

HOLY TRINITY FORUM - Is God a Delusion?

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Preacher: Andrew Moody and Matt Scheffer

[0 : 0 0] have a supper after tonight, but first we're going to have two speakers from our church, Andrew Moody and Matt Sheffer, and they're going to give some presentations.

And what we'd like to do is actually open the floor right up, and you can ask any question you want about issues to do with, is God a delusion, or how do we know Christianity is true or not true, or you can ask the questions that your friend has asked you, or that could be your question, but you just say, I've got a friend who asked this, and we'll know it's you.

So please be relaxed tonight, and do prepare questions, write them down and get them ready. If you don't want to stand up and ask a question, you can hand it to me on a piece of paper, that's fine.

Now, really the big man at the moment is Richard Dawkins, he's getting lots of media time, he's an evolutionary biologist, he did hold a chair at Oxford University, but he's most well known for his writings in popular science, and he's a real advocate for not just evolution, but just lifting up science in kind of the public sphere.

Before, recently, his most popular book was The Blind Watchmaker, and an early book called The Selfish Gene, but his big thing recently has been The God Delusion, that everyone's been talking about it, and it's been turned into a documentary that you may have seen on SBS, I think.

[1 : 3 2] The documentary was called The Root of All Evil, question mark, and he obviously thinks religion is the root of all evil. Here are some quotes from Richard Dawkins from that documentary.

For many people, part of growing up is killing off the virus of faith, with a good strong dose of rational thinking. But if an individual doesn't succeed in shaking it off, his mind is stuck in a permanent state of infancy, and there is a real danger that he will infect the next generation.

The time has come for people of reason to say, enough is enough. Religious faith discourages independent thought. It's divisive and it's dangerous.

He doesn't mince his words, does he? He says, I want to examine that dangerous thing that's common to Judaism and Christianity as well, the process of non-thinking called faith.

Religion is about turning untested belief into unshakable truth through the power of institutions and the passage of time. And lastly, one of the great quotes I saw was, one of the things that is wrong with religion is that it teaches us to be satisfied with answers, which are not really answers at all.

[2 : 5 5] And so, part of me actually, I agree with his hunger for having good answers, and that's why we've put on this forum tonight. And we encourage you as a church to ask the hard questions that he's asking, but to do it not just reading Dawkins, but to actually be reading Christians who are taking him on, and to be not fighting an intellectual like Dawkins with a Sunday school faith, but actually be thinking in an adult way about Christian truth, and how that actually does really challenge what he's saying.

I think Richard Dawkins has moved from biology into the area of philosophy, and to be honest, friends, that's an area that's not his area of expertise.

There's one philosopher, a Christian philosopher called Alvin Plantinga, who, in a review of *The God Delusion*, on a website called ChristianityToday.com, and we'll link that from the Holy Trinity website, but he reviews the book in a scathing way and just says, as a philosopher, Richard Dawkins is an excellent biologist, but as a philosopher, he would fail a first-year university subject.

Now, Richard Dawkins is not a lone friend. There seems to be a whole wave of them at the moment, of really aggressive or even almost militant atheists, writing books and denouncing Christianity or religion.

There's guys like Sam Harris, another guy called Christopher Hitchens, who wrote a book called *God is Not Great, How Religion Poisons Everything*. So that's not holding back there.

[4 : 37] In fact, Christopher Hitchens, I have to put this link on our website as well, but he had a great debate with a Christian called Douglas Wilson, and they really had it out on this website, and I think Douglas Wilson just won hands down and really exposed it.

Christopher Hitchens didn't like God at all, and this is one thing Douglas Wilson said about having done the debate. He said, there are two fundamental tenets of true atheism.

This is half a joke. There are two tenets. One is, there is no God, and the second tenet is, I hate him. We need to ask the question, what is it in Dawkins and Hitchens and Harris and these really full-on atheists that have made them so kind of anti-God, what is it that's driven them to this?

I'm personally a bit cynical and a bit sceptical of Richard Dawkins, the superhero, who's going to rescue the unwashed masses from the dangers of religion.

I don't really feel like I need a hero to rescue me from that. I think I've got a brain, and I can weigh things up myself. It's kind of interesting that these people do end up, in a way, fulfilling what the Bible says about human beings living in rebellion and hatred against God.

[6 : 02] And yet, friends, I want to say, I love Dawkins, and I love these guys, because as a Christian, I think it's a great opportunity for us to speak up for the truth about Jesus in an unashamed and unafraid way.

And, you know, good luck to Richard Dawkins for really putting these issues on the table and saying, is Christianity true? That's a question I want everyone in Australia to ask.

Is Christianity true? And I want them to check it out, check out the evidence. If I had to invite to a dinner party either Paul Hogan or Richard Dawkins, Paul Hogan is the kind of thorough prawn on the Barbie secular Aussie who says stuff like, me and God are mates.

Whereas Richard Dawkins is actually more honest about the fact, I think, that he doesn't like God. He hates God. And I think at least there's honesty in Dawkins' position rather than the affluent Australian who lives rebelling against God but actually pretending that they're friends with God while they're doing it.

I respect Richard Dawkins for his honesty. But I think he does get some things wrong, and here's another great quote from Richard Dawkins which I really think shows he doesn't quite understand where Christians are coming from.

