

This morning we begin a brand new series of messages titled, “Believe.” This series is going to revolve around the idea of knowing what we believe about God and why it matters. This raises a question: Does what we believe about God actually matter? Does what you believe about God make a difference in your life? Does it make a difference in your death? Does what you believe about God impact anything at all? “The world” answers those kinds of questions a certain way...but the Bible tells us something different. So that’s what we’re going to be looking at in this series.

There is a story that I told over 5 years ago, and you may have heard elsewhere, that I want to share with you again that helps us think about this question. It’s a story about an atheist who was taking a walk through the woods. He kept admiring the majestic trees, mountains and the river he was walking along. All of a sudden, a huge grizzly bear appeared and started chasing him. The man ran and ran but the bear kept getting closer. At last the man stumbled and fell, and as he came upright the bear was almost on top of him, getting ready to swat him with his paw. The man cried out to God without even thinking about it as many people do, exclaiming, “Oh my gosh!” (Actually, not gosh, but you get the point.)

At that moment, everything came to a standstill, and a voice called out from the heavens: “You’ve denied my existence your whole life, taught others that I don’t exist, and credit creation for a cosmic accident, and now you call out to me and expect me to help you out of this predicament?” The man replied, “I guess it would be hypocritical of me to convert to Christianity now...perhaps you could make the bear a Christian instead of me?” “Very well,” replied the voice from above. At that moment, life resumed around the man – the birds chirped, the river ran, and life carried on. The bear stirred, slowly lowered its paws, brought them together, bowed its head, and spoke: “Lord, I am truly grateful for this food which I am about to receive.”

For that guy, what he believed mattered. Granted, it’s not a true story. So how about in real life: Does what we believe matter? That, in part, is what this

series will be about. Knowing what we believe, and knowing why it matters.

This series is a follow-up series to “The Story” that we did last year. “The Story,” as you’ll recall if you were a part of things here, was a chronological walk through the Bible. We could summarize it by saying, **“The Story is about reading the Bible as one continuous story and understanding it like never before.”** Hopefully, The Story sermon series did that for you along with The Story Bible, devotions, bible studies, and other resources you might have used as a part of that series to understand the Bible better. Paul shared with me a few months into “The Story” that some of the youth said that they appreciated that series because it helped them see how everything is connected. They’d heard and read and studied a lot of the Bible passages that were in The Story Bibles, but they didn’t understand how they were all related and connected together. That is exactly what the point of the Story was.

*This* series, and the book and other materials that go with it, builds on that knowledge, and can be summarized as: **“Believe is about reading the Bible as the guide to think, act, and be like Jesus.”** If you missed out on The Story, that’s ok. You’ll get brought along and caught up to speed. In this series we will focus on 10 Beliefs, 10 Practices, and 10 Virtues. We can summarize them in three questions: What do I believe? What should I do? Who am I becoming? In other words: What do we believe, and why does it matter?

And so in this series, **I hope God will use the Believe Bible, other resources, and these messages to illuminate each of us to the core beliefs found in the Bible to help each of us think, act, and be more like Jesus.** And I believe one thing we’ll see as we go through this is that what we believe really does matter – and you don’t have to be chased by a talking bear to experience that. So...let’s dive in.

The first belief that comes to us out of the Bible is that there is a God who is over and above all other gods, and fully reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Put more succinctly and as a statement of personal belief, we might say, **I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God – Father,**

## Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible makes no effort to defend or explain the existence of God. Right from the beginning, God simply “is.” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...” is how the Bible starts (Genesis 1:1). No “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...a certain being began to grow and become all powerful...” There’s no “Once upon a time” about the history of God. God just is, and God has put the universe into place, as we read about in today’s passage. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands...they reveal knowledge of God.

