

if you could ask God ANYTHING...

Sermon 1 – Romans 1:18-25 “Where’s all the evidence?”

Introduction

- i. What insights have you gained from Kevin’s first talk?
 - ii. Did Kevin’s talk raise questions for you?
1. **The voice of creation** - read Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1-4
 - a. How has God made his existence plain to us?
 - b. If the Bible did not exist, what could we surmise about God by looking at creation?
 - c. If God’s existence is so “plain to them”, why do so many people remain disinterested, or claim they are agnostics or atheists?
 2. **The voice of conscience** – read Romans 2:15
 - a. Can you explain what this verse means?
 - b. Given that the Bible says that God has written His standards into our consciences, how might we explain the differences that exist within people’s consciences? How do people end up with different moral standards?
 - c. Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. What does it mean that God has set eternity in our hearts?
 3. **Without excuse**

The indictment of Romans 1:20 is that ‘people are without excuse’. The grandeur and complexity of creation proclaims the existence of an almighty Creator, and our consciences are infused with an innate awareness of his existence and his moral standards.

 - a. Describe the ways in which people actively suppress this truth. What is their motivation?
 - b. What do you think this means for people who have seen the glory of God in creation but never heard of Jesus because they do not have the Bible and no one has ever told them about Jesus?
 - c. How has this talk and study helped you in your understanding of God and his plans for us?

Pray for those you’ve invited to this series. Pray that through this series, our non-Christian friends and family may be great helped and that we as Christians may become better equipped in talking to them about Jesus.

EVIDENCE FOR BELIEF

(Rom 1:18-25)

Good morning!

My name is Kevin Simington and over the next 3 Sundays, plus a couple of mid-week seminars, I will be presenting a series of messages entitled, *"If I could ask God anything ..."*. I'll be examining some of the most common questions and objections that are raised against Christianity, and I'll be providing some detailed answers to those questions. Because there are answers. Christianity is entirely reasonable and rational, and it is supported by a substantial body of evidence - scientific, historical and literary evidence. I've been engaged in dialogue with seekers and sceptics for 40 years and I have yet to encounter an objection that doesn't have a reasonable, rational answer.

Sherlock Homes and Watson were on a camping trip. One night they consumed a fair amount of alcohol and fell asleep, and then Homes woke up in the middle of the night and lay there looking up at the stars. He nudged Watson and said, *"Watson, look up at all the stars in the sky. What does it tell you?"* Watson looked up and said, *"Well, Astronomically, it tells me that here are billions of galaxies and stars, and potentially billions of planets. Chronologically it tells me that it's about 2am. Meteorologically it tells me that tomorrow will probably be a beautiful day. Philosophically it tells me that we are so insignificant compared to the vastness of the universe. Why Homes? What does it tell you?"* Homes replied, *"You idiot Watson, someone's stolen our tent!"*

This morning I want to briefly examine the evidence for God's existence - evidence which is plainly obvious but which many people fail to see. Over the years I have encountered many people who claim that there is no significant evidence for God's existence. But, according to Romans chapter 1, God has provided us with more than enough evidence for his existence.

I want to draw out several important points from this passage that was just read to us from Romans 1:

1. The Evidence For God's Existence Is Clear, and People Are Without Excuse.

Rom 1:19-20 ¹⁹ *what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *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.*

In other words, God's own opinion on this matter is that He considers that He's made His existence abundantly clear, and no-one can justifiably claim that there wasn't enough evidence. People are without excuse, according to God.

So what is the evidence for God's existence? The first two chapters of Romans specifies two very clear pieces of evidence. And I'm going to call them "Voices". The Voice of Conscience and The Voice Of Creation.

The Voice Of Conscience

This is the idea that God has placed within every person an inbuilt, innate sense of both His existence and His standards of right and wrong.

(Romans 2:15) "The requirements of God's law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them..."

This verse is speaking of a universal sense of right and wrong that God has built into our collective conscience. We don't need the Bible to tell us that violence and greed and hatred and corruption are wrong - we know it intuitively, because God has written his moral code into our collective conscience. But more than that, this verse is also speaking about something even more fundamental - it's referring to a universal sense of God's existence that God has placed within us - an inbuilt, universal sense of the divine, that is ubiquitous across all cultures.

This is what is meant by these references in Romans 1:

v. 19 "*what may be known about God is plain to them*"

v. 21 "*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him*"

v.28 "*Furthermore, they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*"

These verses are all hinting at the fact that God has placed a basic *knowledge* of Himself within us. Every human being has a natural, innate sense that there is a supreme supernatural being of some kind, who deserves our worship, and to whom we are answerable. It's built into us!

On June 24th, 1982, a British Airways Boeing 747 bound for Australia out of Jakarta was cruising at 12,000 metres over the Indian Ocean, when suddenly, without any warning, all four of its engines failed. For the next 12 minutes the pilots fought desperately to restart them, and the plane plummeted 8,000 meters. For the 263 passengers and crew, it was the longest 12 minutes of their lives, and they were convinced they were about to die.