[7 : 25] He says, he's talking about how he thinks religion is just passed on from parents to children. And he says, If you ask people why they are convinced of the truth of their religion, they don't appeal to heredity.

And he thinks religion's hereditary. Put it like that, and it sounds too obviously stupid, says Dawkins. Nor do they appeal to evidence. There isn't any. And nowadays, the better educated admit it.

No, they appeal to faith. Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, and even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.

The worst thing is that the rest of us are supposed to respect it and treat it with kid gloves. Well, I think that quote shows that Dawkins has totally misunderstood what Christian faith is.

Because Christian faith embraces the evidence for who Jesus was, as a historical figure, and for the historical event of his resurrection.

[8 : 32] We celebrate the historical pointers toward that, and ask people to check out that evidence. And it wouldn't be really having faith if you were believing in Jesus apart from that evidence.

Tonight, I'd like people to engage and ask some tough questions, but also let me put out the challenge for you to be thinking about who is Jesus, and was he real, and did he rise from the dead?

Tonight, I'm not here, and our speakers aren't here to actually defend all religions. We're here as Christians, as followers of Jesus, and we believe that he died and rose again and lives today.

And in fact, I think once you've looked at Jesus, it actually becomes impossible to kind of become a vague defender of all religion. Jesus changes everything. Now, just a couple of things by way of plugs.

Let me plug two events that are coming up. One is a course that I'm running, that our church is running, called Introducing God.

[9 : 39] It's on six Saturday mornings from August the 4th. It only goes for about 90 minutes. We have morning tea together, and we watch basically a multimedia presentation about who Jesus was, and then there's time for discussion and asking questions.

And that's a great course for someone to actually become literate about who Jesus was and what the Bible's on about. I think there are many people around, friends, who think they know what Christianity is, but they don't actually have an adult knowledge of Christianity.

They've kind of got a warped, vague experience they had in their childhood, which they've then kind of twisted into something that's actually not biblical Christianity. So this is a great course to do. And also, by running a course like this, we want to send the message that you can't actually find the truth on your own, I don't think.

You can't just Google everything. You actually need to do it with other people and bounce ideas of other people and engage with other people and journey with other people and drink lots of coffee. So that's Introducing God, and there are postcards for that on the little resource table out there.

And the second plug I'd like to do before we have our speakers is our second speaker, Matt, is actually debating an atheist next Tuesday night at Monash University.

[10 : 59] And the topic is, is religion a delusion? And he's debating someone called Dr. John Perkins, who is a member of, I just was reading about him today, he's a member of the Humanist Society of Victoria, the Rationalist Society of Australia, he's a public relations team member of the Atheist Foundation of Australia, and he's a founding member and president of the Secular Party of Australia.

So I didn't even know there was that many clubs, but he's in them all, and he's debating our mat, and that's at the Monash Uni Clayton Campus banquet room next Tuesday night, and that'll be a great event.

And we'll put the information about it on the Holy Trinity website, so if you Google us as a church, sometime by tomorrow we'll have the links to that debate, as well as we'll probably have an MP3 of tonight's meeting as well.

So let me encourage you to be thinking about questions to ask after the talks, and I'll invite up Andrew Moody to share with us. Thank you. Thanks, Wayne.

Well, the great problem, of course, in responding to Richard Dawkins is where to begin. Richard Dawkins covers such a wide range of topics and attacks on so many fronts that the reader or the apologist who's trying to respond to him is deluged with arguments.

[12 : 34] Is it more important to address Dawkins' comments about the Old Testament law codes or his idea that God is like a tooth fairy? Is it more important to join in his condemnation of the church's past crimes or question his protests that atheists would never do the same?

Do we call attention to his biased definition of faith, as Wayne has reminded us, or try to correct his woeful ignorance of how the New Testament has been transmitted to us?

To some degree, mercifully, the advertised topic tonight narrows things down. Is God a delusion? That's the question before us, and so I want to focus fairly narrowly on that question, and briefly, if possible.

If there are other burning questions that people feel we need to address, it'd be good to talk about those two in the question time. So is God a delusion?

Richard Dawkins knows that if he wants to convince us that God is a delusion, he has two big problems on his hands. Firstly, why is there anything at all?

[13 : 49] Why is there a universe? What holds it together? What keeps it working? Secondly, why is the universe so brilliantly fine-tuned for life?

It's well known and has been for a number of decades now amongst cosmologists that if things were even slightly different with the universe, we wouldn't be here tonight.

If there had not been an inexplicable but tiny imbalance in the amount of matter and antimatter at the Big Bang, the whole thing would have annihilated itself.

If the rate of expansion had been smaller by even one part in 100,000 million, the universe would have re-collapsed before reaching its present size.

If the fundamental forces had been just a fraction off, there would be no stars or no planets, or no heavy elements, or no hydrogen, and so on. As famed British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle put it, a common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with the physics.

[15 : 03] Now for the Christian, of course, the explanation for all this is God. God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. God is the one who planned the whole thing so it would support life.

But Richard Dawkins doesn't think much of this argument. After all, doesn't this just leave us with an even more complicated thing to explain? Namely, God.

A better explanation, Dawkins suggests, would be the multiple universe theory, or the multiverse theory. If it's too hard to believe that our universe just fluked a perfect set of laws to produce life, then maybe there are a lot of universes, maybe even an infinity of them butting off each other or foaming away like bubbles in a meta-universe or a mega-multiverse.