Now, this idea of God simply existing on His own doesn’t always satisfy people. People want to know: If God is real, where did He come from? Who created God? **We want to know where God comes from, but the Bible simply says that God has always been.** God is uncreated. God has no beginning, and no end. This is really difficult to get our minds around, because everything in the entire physical universe has a beginning and an end. My life began on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1973. (I know, you look at me and you’re thinking: “You mean 1983?” ☺) My life will also end some day. I don’t know when, but some day it will. That’s true for each of us. Pet dogs and cats and bunnies and fish...they have a beginning, and they have an end, and that’s a painful lesson that a lot of kids learn at an early age when their little goldfish dies just a week after getting it from the pet store. Plants have a beginning and an end. I’m really good at bringing about their end expediently. Trees – even really big ones – have a beginning and an end. Mountains, lakes, rivers, stars...they have a beginning, and they have an end. This is all we know, and to think of God with no beginning and no end...well, we just can’t even get our minds around that. And the Bible doesn’t even try to explain it. God just is.

But for those who want to know more, there are three arguments for the existence of God that I want to share with you. I happened to be reminded of these as I was coming to church last Sunday, and was listening to a sermon on Christian radio. I was hoping to get some good sermon inspiration for that day, because the message needed it! ☺ But, in the few minutes I had the radio on, I heard something from Ravi Zacharias that fit in perfectly with *today’s*

message, and the next three points are influenced by him,<sup>i</sup> though even he acknowledged that this isn't original to him, either, and includes some further thinking from Dallas Willard, the former professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California.

So these are three arguments for the existence of God. The first is what has historically been called “The Cosmological Argument.” And it’s an argument for the existence of God that is based on cause and effect. And it answers the question: If the universe is an effect of some cause, then what is the cause? What caused the universe to come into being? Where did everything come from? Where did the material come from? Why did creation come into being?

These kinds of questions can be answered at a certain level, but if you keep asking questions about a thing’s origins, and keep digging deeper, eventually you get to an unanswerable question. **And what we realize is that no matter how you break down a physical thing to get to its origins, it will never have the reason for its existence in and of itself.** And, everything in the universe – as I mentioned a moment ago – has a beginning, and has – or will have – an end.

For instance, you and I did not bring ourselves into being. We didn’t exist in another dimension and make the decision one day to start walking the face of the earth. Our biological parents brought us into being when they made the decision one night after a particularly romantic dinner, not to just fall asleep the moment they hopped into bed. A little girl once asked her mother, “How did the human race appear?” The mother answered, “God made Adam and Eve and they had children, and so was all humankind made.” Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, “Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved.” The confused girl returned to her mother and said, “Mom, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said they developed from monkeys?” The mother answered, “Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his.”<sup>ii</sup> We all have a beginning, and we had nothing to do with it. We can’t bring ourselves into being.

My iPad, the trees, lake Washington, the land mass known as North America, the earth, the moon, the stars...nothing in all the universe caused itself to come into being. There is no evidence of anything in all the physical realm of the universe that any of it has existed eternally. It all has come into being, and NOT on its own. Something caused it to exist. Even the Big Bang theory implies that the universe hasn't eternally existed. It had a beginning, however many billions of years ago according to the theory.

And so what we realize is that the universe can't give birth to itself. So what caused the universe to exist? **The only answer is: something *not* created (not physical), with the power to bring physical "stuff" into being.** The Bible says that being is God. Lord over all creation. The one to whom Creation points as the Creator behind it all. It's actually pretty stunning how modern science demonstrates (though, science is just observing the world around us) the need for something from outside creation to bring creation into being...and that is exactly what the Bible, written over a period of time some 2,000 to 4,000 years ago or so, tells us about who God is. So that's the cause and effect argument, or the cosmological argument, for the existence of God.

The second one has traditionally been called Teleological argument. It comes from the Greek word Telos, which means "purpose/design." **It's the argument for the existence of God that says everything in creation is laid out with purpose and intention; it's designed to work together.** The universe is not random. This has often been explained using a watch or clock as a metaphor – particularly an older one with gears that turn. The way it all works together to keep time, to run smoothly, shows that it was carefully designed. It has a purpose, and it was put together carefully to accomplish that purpose. A watch doesn't "just happen" to keep time.

