

## **Reason Enough**

Pastor Jeff Wood

April 15, 2018

The way I would put the messages from the last couple weeks is that they were meant to ground and persuade. That is, to help followers of Jesus have more understanding about why believing in Jesus is smart and to help those who are not yet followers of Jesus to realize that doing so is feasible intellectually. Ground you and persuade others.

So on Easter I pointed to the seismic changes in the disciples and their world at that time saying that such changes could only be sufficiently accounted for by something absolutely momentous such as the bodily resurrection of Christ. The best man ever known who had been certifiably dead now back physically alive would account for seismic changes in personality and religious/cultural practices...men running for their lives to laying down their lives, radical sabbath observance – no longer important, Temple and sacrifices – no longer important, Jew-Gentile racism – obsolete, women as second-class – overthrown... that a living Jesus changed them.

Last week I simply pointed out that we can be morally responsible or morally irresponsible in our believing AND in our disbelieving. Responsibility has to do with having reasons. And it is not only the believer who bears the burden of marshalling reasons, it is the skeptic as well. In

sum, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus and have these reasons. You don't. What are your reasons?

Responsibility is also about owning consequences. It is interesting phenomenon to me that a leader can say to people, "Let's try this," and they say "No." Then, "This," and they say "No." Then, "This," and they say, "No." And so on. Finally, the people assert, "The leader failed us." Where's the voice that says, "You said, 'No,' and these are the consequences? You are responsible for this."

Today, I'd like to offer a few more reasons for believing that may be helpful to you as followers or you as investigators of Christianity. There are many incredibly far-reaching, in-depth, and detailed works such as *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell and *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist*. What I offer to you today is maybe one of those titles with the words "...for Dummies" tacked on. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict for Dummies* and *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist for Dummies*. This is not because we are dummies but in this format and time frame we can only do so much.

If you can go away from these couple of weeks saying, one: there were massive changes in Jesus' people and his world that are very noticeable but hard to explain, apart from the resurrection and two: there should be reasons given BOTH for believing and disbelieving that will be good. Now add to those thoughts, these.

The Quality of the NT. And, because of our culture's reverence for science and some notions that religion and

science conflict or that faith doesn't jive with scientific thought, just a word or two related to Science.

The quality of the NT and this has to do with first, the proximity of the writing. Here's the common thought across the land today and has been for quite some time. There was Jesus and he did some impressive stuff. A long time later it was written down. In between, a bunch of legend grew up. It got incorporated into the writings and has continued to grow ever since. So the NT is legend-like and it is so because we have just a few documents from a long time after Jesus lived. The idealistic, want-to-believe followers of Jesus have overlaid the historical Jesus with fancies about miracles, saying he was God, and so forth.

Here's the basic problem with that – nearness of the documents and the eyewitnesses. If you were reading American history and there was nothing in it about ground zero, homeland security, and 9-11 or the death of Billy Graham, you'd figure that it was written prior to those things having happened. Acts doesn't mention the war against Jerusalem (66 AD) or its fall (70 AD) or the death of Peter or James or Paul (62-65 AD). That's within 30 years of when Jesus died. Acts is a sequel, so the first volume was before that and Luke used materials already compiled (like the Gospel of Mark), so that was before ... Paul wrote before he was put to death ... all this in simple terms means that record of Jesus is from 10-20 years after his death<sup>1</sup> and it contains him being a miracle worker and claims to be the

---

<sup>1</sup>The earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written 400 years after he lived.

Son of God. All this when there were eyewitnesses that would have contested their falsehood. If I said we lost WWII, and it's 70+ years since then, not 10-20 years, there are eyewitnesses that would argue with me the facts.

And we're not talking just one or two documents. We're talking lots. So when we are talking about the quality of the NT we're talking about how quickly they were written but also how much was written.

Everyone accepts Caesar's *Gallic Wars* written 58 BC approximately. We have only 9 to 10 documents, with the earliest one being 900 years after it was written. In the NT we have roughly 5000 from as early as 10-20 years after. One scholar puts it this way – take all the manuscripts of the average classical writer and their pile is four feet high.<sup>2</sup> Take all the manuscripts for the NT and that pile is one mile high. One famous scholar, Bruce Metzger, said, “The textual critic of the NT is embarrassed by the wealth of his material.”<sup>3</sup>

So lots of documents, from quite early, with eyewitnesses to argue with them if they are factually off.