If each universe gets another chance to set its own laws and properties, then of course it's inevitable that sooner or later there will be life. Indeed, everything that can happen will happen.

As Dawkins writes, in some of these universes, I'm already dead. In a small minority of them, you have a green moustache. The strange thing to note, and the interesting thing to note about this of course, is that it's not actually an alternative to God.

[16 : 27] If we use this theory of many universes to explain where our universe and its laws come from, we've simply achieved this by pushing the question back one step. Where do the laws come from that allow the production of all these universes?

What's the source of the limitless energy required to produce all these worlds? In many ways, the multiverse theory leaves us with the same questions we had when we were thinking about our own universe, except now we've got a zillion universes to explain.

How is this any simpler than believing in God? Another criticism that can be made of the multiple universe theory is that it can be used to prove or disprove anything.

Imagine that you're having a frank discussion with one of your Christian friends after the event tonight. You say, God has simply not given me enough evidence to believe in him. In fact, the only way I could believe in God is if he gave me irrefutable proof.

say if he made a statue of the Virgin Mary, wave at me. And yet, as you're driving home, past the Catholic Church, you look out your window, and there up on the rooftop is the Madonna, flapping her arms like mad.

[17 : 50] For a moment, you're dumbstruck, flabbergasted, ready to repent. But then it hits you. There is a small but finite chance that this could happen naturally.

In fact, Richard Dawkins writes about it in the very final pages of *The God Delusion*. A statue of Madonna could wave its hands at us. The atoms that make up its crystalline structure are all vibrating back and forth, and the jiggling atoms could just happen to move in the same direction at the same time, and again, and again, and we'd see it waving at us.

It could happen, but the odds against it are so great that if you had set out writing the number at the origin of the universe, you would still not have written enough zeros to this day.

But of course, if there are enough universes, this impossibly unlikely event will happen sooner or later. In fact, if there are infinite universes, it will happen infinite times, and yes, in some of them, the statue will coincidentally wave at you just after you have listed this as the only evidence that would make you believe in God.

What a lark! You chuckle as Madonna finishes her routine. The multiple universe theory must be true after all. I would like to suggest the only reason why anybody would use an argument like this is if there were no other way to avoid an obvious conclusion that we didn't want to accept.

[19 : 26] There is no evidence for any of these other worlds, no experiment capable of testing their existence. The only reason for imagining them is that their existence produces an unconquerable agnosticism which can inoculate us against any evidence that we desperately want to avoid.

Richard Dawkins' readiness to use this argument, I think, actually testifies to the strength of the case for God. But wait, Dawkins responds, even if the multiverse theory has almost nothing going for it, how is the idea of God, specifically the Christian God, any better?

Isn't it easier to imagine an impersonal force than a conscious personal being who designs and judges and listens to prayers? Or, if we have to imagine a first cause, mustn't it be something simple that builds itself up to something more complex as it goes along?

Now, this your God is too complex point is very important to Dawkins. In fact, you could argue that it's his major argument, again, against God.

On page 157, he boasts that it is an un rebuttable refutation of the existence of God. But there's also something fundamentally illogical about it.

[20 : 52] The idea that things must be simple and become more complex might make sense if you're talking about things being randomly assembled from existing parts. But, of course, God, by definition, is not like that.

God is self-existent and uncaused. So why does he need to start off simple or sub-personal? To try to use evolutionary models, as Dawkins does, to talk about something that's uncaused and eternal, is a fundamental category mistake, and a rather obvious one at that.

another problem with this simple or impersonal God that Dawkins prefers is whether a God like that could ever adequately account for the way human existence is.

If that which produces us is blind and impersonal, how do we provide a satisfactory example of the higher aspects of human nature? What about love or beauty or friendship or consciousness or art or morality or humour?

For the atheist or pantheist, these things are either anomalies or evolutionary tricks to make us better at reproducing and caring for our young.

[22 : 05] You've probably heard the kind of interpretation I'm talking about. Art and music are some kind of herd bonding activity or a way for males to improve their fitness.

Altruism and compassion are really a misfiring of our evolutionary instinct to care for our young. Free will is an illusion. Consciousness is an enigma. Beauty is either about sex or food or nothing.

But notice what's happening here. This worldview ends up turning everything that is most important to humans into banality, explaining it away.

It's like a lunatic alchemy devoted to turning gold and silver into base metals. Nobody actually believes this in practical everyday life. even Dawkins doesn't believe it.

In a speech given late in 2005 at Oxford, Dawkins delivered what was clearly an early draft of his final chapter of the God delusion. He said, most scientists today subscribe to a mechanistic view of the mind in which we are the way we are because of our neuroanatomy and our physiological chemistry.

[23 : 16] But we scientists are inconsistent. If we were consistent, our response to a misbehaving person like a murderer would be, this unit has a faulty component.

It needs repairing. But that's not what we say. What we say is, vile monster, prison is too good for you. In short, when we are thinking like academics, we regard people as elaborate and complicated machines like computers or cars.

But when we revert to being human, we behave more like Basil Fawlty who, you remember, thrashed his car to teach it a lesson when it wouldn't start. Please notice the self-conscious contradiction here.

We scientists are inconsistent when we attribute blame to people. When we think like academics, we regard people as complicated machines. But when we revert to being human, we want to hold them accountable.