It all began with an announcement over the cabin speakers: "*Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We have a small problem. All four engines have stopped. We are doing our darnedest to get them going again. I trust you are not in too much distress.*"

Convinced they were about to die, some of the passengers got their passports out of their overhead luggage and placed them in their coat pockets so that their bodies could be properly identified. Several women confessed to putting on stilettos, just in case they survived, so they could kick the sharks with their heels! A very common response, however, was prayer; desperate, pleading prayer as people cried out to God to save them.

The engines were eventually re-started and the plane landed safely back in Jakarta. A Discovery Channel documentary was later made about the incident. When these praying passengers were later interviewed, many of them said that they were atheists or agnostics, but when the crunch came, they found themselves praying.

This is certainly not unusual. It is not uncommon for people who are professed atheists or agnostics to cry out to God in desperation when they find themselves in terrifying or traumatic circumstances. And it simply illustrates the truth that every single human being has an innate sense of God's existence.

But that brings me to the next point:

MANY PEOPLE SUPPRESS THE TRUTH

Many people are choosing to suppress that sense of God's existence. They don't want to believe. They don't want to be answerable to an almighty God. Romans 1 describes this suppression:

Rom 1:18-19 "... people 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."

God has made it plain to every single human being that He exists! But if a person continues to DENY that truth, to suppress this innate sense of God's existence for long enough, that spark of spiritual awareness can be almost completely extinguished. Romans 1, quite appropriately, refers to this as the darkening of the heart:

Rom 1:21-22. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

I am convinced, however, that even the most outspoken atheist retains a spark of spiritual awareness that is sometimes brought to the surface during times of mortal danger. In fact, history is replete with outspoken atheists who, when placed in extreme mortal danger, execute spiritual backflips that would make any gymnast proud. Have a listen to some of these Famous Last Words of Atheists.

- **Thomas Paine** (1737-1809) was an English-American political activist, one of the founding fathers of America, and a very outspoken and influential atheist. He published the book, "*The Age Of Reason*", which was an atheist manifesto that influenced thousands of people to question God's existence. As he lay dying, however, he uttered these famous words, "*I would give worlds if I had them, that The Age of*

*Reason had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! No, don't leave; stay with me! For I am on the edge of Hell here! If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one."*¹

- **Sir Frances Newport** (1555 – 1623) was the founding president of the British Infidel Association. As he lay dying, several members of the Association had gathered around his bed, to encourage and support him. Suddenly, Newport called out, with a look of terror in his eyes, *"You need not tell me there is no God for now I know there is one, and that I am in His presence! You need not tell me there is no Hell. I feel myself already slipping. Wretches, cease your idle talk! I know I am lost forever! Oh, that fire! Oh, the insufferable pangs of Hell!"*² He then slumped into unconsciousness and died.
- **Sir Thomas Scott** (1535 – 1594) was an outspoken atheist and member of the British Parliament who was instrumental in passing several laws that were detrimental to the Church in Great Britain at that time. As he lay dying, he cried out, *"Until this moment, I thought there was neither God nor Hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty!"*³
- **Voltaire** (1694 – 1778) was a famous French philosopher and an outspoken atheist. His real name was Francois Arouet, but was he better known by his non-deplume, Voltaire. His atheistic writings influenced thousands of people to abandon religious faith. On his death bed, he cried out these final words to his attending physician, *"I am abandoned by God and man! I would give you half of what I am worth if you would give me six months life. But I am going to Hell! Oh Christ! Oh Jesus Christ!"*⁴

Those are some pretty extraordinary death bed statements aren't they? You see, no matter how vehemently a person may deny the existence of God, that innate sense of His existence is never completely extinguished. God whispers to every soul, *"I am here. I am here"*. So that everyone is without excuse.

And not only does God whisper to our souls, but He shouts to us through the voice of creation.

THE VOICE OF CREATION

Romans 1:20. "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."

The voice of creation is not a subtle whisper; it cries out in magnificent exclamation! There is a God! And He is great!

Thousands of years ago, King David wrote, *"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. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."* (Psalm 19:1-4).

The grandeur of the physical universe, with its billions of galaxies and its unspeakable beauty, cries out to humanity in a language that bypasses mere vocabulary and interacts directly with our hearts and souls. It declares to us, day by day, moment by moment, that there is a Creator. The heavens truly do *"declare the glory of God"*.

The debate concerning the evidence for God's existence, or lack of it, within the natural realm, is an ongoing one. Volumes have been written on the topic at the most profound scientific levels. As an interested spectator in the debate myself, regularly reading physics, cosmology, chemistry and genetics, I have noted a dramatic shift in the balance of the debate in recent decades. Recent scientific discoveries and developments have tended to undermine the atheist cause and bolster the evidential case for intelligent design. These developments include:

- Recent cosmological evidence pointing to a supernatural (beyond nature) origin to the universe.
- Overwhelming teleological evidence of intelligent design within nature.