I listened to a TED Talk several weeks ago. One of the presenters was a super-model. While well-known for her figure, she is a studied and professional person. She was frank about the air-brushing and other doctoring that goes on with the photos. It's all about selling really. I bring this up because this is the other aspect of the quality of the NT

---

<sup>2</sup>McDowell, *Evidence*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>p. 34. Or, Bruce, “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such wealth of good textual attestation as the NT.” p. 178 in *The NT Documents – Are They Reliable?*

documents – one is that they are very early, second is that there a lots of them, another is they are so natural, honest, and typical. In other words, they are NOT airbrushed. This is the third thing I mean by the quality of the NT writings. Proximity in time, quantity of manuscripts, and the nature of the content.

Stupidity, like the two on the Road to Emmaus not recognizing Jesus, is left in place and not surgically removed. Awkwardness, like at the Great Commission saying some of his disciples worshipped and some doubted, is not airbrushed out. Political incorrectness, like having women be spokespersons, is not hidden. Various perspectives – look at the end of Mark’s gospel versus the end of John’s -- are not made completely homogeneous. In other words, the NT smacks nothing of being airbrushed propaganda. Any PR agent or spinmeister would have completely bet against this material being effective. That is, unless it was simply true.<sup>4</sup>

Now just a final word or two related to science. I am not a scientist but I read a little here and a little there and what I do know is that we moderns consider ourselves rationalists and want everything proven scientifically. We want a scientist to say it is so because if a scientist says it is so, it is so. Let’s not forget to be discerning. A scientist can be a good one or a bad one. A scientist who studies germs

---

<sup>4</sup>They’re true also with respect to facts. For example, Luke cites 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands and he’s accurate. If he cares for the accuracy of those details, why wouldn’t he care for the others as well?

very well, not badly, could be quoted about astronomy and that, with scrutiny, wouldn't necessarily hold a lot of weight.

One of the realizations from data gotten from the Hubble Telescope, for example, is that the universe is expanding. The theory related to this is the Big Bang Theory, that there was an explosion that moved us from nothing into something. A cake may not have existed one day and then come to exist the next but that is because there are ingredients and an oven. Try making a cake come into being with no ingredients, no oven. It doesn't work. It doesn't work with a lot of time and randomness but it might work with an intelligent designer. Hypothesis 1, randomness acting on nothing created something. Hypothesis 2, an intelligent designer who always existed and is self-sustaining. Which takes more faith?

As that explosion explodes, per a 2014 Wall Street Journal article entitled *Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God*,<sup>5</sup> 200 parameters are necessary for a planet to support life. All must be met or it all fails. You can't have 199 and say that's close. It's all or nothing. We have all 200. They came into being. That doesn't just randomly happen.

There are four fundamental forces – gravity, electromagnetic force, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. They were all determined in less than one millionth of a second after the big bang. And if one of them had been off by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000, then no stars would have been formed. There is the proposition that

---

<sup>5</sup> Metaxis WSJ, Dec. 26, 2014

all this happened randomly and the one that this all happened through an intelligent designer. Which is more likely?

In this expanding universe astrophysicists speak of dark matter and dark energy. It is not observable ... doesn't interact with light (what???) and is said to comprise 95% of what exists in the cosmos. So we can see about 5% of what exists and of that 5% we know only a fraction. An article at NASA says, "More is unknown than is known. We know how much dark energy there is because we know how it affects the Universe's expansion. Other than that, it is a complete mystery. But it is an important mystery."<sup>6</sup> So there is that which we cannot see that makes up most of what is and we can discern its influence? So there is fantastically more that we don't know than we do? Let's have a little humility ... and allow for the way the universe is showing itself to be to not rule God out. Science doesn't rule God out.

Billy Graham was asked how he knew there was something beyond death? How did he *know* about that? He answered, "Jesus died and came back. That's proof." How do you know that someone can go to the moon and come back? Because someone did. For a long time they couldn't and didn't. But then they did. And once they did, now we understand the moon with respect to us DIFFERENTLY.

Understand, because of Jesus and his resurrection, the nature of life ... and death... DIFFERENTLY.

---

<sup>6</sup> [Science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy/](https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy/)

*If you'd like to talk with someone about this message  
or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the  
pastors & elders of the church would welcome your call.*

*[revjeffwood@gmail.com](mailto:revjeffwood@gmail.com)*

*Welovefirst.org*

*facebook.com/welovefirstsebastian*