I think this is a real giveaway. Dawkins' materialistic, atheistic science turns people into machines. The only way to avoid this is to suspend our intellectual conclusions and revert to being human.

[24 : 27] And notice how Dawkins is inconsistent even when he is trying to write as a scientist. If we were consistent, he writes, our response to a murderer would be, this person has a faulty component. But where does Dawkins get the idea that murderers or any other malefactor, they're broken.

By his own reasoning, there have to be good evolutionary explanations for all kinds of human behaviour. Where do we get this idea that having respect for other human beings is the correct way for humans to behave?

My point here is that scientific atheism, or indeed any impersonal view of reality, turns out to be very bad at explaining everything that is most important to human beings.

Dawkins famously comments that evolution made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist. Yet it's patently clear here that his scientific atheism makes it impossible for him to be an intellectually fulfilled human being.

But the very opposite is true of Christianity, I want to argue as I conclude now. The God who's revealed in Jesus Christ gives us wonderful explanations for all these things.

[25 : 44] love makes sense.

Love makes sense. Love is not simply a cipher for sex drive or herd instinct, but the realest thing in the universe. Because God has given us a world as a gift or as a trust, we are right to feel that it's wonderful as Dawkins does and value it and acknowledge that it's precious and should be preserved.

The feelings we have about the world, in other words, correspond to something true and real in the created order, real qualities. Because we're more than animals, more than machines, we are right to insist that people should be held accountable for their actions.

Evil should be condemned and punished. Goodness should be praised and celebrated because there is an objective standard, a real standard.

Even Richard Dawkins is right to criticise religious hypocrisy, though his own ideology gives him no basis for doing so. Dawkins claim that the personhood and moral nature of the Christian God makes it hard for us to believe in him.

[27 : 08] I want to argue that the opposite is true. That putting personhood and love and morality at the centre of the universe validates everything that we know intuitively to be true about life and the world.

Is God a delusion? I don't think Richard Dawkins gives us good reasons to believe so. If we try to account for the world and its qualities apart from God, we simply end up making things more complicated or resorting to bizarre fantasies.

If we try to account for human experience apart from God, we end up trivialising or ignoring all that is most important in human existence. God is a better explanation for the world and provides a more persuasive framework for understanding life as it actually is.

No, God is not a delusion. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thanks, Andrew.

You reminded me of something I heard one Christian writer say when he was in this debate with an atheist who was pretty much pinned on that point of if everything is sort of in effect random and without a moral basis or a meaning to it, he was in this debate saying this, he was saying if you take a bottle of Pepsi and a bottle of Coke and shake them up, like if we're just a sack of random chemicals in a random kind of universe and you shake up the Pepsi and the Coke and put them on the table, you can't call it a debate.

[28 : 45] It's just fizzing. And atheists, you know, argue and have these debates but in their worldview it's just fizzing. And in our worldview it's actually something relational and engaging.

So, friends, I hope you're fizzing with questions that come up but let me introduce Matt Sheffer. Thank you, Matt. Thanks, Wayne.

Thanks, Andrew. I'm just getting it myself set up here and so talk amongst yourselves if you want. Just a quick plug too.

So, I go to this church. I'm a Christian. I like to talk to other people about the Christian faith. So, for me tonight, this kind of discussion, well, it's really a home game.

Next week I'm going to play an away game for the team, so to speak. And I'm going to be at a university debating a real live atheist on whether or not God exists, etc.

[29 : 48] So, I'll plug that again. And it's great to see everyone here tonight and that we can talk about it. Now, the resurrection of Jesus is the event which the entire Christian worldview rests on.

It was the content of the early church's message and their preaching, and it's still the content today of the Christian message and Christian preaching. The message of salvation through faith in Christ is only meaningful and true if Jesus rose from the dead.

Put simply, no resurrection, no Christianity. Now, the God delusion puts forward some pretty seemingly strong arguments to disprove the God of the Bible.

Richard Dawkins tries to tackle the classic arguments against the existence of God like the morality argument and causality, etc.

But what Richard Dawkins fails to do in his book, in his lectures, and in his TV program is really respond to or refute the resurrection of Jesus.

[31 : 09] He doesn't even go there. He doesn't tackle it head on like he does with zeal for other arguments or he doesn't offer an alternative that fits within his materialistic, atheistic understanding of the world.

He doesn't go to the Middle East and dig up the corpse of Jesus because if Jesus was not raised from the dead, if his corpse is still in the tomb, then Richard Dawkins, all he needs to do to kill Christianity off for good is produce the body of Jesus.

But he doesn't. And my question is why? Because the implications of the resurrection are huge. For the Christian, well, if the resurrection didn't happen, then all of this is a waste of time.

In that respect, Dawkins is right. We are deluded. God, the resurrection validates Jesus' message to be God and not only be God but demand a particular response from humanity.

And if he didn't rise again from the dead, then his words are pretty empty. Then he's got no right or authority to tell us to obey him at all. In fact, if this life is all there is, then let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[32 : 36] For the atheist, however, if the resurrection, if it did happen in human history, if it was a true event, if it really did happen, then the Bible's message about Jesus is vindicated.

Not only does God exist, but he rules the world he made and he will hold each of us accountable for how we live. To use the apostle Paul's words to the Greek philosophers in Athens, in Acts chapter 17, he says that God will judge the world with justice and he's given proof of this to all men by raising Jesus from the dead.