¹ <https://www.christian-faith.com/words-of-dying-atheists-and-skeptics/>

² IBID

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

- The now widely acknowledged impossibility of genetic replication producing positive mutations and new genetic information necessary for macro-evolution
- The now widely acknowledged complete failure of the fossil record to provide paleontological evidence for macro evolution (major changes from one species to another).

Because of these, and many more, ongoing evidential developments within all branches of science, a growing number of scientists are abandoning the concept of blind, random chance as an explanation for the origin of life, and are embracing the concept of intelligent design:

Dr Robert Jastrow, astronomer, physicist and founder of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, states, *"Astronomers now find that they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover.... That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact."*⁵

Dr Paul Davies, Professor of Theoretical Physics, Adelaide University, states, *"The physical universe is put together with an ingenuity that is so astonishing, with physical constants that are so impossibly perfect, that I can no longer accept it as the product of brute chance"*.

Dr. Fred Hoyle, astrophysicist and mathematician, Cambridge University, states, *"A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question."*

Dr Hugh Ross, Director of Observations at Royal Astronomical Society, Vancouver, and author of *"The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Latest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God"*, writes; *"Astronomers who do not draw theistic conclusions are becoming rare, and even the few dissenters hint that the tide is against them. Geoffrey Burbidge, of the University of California at San Diego, complains that his fellow astronomers are rushing off to join 'the First Church of Christ of the Big Bang.'"*

Of course, determined atheism will never be defeated by rational argument or evidence, no matter how convincing it is, because atheism, at its heart, is spiritual blindness. It is a resolute unwillingness to believe in God; an unwillingness that refuses to see the imprint of the Creator in creation; an unwillingness that grasps desperately at any conceivable alternate explanation for life which enables the unbeliever to continue to ignore the God who made them. This is why Paul writes, *"their foolish hearts were darkened"* (Rom 1:21).

But for those with an open heart and open mind, the Bible indicates that the evidence for God is *clear*; Romans 1:20. *"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."* At its heart, this evidence is easy to perceive and simple to understand. You don't need to read scientific journals and have a degree in genetics or cosmology to perceive it. The evidence is there for all to see. Look up at the stars at night or hold a new-born baby in your arms, and open your heart to the wonder of creation and the miracle of life. This universe is not an accident. It did not just come into being by itself. Life is an extraordinary miracle. The evidence is staring us in the face every day if we care to look!

NO EXCUSE

And so, the Bible is clear: *"people are without excuse"* (Rom 1:20). The evidence for God is there if you have eyes to see.

Of course, there remain many people who claim that the evidence is not clear enough. They ask, *"If God exists, why doesn't He make Himself more obvious? If God wants people to believe in Him, surely He could make Himself much more obvious?"* That is the question that I will be addressing next week.

⁵ Robert Jastrow, "A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths," Christianity Today, August 6, 1982.

But as we conclude this morning, let me encourage you to do a couple of things:

Firstly, If you're a visitor, and you aren't yet a Christian, perhaps you have questions and doubts, then don't give up asking and searching. I really urge you to seriously check out Christianity. Because if it is true, it is the most important, life-changing truth in the whole world. If there really is a God to whom we are ultimately accountable, then that changes EVERYTHING. Don't short-change yourself on this issue. Seriously look into it - because it's too important to dismiss lightly and off-handedly.

TO REGULAR MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH, 2 FINAL EXHORTATIONS:

1. Become more familiar with the evidence yourself, so that you can engage in intelligent dialogue with sceptics and seekers. *1 Pet 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have".*

Despite the fact that the kinds of questions and objections commonly raised by sceptics and seekers are very predictable - in fact most of you could easily write a list of the most commonly asked questions - I find that most Christians are ill-prepared to answer them. And I want to encourage you to "***Be prepared***" as 1 Peter 3:15 says. Do some reading. Do some research. Get hold of some resources that can provide you with facts and evidence to enable you to answer these questions. Because there are answers! Christianity is entirely reasonable and defensible. Be prepared!

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2. And the second take home message is also very simple: Pray for your unsaved friends and family - that God will open their eyes to the evidence for His existence and open their hearts to respond to Him.

Gracious Heavenly Father,

We pray for our friends and loved ones who don't yet know you. Who may be struggling with questions and doubts. We ask for two things this morning. Firstly, that you would reveal yourself to them, indisputably and clearly. That through the work of your Holy Spirit, their eyes would be opened and their hearts moved to turn to Christ in faith and repentance. Secondly, we ask that you will help us to be prepared to answer their questions. Help us to not only be willing in spirit, but also to be equipped and able to offer intelligent, rational answers to people's questions. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.