

March 20th, 2016

VIDEO: EVIDENCE INTRO

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INTRODUCTION

Good Morning!

JOSH MCDOWELL

I don't know if you are familiar with Josh McDowell or not, but he is a Christian author, scholar, and apologist. Most of his writings are centered around providing evidence for what he knows to be true about God, the Bible, and Jesus.

His story is an interesting one, so before we begin this series I want to tell you a little bit about how Josh McDowell got to be where he is now.

Josh grew up with questions that we all face; who am I, why am I here, where am I going. When he was younger he sought out these answers in the same place that he saw most people turning too, Church. He was all in. Week after week he went to Church, he was all in, but felt like he was getting nothing in return. So after a while he decided religion was not going to provide any answers for him so he turned to education.

He enrolled in a university and began questioning everyone. He thought for sure he would be surrounded by great minds that

could get all of his questions answered. Soon he realized that everyone he was talking too had the same problems, frustrations, and unanswered questions as himself. Education was not the answer.

Josh found himself turning next to prestige. He began running for student offices at the university. He was meeting people, making important decisions, and spending the universities money doing what he wanted to do. Soon the thrill wore off.

It was around this time that Josh noticed this small group of people on campus – 8 students and 2 faculty. There was something different about this group, they seemed to know where they were going in life. They were convicted and he liked that, but there was something more; love. This group not only loved each other, but they deeply loved and cared for those outside the group. Josh wanted to know more, so he decided to make friends with them.

About two weeks later, he found himself in a conversation with them about God. He began mocking God and anyone that would believe. He finally asked, “What changed your lives?” A girl at the table responded, “Jesus.” Josh snapped, “Don’t give me that kind of garbage. I’m fed up with religion, the Bible, and the church.”

The girl quickly snapped back, “I didn’t say religion, I said Jesus.” And the conversation continued. This small group finally issued Josh a challenge. They challenged him, a pre-law

student, to examine intellectually the claim that Jesus is God's Son.

At first he laughed at their challenge, how could something as flimsy as Christianity stand up to an intellectual examination? But day after day they continued to present the challenge to him. He eventually became so irritated that he finally accepted their challenge, not to prove anything, but to refute it.

He determined that he would write a book that would make an intellectual joke of Christianity.

He began travelling throughout the United States and England to gather evidence to prove that Christianity was a sham.

Something happened though, the more evidence he uncovered, the more he found the claims of Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, to be true. He soon found himself in a battle of will and mind. His mind saw the overwhelming evidence that Jesus is God's son, but his will wasn't ready to give in.

Finally, Josh couldn't deny the truth any longer. Every evidence that he found pointed to Jesus being exactly who he claimed to be. And realizing the truth of it, Josh gave his life to Jesus and was baptized.

I love his story.

This is a man that was convinced that Christianity was a joke. He was educated and he was ready to prove Christians wrong. He put everything on hold to intellectual attack Christianity, but he couldn't. As he sought truth, he found Christ.

SERIES INTRO

Over these next three sermons (today, Good Friday, and Easter) we are going to seek truth about Jesus. We are going to seek evidence for his life (did he really live), evidence for his death (did He really die in the way the Bible describes), and evidence for his resurrection (did He really raise from the dead 3 days later).

As I planned for this series I began thinking about how prove or disprove the claims of the Bible. How to prove or disprove the claims of God. And really there are only a few ways that we can intellectually prove or disprove God.

#1 We can ask God to prove Himself

This is the most-straight forward method and I have seen several people claim that God does not exist because of this method. It is the simple, “God if you exist, show me.”

I had a friend who did this once. We were in line for a roller coaster and the topic of God came up. We were young, Middle School/High School age. We began debating inline whether God was real or not. Finally we got on the roller coaster and sat side by side. It was in this moment that my friend decided he was going to win the argument. As he was pulling down his shoulder harness, he left a good sized gap. When the roller coaster started he squeezed his little body out of the shoulder harness and had just a seatbelt on. He proceeded to lean forward and scream, “God, if you are real, kill me now!”

I was shaken. What was he doing? What was this going to prove?

Let's assume that there is no God ... which my friend believed ... he was still risking his life. You don't need God to fall out of a roller coaster.

But ... what if there is a God? What if he was wrong and I was right? That would mean that God is exactly who he claims to be; all knowing, all powerful, Lord. Here is this idiot hanging out of a roller coaster screaming at the all knowing all powerful God. Taunting Him. Calling Him fake and asking God to kill him.

All I could think is ... one of two things is going to happen

- All powerful God is going to honor his request, which does no good for my friend
- All powerful God is going protect him from himself, and patiently and faithfully wait for my friend to find the truth.