So the question really is, in this topic of is God a delusion, is the resurrection a delusion? Is it history or is it a hoax?

Really important question to ask and tonight I want to look at that. Now Bertrand Russell is a famous atheist and he wrote a lecture, turned it into a book called Why I Am Not a Christian.

It's a famous piece of atheistic literature. And in it he says that the existence of Jesus is doubtful. That's his kind of opening premise and from that stems a whole lecture on why God doesn't exist because he starts by saying the existence of Jesus is doubtful.

[34 : 04] Now Bertrand Russell might have been a great writer, he might have been very good with logic, but Russell was not very good at history because a brief look at history actually tells us something different, that the existence of Jesus is, it's not doubtful that it is, it's actually reasonable and justifiable to conclude Jesus existed based on evidence.

What evidence? Looking into history involves looking into historical accounts. From the first century, the Roman historian Tacitus, a guy called Cornelius Tacitus, he was a Roman, he was not a Christian or in favour of the Christian message or Christian movement, but he mentions in his accounts the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate, who he says was the governor of Judea, and that Jesus' followers began a deadly superstition.

Scholars say that that's a reference to the resurrection, he's not going to come out and say Jesus rose from the dead, he just says it's a deadly superstition. Another Roman historian, Suetonius, from the early second century, he also refers to the claim that Jesus was known by some Jews as the Jewish Messiah or the Christ.

Pliny, the younger, an early second century Roman governor, he writes about Christians and their weekly practice of worshipping and singing hymns to Christ, the Jesus, as to a God.

So that's Roman sources. Remember, these guys are not in favour of promoting the Christian faith at all, but they do mention specific historic details, which we can cross-reference with other sources.

[35 : 55] So that's sort of the Roman historic sources contemporary to the first century. Now, outside of Roman sources, if we look at Jewish historic sources and accounts, probably the most famous is Flavius Josephus.

Josephus, he was a Jew, but he was a historian for the occupying Romans, and he recounts that Jesus was known as a wise teacher, he was reported to be a healer, he writes that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and that his followers reported that Jesus had been seen three days after his crucifixion.

Again, these authors are not biased in favour of the Christian faith, but they mention historic details which we can cross-reference with the sources closest to Jesus, the New Testament documents.

So, why believe that the New Testament documents are contemporary corroborating evidence for Jesus?

Well, historically speaking, the Gospels were all written within living memory of Jesus, within sort of three to four decades of the actual events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

[37 : 24] So, there were people alive who witnessed what happened, Jesus' crucifixion or whether or not, and they could have gone around telling people that it wasn't true. If there were any facts that didn't actually happen, well, there were people alive who could have verified or set the record straight.

So, it's one reason to believe that the New Testament Gospels actually tell the truth. Another reason is that two of the Gospels were written by direct eyewitnesses to the events.

The other two, Mark and Luke, were written by those who were in touch with or in direct contact with eyewitnesses. So, there's very close connection to the actual events.

Evidence that is acceptable in a court of law is evidence that can be verified by two or more witnesses. And in the case of the death and resurrection of Jesus, well, we have more than two witnesses.

We actually have four. And if you read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul, the Apostle Paul writes, he actually lists a whole number of people. At one stage, he says over 500 people saw Jesus risen from the dead.

[38 : 33] The Gospels mention historical people and places, historic details, items of clothing and customs, which we can cross-reference with other sort of historic sources outside the Bible to other writers like Tacitus and Josephus.

The point of saying that is that when I come to the New Testament, I know that I can put it on a different shelf to say Harry Potter. Harry Potter is a fictional book, fictional characters.

It didn't happen in human space and time. But when I come to the New Testament accounts, there is good reason to believe that it's not a work of fiction, that it's an historical narrative.

So Bertrand Russell, famous atheist, he proposes that the existence of Jesus is doubtful and you can't know anything about first century history. But when we actually look at some of the historic sources that Russell doesn't really look at, we find a different story.

We can actually have confidence Jesus was a real person, that his crucifixion was a real event. Now we look at the resurrection. So we've seen contemporary corroborating evidence for Jesus' existence, his crucifixion.

[39 : 50] Now let's look at some of the arguments against Jesus being risen from the dead, or why his tomb was empty, reported to be empty on the third day. So one argument that is put forward by atheists like Russell and Richard Dawkins is that Jesus didn't really die on the cross.

He just kind of faked it, and he's kind of asleep in the tomb, and the third day he kind of woke up, and it's all fake. Jesus put on a show. I don't think that argument holds any weight.

I don't think that that argument really has looked at the efficiency of a Roman crucifixion. Jesus' crucifixion was carried out by trained Roman soldiers.

These guys knew how to kill people, and they enjoyed it too. So the design of death by crucifixion is to asphyxiate the victim.

They don't just die from blood loss, but they die because the whole body weight presses on their lungs when they're strung up on a cross, and it's a slow, torturous death.

[40 : 58] These guys detailed every little thing that needs to take place in order for a person to suffer and to ultimately make sure that they die. The Romans had the motivation to do it too.

They were Roman soldiers. They were given an order to put a criminal to death. That was the order. And in the military, you obey your senior officers. So these guys were carrying out legitimate orders.

