

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

Genesis 1:1-13, John 14:8-11 [MW20-37]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 04 October 2020

After a lecture on the solar system, philosopher William James was approached by a determined elderly lady with a theory. "We don't live on a ball rotating around the sun," she said. "We live on a crust of earth on the back of a giant turtle." James decided to be gentle. "If your theory is correct, madam, what does this turtle stand on?" "The first turtle stands on the back of a second, far larger, turtle, of course." "But what does this turtle stand on?" The old lady crowed triumphantly. "It's no use, Mr. James--it's turtles all the way down!"

In a sense, the answer to the question: where did God come from?

- is similar to saying: "it's turtles all the way down"!
because, in a nutshell, the answer is
- God just is

God just is

- God was, God is, and God will be
God did not "come from" anywhere
- God was there, and God has always been there

We get this from the very first words of the Bible

- "in the beginning God"
in the beginning God
- the Bible writers were so sure about this
they never sought to explain how or why God came about
- they never felt the need to 'prove' the existence of God
or that God was at work in creation
- the Bible writers started with the premise: in the beginning God
before life, the universe or anything
there was God!

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

- in order to make something, you must exist before you make it
this may not seem like a very big deal
however it is a *very big* deal: this is huge!
- only God is completely free from all limitation of time
only God is infinite
only God has no beginning and no end
- there is nothing else in the whole universe like this!

God is the great 'I am'

- I am here
I have always been here, I will always be here
because I am God
- God is not a noun, God is a verb!

So if it's not possible to get further back than: in the beginning God

- and it seems it's not
then that leaves only two choices
- either God exists
or God doesn't exist

It is important to realise that saying God exists is a statement of faith

- and saying God does *not* exist is equally a statement of faith
- faith is required to believe or not believe in the existence of God
- if someone says "prove God exists"
- the appropriate reply is "prove God doesn't"

Legend has it that a certain college philosophy professor asked one question on his final exam. He picked up a chair, put it on his desk, and wrote on the board, "Using everything we have learned this semester, prove that this chair does not exist." The students dug deep and wrote like crazy for a whole hour, some of them churning out 30 pages of heady philosophical debate and logic. But one student turned in his paper after less than a minute. Turned out he was the only one to get an "A." What did he write so quickly that turned out to be just the right answer? "What chair?"

When I was studying philosophy at university I remember getting very excited

- when told that we would be learning 'proofs for the existence of God'
- unfortunately they seemed quite complicated
- and not immediately useful in helping my non-Christian friends move closer to faith
- however I discovered these same long words very helpfully
- and clearly explained by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz
- in their book *Guide to God*
- I wish they'd been around when I was studying philosophy!

So here we go, four long words that help to 'prove' God exists ...

The Ontological Argument

- the very fact that human beings have an idea of God points to God's existence
- pursuit of or belief in the divine can be found among all peoples and tribes
- since every rational person has thought about God in some way
- we can reasonably conclude God exists
- For example:
- earth's seas have always felt the tug of the moon's gravitational field creating tides
- even if you can't see the moon or explain exactly what the moon is
- the tides show the moon's presence
- even though God can't be seen, the incredibly strong pull we feel toward God
- is an evidence of God's existence

The Cosmological Argument

- every effect must have a cause
- a four year old might really believe his muddy footprints
- just happened by themselves, but his Mum sure doesn't!
- if the universe had a beginning point, which science now also supports
- there must have been some incredibly powerful person or cause to begin it
- we believe that someone was God, the "First Cause"

The Teleological Argument

- there is order, harmony, purpose and intelligence in nature and the world
- logic suggests that an intelligent and purposeful being produced it

For example:

- if you saw a stunning mansion built on a cliff high above the ocean you would know that a master architect and skilled builders were involved
- likewise the amazing and beautiful ocean below makes a strong argument for the existence of an amazing intelligence behind it

The Moral Argument

- humans have a moral code, a built in sense of right and wrong this has been true of every people and civilisation in recorded history
- a “moral compass” could not just happen the sense of right and wrong in the heart of every person is evidence of a moral Creator

In answer to the question: “Assuming I have a good relationship with a friend who doesn’t really believe in God, how can I reason with them about the existence of God?” theologian R. C. Sproul writes:

... if something exists now, something has always existed from all eternity or there would be nothing. Somehow, somewhere, someone or something must have the power of being within himself, and that one who has the power of being within himself we call God. That’s how I would start the discussion: “How has this world come into being? How has this cup come into being? How has anything come into being?” and then focus attention there.

There was a question that really used to get us philosophy students going

- if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it, does it make a sound?

So, if people stop believing in God, does God stop existing?

- the answer is of course ... no it is not necessary for us to believe in God for God to exist
- God exists whether we believe in him or not because God isn’t just *our idea*
- God exists apart from us

And the best part about that for us mere mortals is ...

- God didn’t just make the world without being emotionally involved like, for example, a river carving out a canyon
- nor did God make things then leave like, for example, a child who makes a sand castle on the beach, then wanders off

God *loves* the world he made

- God loves us, God knows us, God will never leave us God has a great destiny for each and every one of us
- and this message of a loving, personally involved God is repeated over and over and over again in the Bible

John R. W. Stott, in his book *Basic Christianity*, puts it like this

You can never take God by surprise. You can never anticipate him. He always makes the first move. He is always there ‘in the beginning’. Before man existed, God acted. Before man stirs himself to seek God, God has sought man. In the Bible we do not see man groping after God; we see God reaching after man.

Many people visualise a God who sits comfortably on a distant throne, remote, aloof and indifferent to the needs of mortals, until, may be, they can badger him into taking action on their behalf ... the Bible reveals a God who, long before it even occurs to man to turn to him, while man is still lost in darkness and sunk in sin, takes the initiative, rises from his throne, lays aside his glory, and stoops to seek until he finds him.

It all comes down to

- 'in the beginning God ...'

Surprisingly, many people today believe the universe fell together by chance

- that there is no purpose behind it all
which would mean life is random and meaningless
- and indeed for far too many people this is just how life seems
people just so many pawns in a game without rules
cogs in a machine which is running wild

Yet the universe tells us this is not so, and tells us about God

- our most advanced scientists are only just beginning to discover
what God put there in the first place
- they are continually baffled by the way everything holds together
and runs so smoothly, for God looks after what he has made
God made a beautiful and pleasant world where life could flourish
- Jesus reminded his disciples about this
telling them God feeds the sparrows and clothes the hillsides with beauty
and so too will God take care of us

Take a radio telescope and scan the outer reaches of space

- take an electron microscope and explore the hidden world
beyond the range of sight
and everywhere you look you will find order and design
- without it science would be impossible, and life would be intolerable
but it's not like that:
the ground is solid, water is wet and the air is breathable
what is dropped falls, light shines and so on

The order, design and law we see in the world tell us that

- God is not a haphazard disorganised Creator
who either forgets what he has done or makes it up as he goes along
- we see that God is a God of purpose, with plans for what he has made

And if this is true for stars and atoms

- then it is true for the history of the world
and it is true for human beings
- it is true for me
it is true for you

All because, in the beginning, God ...