from heaven every day to feed the people. There was physical, tangible evidence of God's presence with them every day!
- ? So what was the result of all this? This physical, tangible, incontrovertible presence of God in the world for 40 years. Surely it resulted in mass conversion? Surely the surrounding nations lay down their swords and repented and placed their faith in this great God that they could see before their very eyes?
No. The surrounding nations continued to oppose God and his people. They refused to repent and submit to God.
And the Jews themselves? Surely this indisputable physical sign strengthened their own faith and their resolve to follow God?
- No. Shortly after the pillars of cloud and fire appeared, Moses went up the mountain to receive the 10 commandments from God, and while he was gone everyone got together and someone said, "Hey I've got a great idea! Let's make an idol and worship it!" And everyone else said, "Brilliant! Great idea! Let's do it!". And so that's what they did. With the awe inspiring, tangible presence of God right in front of their eyes, they turned their backs on it, and made a little golden calf, and started worshipping it. It's gobsmackingly stupid isn't it? It's almost too hard to believe that they could be that stupid. And yet that incident provides us with a window into the true state of the human heart.

- You see, God could do a lap of the earth in a fiery chariot every hour of every day, and people would not repent. “Yep there goes God again. Good old God. Regular as clockwork...”
- Now of course, there was a physical visitation of God to our planet, even more remarkable than a pillar of fire – and that is the person of Jesus. God in the flesh, who walked among us, who became a red blood cell so that we could perceive him at our miniscule level,

who healed the sick and raised the dead and calmed storms and walked on water. And yet most people, even then, chose not to follow him. On one occasion a religious leader came up to Jesus and said, *“If you are from God give us a sign from heaven”*. And this was *after* Jesus has healed the sick, raised the dead, walked on water.

- And Jesus replied, *“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given to them, except the sign of Jonah.” Matt 16:4*

He was speaking about his forthcoming death and resurrection. And he was effectively saying,

- **The death and resurrection of Jesus is enough of a sign for those who are earnestly seeking God and no sign will ever be enough for those who aren’t.**

What about you? Have you reached a point when you are ready to admit that there is a God and that you need to do something about it? God has done everything possible to reveal himself to you.

- He’s stamped his image indelibly into creation,
- He’s painted the most extraordinary message in the stars,
- And most importantly of all, He’s personally visited our planet, in the person of Jesus, who proved his divinity through the most amazing miracles, who proved his love by dying on a cross for our sins, and who proved his right to be our Lord and Master by rising from the dead and ascending into heaven, from where He will one day return to judge the living and the dead.

Listen to Paul’s words in Acts 17, part of which I read earlier:

- *“God is not far from any of us, for in him we live and move and have our being ... and now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the One he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:27-31)*

- **What if there IS a God?** If there is a God, our lives have meaning and purpose beyond this mortal life. If there is a God, death is not the end. If there is a God, we will all one day stand in his presence and be judged for the way we have lived. Are you ready for that?

- I want to urge you today, if you haven’t already done so, to turn back to the God who made you, and begin a relationship with him, that will last forever.