They were capable of doing it too. Jesus didn't put up a resistance. Jesus went willingly to death on a cross. And the other thing is that if Jesus had to have tried to escape it, in the ancient culture, if you were in charge of a prisoner and they escaped, especially if they were on charge of death row, then you would be their substitute.

That's how seriously it was taken to let a criminal go. So Jesus was well known for drawing crowds in the synagogues as well as marketplaces and streets. He was under an order by Pontius Pilate to be crucified.

They had every reason, motivation, capability, the know-how to put someone to death, death on a cross. So I don't think that the argument that Jesus just kind of faked it really holds any weight.

[42 : 23] Another argument is, was the tomb even empty? Did the people who went there kind of see a dead body and then just kind of maybe dump it somewhere and fake it? Or did they just, did they steal the body?

Those are good questions to look at. Reading from 1 Corinthians 15, if you have a Bible you can read it, in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, that he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve, after that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep and that's the way of saying died.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also as one abnormally born. Paul has this whole list of people who can verify seeing and touching Jesus risen from the dead.

I don't think that the argument that they went into a tomb and Jesus was there really makes sense when you think that all of the apostles, except for Judas, he killed himself the night Jesus was betrayed, but all of the apostles went to their death, went to a martyr's death for their conviction that they'd seen Jesus risen from the dead.

They didn't have anything to gain or profit from a resurrection myth. they were treated with contempt, they were persecuted for it, and they all went to their death proclaiming what they'd seen and heard.

[44 : 14] People might die for something, well, that might get them a bit of fame. People might die for something that they don't know is a lie. But how many people would willingly, knowingly die for a lie?

That's a question you've got to ask when you look at the resurrection. So plenty of people saw him raised from the dead. The witnesses were willing to go to their deaths rather than deny that the tomb wasn't empty.

These are the kinds of questions that come out of looking at the Gospels, not even as a believer, not even believing the Bible is the Word of God, even just looking at it from a historical perspective.

A really good question to ask is how can we know that these events took place? And then what is the basis for testing the historical claims that Christianity makes?

Richard Dawkins in his book, *The God Delusion*, doesn't address any of these questions at all. He doesn't provide any alternative. It's just something that's swept under the rug. Why is that?

[45 : 32] Well, maybe one of the reasons is, I don't want to put words in the guy's mouth, but maybe one of the reasons is that if the resurrection is true, so if the disciples saw an empty tomb and it vindicates Jesus' message to not only be God, the author of life, it also vindicates Jesus' message to be judge.

The God of the Bible is like a king over his universe and he promises to hold everyone accountable for how they live. Now that's great when we think of examples of moral evil in the world, when people have harmed us or when we've been robbed or cheated or we've been lied to.

That's a small personal example, but we think on a cosmic scale of like a national disaster or when there's a war or something like that, when there's real objective moral evil, it's good to have a God who's going to hold everyone accountable because it means that the perpetrators of evil don't get away with it.

So at one level it's good, but at another level when we think more closely at a home, we've actually been the ones who have perpetrated moral evil against other people.

When we've lied or we've held the truth from someone, when we have sought our own personal gain at the expense of someone else, when we have cheated someone else, when we have committed a moral act of evil, then the idea of God being our judge is a little bit scary because it means we will meet our maker face to face when we die and he will give us what we deserve.

[47 : 13] So at one level, maybe the reason that militant atheism doesn't deal with the resurrection, doesn't try to disprove it or refute it or come up with the corpse of Jesus if he really didn't rise again from the dead, maybe it's not so much an intellectual argument, maybe it's more a matter of the heart, maybe it's a matter of the will, that if Jesus really is vindicated by his resurrection to be God and judge, maybe people just don't want to answer to him as judge.

and isn't that more of a delusion than Christians who are willing to investigate history and wake up to the fact that humans don't have the capacity or the ability to solve the world's problems and instead we need to turn to Jesus whom God has raised from the dead.

I just want to finish by just briefly telling the story of one guy and I've got a quote from how the God of the Bible changed his life but the guy began his life an opponent of the Christian message.

He didn't want a bar of it, hated Christians, hated the Christian message, was totally against it. He got a kick out of finding Christians and going house to house to where Christians live and dragging them out of their house and beating them up and handing them into the religious authorities.

I mean this guy was so passionately against the Christian message. But then the risen Jesus revealed himself to this guy and turned his life around.

[48 : 54] The guy was confronted with the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. The guy went on to not only go and tell other people about Jesus but Jesus changed his life from hating Christians to actually converting other people and planting churches the guy actually wrote most of the New Testament.

And just one story that I want to finish with. The guy actually shares about what his life has been since he encountered the risen Jesus and the difference that that has made.

And maybe one day militant atheists, writers like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, people said, maybe if they do some investigation into history, maybe if they deal with the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and all the huge implications that comes with, maybe one day this might be their words too.

And I just want to read the Apostle Paul's words at the end of the book of Romans. Now this guy was not a Christian, he was an opponent of the Christian message. He encountered the risen Jesus and this is what he says, Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out.

Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

[50 : 33] To him be the glory forever. Amen. Amen. Thanks Matt.

And if I can just give a plug to some great books. There's a historian, Australian historian called Paul Barnett. We've got some of his books for sale on the store out there and they will really outline in back and wide and the evidence that Matt's, some of it Matt pointed out and that great historical evidence for the truth of Jesus.