The fact is, no matter where you find purpose and design and complexity of creation that all works carefully together, you will always see intelligence behind it. For instance: you will never be convinced by someone's argument that a dictionary came together in an explosion in a printing press. It wouldn't come about by accident. It wouldn't even come about naturally,

over the course of 15 million years. It is put together too carefully, in order, logically, and with very specific design. The universe is much the same. It's organized, it's complex, it's specific, it's designed to all work together, from the stars and planets to the heart that beats inside you to the electrical impulses that go from your brain through your neurological system that allows your body to move and function. So that's teleological argument, that the universe is created with purpose and intelligence and design; it's not random.

The last argument is called the moral argument. It goes like this: **Moral realities only exist if God exists. They do exist, therefore: God exists.** Ravi Zacharias says that this is the most difficult for the atheist to escape, because how does an amoral universe...an inanimate, not thinking, non-relational thing...how does it *through non-moral processes*, end up with a moral framework? Pick any substance of the universe from whenever you think the universe came into being (or at some other point in time), and how does that come to have a belief that it's immoral to steal, to kill, or to root for the Denver Broncos today?

In fact, amorality is built into evolutionary theory. Evolution is built on the notion that what is weaker will be destroyed. It's all about survival of the fittest. That is an amoral process. So where do our morals come from if we're just the product of an amoral process that accidentally led to our existence over the course of however many millions and billions of years? Ravi says, **"The moral argument hangs like a shadow that we cannot get rid of" (Ravi Zacharias).** There must be some kind of intervention and instilling of moral values from beyond the amoral universe. This again points us to a moral being, uncreated, who instills these morals in us.

And this is what the Bible claims about God: That God has simply always been. Uncreated for all eternity beyond time. There's no beginning to God. But God *did* begin time and begin creation, and he's designed it and created it very specifically, very intentionally and intelligently. And he's given a moral framework to the universe, particularly to that part of Creation that is created in His image - humanity.

**And this God of the universe is the one true God worth worshiping.**

When you think about it, it's like: why *wouldn't* we do that? If the Bible's claim that God has existed for all time is true, and our observation of the created universe confirms this and points to the necessity of a Creator being outside of creation, and we see how everything works together "just so", and He gave us moral laws to live by...when we take all that together: then why *wouldn't* we bow down to Him?

The last, brief thing I want to say is that: **Besides revealing himself in Creation, he's revealed himself concretely and personally in Jesus Christ, and still moves in the world today through the Holy Spirit.** Right from the get-go Scripture speaks of God expressing himself in plurality. One God, living in community with himself. Genesis tells us of God creating humanity – and this is spoken from God's perspective – "in our image." That "our" is explained and revealed over time in the Bible to be Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a Trinitarian expression of God. You won't find the *word* "trinity" or any of its forms, in the Bible...but that is exactly how God expresses and reveals himself in the Bible.

We will dive into that more next week when we look at the character of God and how His character is revealed through Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But for now, know that God has revealed himself to you and me in Creation, let alone in other ways. The universe even leads to the conclusion that physical stuff can't cause itself to come into existence, that the universe is ordered and designed "just so," and amoral substances and amoral process don't give birth to moral beings. This all points us to God, who fully reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I hope and pray that the beauty of creation around you would lead you to know your Creator. He wants you to know Him. He wants you to be in relationship with Him. That's the ultimate purpose for which you were created: to know God deeply in your life. And I pray it would be so for each of us, and not just when we're being chased by the "talking bears" in our lives, but each and every moment of each and every day. Because what you believe matters. It makes a difference in our lives. And the foundational

belief...the foundational doctrine of the Christian faith is that God is real, and worthy of our worship. May we each be able to say (I invite you to say this with me as we close out the message): **I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> From Ravi Zacharias' talk, titled, "In The Course of Human Event, Part 1."

<sup>ii</sup> I can't remember where I came across this story, or the story about the guy being chased by the bear. Both have been in my files for some time.