Jesus and his resurrection which I think you have to grapple with if you're grappling with these questions and it really is the elephant in the atheist living room that they're drinking their tea and just ignoring.

Now let's open up now and have some questions. Please ask any questions you like. You can come back to the guys about the things they've shared or you may have a Dawkins-ish kind of question on a topic that we haven't touched on and if you two guys could just come and stand up here and they or we will do our best to give an answer or see how we go.

Are there any comments or questions people want to share? Yes, Lynn? I'm just going to read something that C.S.

[51 : 55] Lewis wrote about his atheism before he became a Christian. C.S. Lewis says, my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust.

But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?

If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such a violent reaction against it? Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist, in other words that the whole of reality was senseless, I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality, namely my idea of justice, was full of sense.

I really agree that you can be moral as an atheist. But I would say that that sense of morality comes from God and that God explains where that sense of morality comes from.

Even the protestations that you've made and that C.S. Lewis did make and Dawkins still makes about God's kind of injustices reflect that kind of God given sense of right and wrong which is very hard to explain I think adequately at least if you don't believe in God, if you don't believe there's a right way for things to be.

[53 : 26] Yes. Yes, it would be something quite other, wouldn't it? I don't think it would be the same as what we think of when we think of morality.

And I think Dawkins makes that point too. He calls it misfirings of our genetic self-preservation temptation or at one moment he calls it blessed Darwinian mistakes.

Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it. On your way, if, well, yeah, here's a free offer. I'd like to buy you a book. On your way out, pick whatever book you want, it's yours, I bought it for you.

So, free gifts. I can only do it for one, I'm sorry, I can't buy everyone a book, but I just want to follow up just on the point about the implication of the resurrection in that no other poet or philosopher or speaker or lecturer or scientist has ever conquered death the way that the New Testament documents recount Jesus' resurrection.

And I think that is important because everyone in this room, everyone in the world, regardless of our theistic position, is going to end up in the grave one day.

[54 : 49] You only need to read the obituaries in the back of the newspaper every day, there's hundreds of them, and you think one day there's going to be one of those with my name on it.

And the death death is a reality of life. Jesus, however, promises to conquer death.

And they're not just empty words. Jesus' words about death have got authority, unique authority, because he demonstrated his own power over death. And I think no one else has done that, and so I think it's worth investigating because the words of Karl Marx and Bertrand Russell and Richard Dawkins are just kind of empty human words.

Yeah. Well, the question, because I think this is being taped, so the question was, why can't I just live and die, and why do I have to believe in eternal life?

And it's a good question. Yeah. I didn't start off by saying that God exists.

[56 : 06] I began my presentation by asking the question, is it reasonable to believe that Jesus Christ existed? And then I asked the question, is it reasonable to believe that Jesus was killed?

And then I want to ask the question, is it reasonable to believe that the man walked out of his tomb alive again? And so, the reason that I'm trying to answer a question like this is because if God does not exist, and this life is all there is, then I would like for you to explain by your presuppositions and your reasoning alone, how did that, why, how was that tomb empty?

Was it or wasn't it? how do you explain the resurrection of Jesus? I do have a follow-up sort of comment or response to what you're saying, and I think you're making, you know, it's great that you're making these comments and I want Andy to have the floor as well, so I would like to answer, but Andy, if you thought of a response, you would like to make a response?

I guess the question is whether your view of what will happen to you is true or not. If what you're thinking is true, that you will die like a flower, then you can believe what you want, and if you're happy about it, that's great, you know, there's no problem.

But if you're wrong, then there's a lot at stake, isn't there? I'll just chuck in something.

[57 : 48] I come back to Matt, the hard part is that only one person's ever come back according to Matt's evidence, so I'd be listening to him, because I've lost people too, but we don't know unless God shows us, and I think he has shown us in Jesus, and so it's worth looking at Jesus, see whether you think he's on the money on that, or whether you think Jesus is either confused himself, or whether he's lying about it, or whether he's true in what he says about life after death, but it's one of those three, yeah.

I'll just state the question, so Elizabeth has raised the matter, then you don't have to, you're welcome to, but this is one of the core issues, that the atheists are very helpful, really, I just thank God for them for this, because they show clearly that if you don't believe in God, well, they say the world is in effect random, and it's very hard then to conclude that there's a moral basis to the universe, and if you throw hot coffee in my face, that's just atoms to the atheist, and you can't get offended by it, but as a Christian who believes in God on a moral basis, that's the grounds for which you'll be offended when a coffee is thrown in my face.

Oh, no, I'm not saying that because it's part of the Christian worldview that God's moral order is in the universe, and so anyone can have access to it, even Richard Dawkins, even you and me, can be moral and good, it's God's world, but God at some point should get the credit, and we're accountable to him for it.

Yeah, that's right, and it's really not, I'm not trying to draw a line around Christians having all the goodness, but it's the people like Dawkins saying there is no moral basis to the universe, and we're trying to say, well, you know, we don't like where you're going with that, the way people will treat each other, if you go with that outlook, that's a bit scary.

In the process of tonight's talk, I was reading a book, Can Man Live Without God by Ravi Zacharias. Ravi Zacharias is a great Christian speaker, and just sort of quotes come to mind where he's in a university and he was talking about his God of delusion with some university students and someone got up and sort of made the point, well, why can't I just have my own moral code, and you can have your Christian one, but if I still live a good life, why can't I just do that?

[60 : 26] And Ravi made the point of saying, well, you can, and if there is no God and no sort of ultimate determiner of right and wrong, if there is no moral law giver, well, then that's fine for you to live a good life, but I prefer to go and beat up, you know, old ladies or steal ice cream from little kids, or you're hard pressed in a world where there is no God and ultimate moral law giver, you're hard pressed to tell me that I am wrong for my lifestyle choice.

And that's sort of the quote that Ravi said, and I'm sort of relaying what he was saying, and I think that's hard to work out what good means, I think, if you're not a Christian or you don't believe in some kind of order.

Yeah, sorry. Yeah. Yes, but why is it good not to hurt people? Ah, so it's what you feel.

But what if I feel that it's good to hurt people? No, but lots of people do, obviously. There are lots of people who do like hurting people. That's right.

Well, they might be, but that wouldn't disprove the point, I don't think. The point is that if you rely on what you feel, if that's what good means, then it can mean a whole lot of different things.

[62 : 12] Some of them are very objectionable to most of us, I think. Yep, I'll just repeat the question. That's a good question. What happens if someone comes up with an evolutionary explanation for morality?

I think they do try to do that. Christopher Hitchens tries to do that, says morals are evolving and we're developing them. Yeah, but do you guys want to come to that?

Yeah, Richard Dawkins does too. He says that it's altruism, for example. You see children suffering in Africa. There's no good reason for you to feel sorry for them.

The reason why you feel sorry for them is because your evolutionary background tells you that when you see children suffering they probably belong to your herd, so you'll be passing on your genetic material through them indirectly or indirectly.

So there's a good reason to feel sorry for them according to the way our background is formed. So he says that's what morality is. It's a kind of misfiring of our evolutionary makeup.

[63 : 23] What's that? Well, I'm saying what Dawkins says. He then says that it's really good to do that, but I don't think he ever justifies that step that he makes to say, like I said before, he says this is where it comes from.

Then he says, but they're blessed, precious mistakes. Blessed is a very strange word for Dawkins to use at that moment, I must say. I know we're all blessed whether we're Christians or not, I think that's right.

I don't think he provides a rationale for making that leap and then saying, but it's good to be mistaken in this way. Yes, I think what's happening there is that Singer and others use game theory to turn self-interest into a, they make morality a cipher for self-interest.

Naturalistic fallacy. Why, why, I, there's a, you've given me a historical background for where the feelings come from. You've given me subjective feeling. I'm not sure where there's ought in that.

Well, ought is what morality is about, I think. I think, yeah, I think we're all agreeing that morality predates Jesus and that it's something very fundamental. I don't think anybody would say it's just there, it's been given.

[64 : 51] I think, I think we'd say that it's there because God has designed the world to be a certain way and I was going to say because God has, God himself has a character of being other person centred.

So it's right for us to be other person centred and to be self-sacrificial and be kind and generous. this might be something to talk about after, I reckon.

Yeah, I was probably a bit vague about that. I think the point I was trying to make was that no one deliberately dies for something they know isn't true or someone doesn't willingly die for something they know isn't true.

Okay, yeah. Yeah, that's helpful. So then why, but I don't think you can separate the because the reason that they went to their deaths was because of their proclamation of the resurrection.

They were not willing to surrender that. That was unique. So I think, yes, you do have a unique historical event to which they were eyewitnesses to. Hmm. Hmm.

[66 : 13] Hmm. Sure. Anyone else want to say? I was just going to say, I can't think of too many examples of where you have people dying for something that they should have good reason to know is false.

So, you know, it's one thing to die for something which is kind of fairly abstract or in the past. It would make sense, for example, for Christians to die for a false resurrection today, perhaps.

But if they're within the lifetime of Jesus, and there's all these letters and oral histories and then books coming out saying, you know, Jesus appeared to all these people, and we say, well, we know that's not really true.

We know that's an inflated claim. It's hard to then imagine why people would be dying for that. And can I just add to that comment? That's helpful. And I guess I probably didn't back it up or explain it in the sense that these people who went willingly and boldly to their deaths proclaiming the resurrection were people who, on the night Jesus was betrayed and handed over, fled.

They didn't stick around when the going got tough. Jesus told his disciples before he died, he said, people will hate you because of me and they will kill you.

[67 : 30] Now, that's not a really cool way if you want to start a new movement. It's not a way to attract a lot of attention. If you say, hey, guys, guess what? Lifetime of poverty, getting killed right here. Who's signing up? Okay, so, and these disciples, the night he was betrayed, they, in effect, stood back and they ran away and they were scared.

They were found after Jesus' crucifixion. They were in a room, scared, huddling. Now, if the Romans treated Jesus like that, imagine what they're going to do to his followers.

They had every reason to be scared that they would be found out. Paul hadn't been converted yet. He was still out on the loose finding Christians, beating them up. They didn't have the boldness and the confidence.

The night of the crucifixion, the disciples are weak and they fight amongst one another and they think they're better than one another. And you look at that and you think, how is anyone going to do anything to start a worldwide movement with this bunch of guys?

Yet after the resurrection, they are unified, they are other person centred, they are loving, they go gladly to their deaths proclaiming the resurrection.

[68 : 42] You just see in their character completely different people. And you've got to ask the question, what makes someone...