See this method seems the most straight forward, but when we go to the all mighty God and we say, "prove yourself" ... we forget, what happens if He does. What happens if God proves Himself and we realize that we just demanded that from Him like He owed it to us and had to respond to our commands.

This method of proving or disproving God is flawed.

[#2 We can use Scientific evidence](#)

This is a method that people turn to often. Some people stand convicted that science proves God, others stand convicted that science disproves God.

Here is where science gets a little tricky in disproving God.

I believe, because I am told in God's Word, that God created everything out of nothing. He spoke it into existence. This means that God is the creator of all things and all things are at his fingertips. If He can create it, He can manipulate it or change it. It's like a painter who creates a beautiful masterpiece only to realize that the color of the sky was not what she originally intended. So she goes back to it and blends in some reds and purples.

God has the same power over His creation. If I believe that He created it out of nothing, I also believe that He can do with it as He pleases. This makes the scientific method of disproving God a little tough.

Let me explain with a couple examples:

- I was watching a show that was refuting God's hand in Biblical events. In one episode they were talking about Sodom and Gomorrah. The Biblical claim is that God reigned sulfur down from the heavens. They have found the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, so they are able to do some investigating to find the validity of this. After researching and testing, they found that Sodom and Gomorrah were in fact destroyed by fire and sulfur ... but

not by God. There was an explosion that occurred near those towns. It was a natural phenomenon because of the gases in that area and it caused the appearance that sulfur was raining down from heaven. It wasn't God, it was natural. **God created nature, if God created it out of nothing, if He spoke it into existence ... does He not have the power to command it?** They laughed at the Biblical claim and I was in awe of how God used nature.

- I saw another one talking about the burning bush and another about the parting of the Red Sea. All of these they were able to prove were not only scientifically possible, but that they were things that were able to naturally occur. Therefore, they said, It was nature and not God. But I contest that God, who created nature, has control of nature.
- Finally, I have had many people confront me with carbon dating and the age of the world not matching what the Bible claims it to be. But if we look at the creation account, here is what we find.
 - God created a mature man and woman, wouldn't it be easy to assume He created a mature earth?
 - To take it further, God created the lights in the sky before he ever created the Sun, Moon, and Stars. It would appear that He created a mature universe as well, because some of those lights would take millions of years to reach us based on their distance

away, but they appeared before the star was actually created.

See, I believe that science helps us see the validity of claims that God makes, but it is hard to look at science and say ... it is a natural phenomenon so it can't be God ... or ... it is not naturally possible so it can't be God. Because I believe that God created everything out of nothing and therefore has control over His creation.

[#3 We can use Historical evidence](#)

In this past year I have shown you on a couple occasions the reliability of the Bible as a book. As a historical book. When you compare it to other great works, the Bible is the most reliable piece of literature we have. This is based on how many manuscript copies we have, how closely they were made from the original writings, and their accuracy with each other.

But this just means that it is an accurate copy of the original work. Which leaves us with a major question ... is it fact or fiction? Are they fairy tale stories or are they factual stories?

All of this hinges on the existence and the authority of one man, Jesus.

Because Jesus referenced and spoke to the validity of all that was in the Old Testament. So if Jesus believed the Old Testament to be factual and Jesus is the Son of God ... I believe it to be factual as well.

Which leaves one driving quest ... Did Jesus a really live and did He really die how the Bible describes? (If He did not, then all of the Bible can be viewed as fiction) Did Jesus really defeat death and prove Himself to be God? (Because if He did, then I should believe what He tells me to be true ... and I should accept that He in fact is Lord)

That is what we will be seeking answers to over this next week.

EVIDENCE THAT HE LIVED

Today we will be looking at the easiest of the three. Did Jesus really live? Is He a real historical person like George Washington? Or is he a fictional character set in a historic world like Charles Darnay?

To get a full view of this we are going to see what several different types of sources have to say about Jesus.

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

First we are going to start with the Christian Evidence. We will not be looking at the New Testament writers though. We believe that the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, etc. have been proven to be historically reliable ... and all of them were written within 100 years of Jesus' death, but we will not be looking at them we will be taking one step back from them.

Clement of Rome was the Bishop of Rome from 88 AD 99AD, this was about 60 years after Jesus died. Clement wrote:

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“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order.”

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, and a disciple of Paul, John, and Peter wrote:

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“Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in

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heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe in Him.”

The list of early Christian evidence of Jesus Christ goes on; Quadratus, Barnabas, Aristides, Justin Martyr, Hegesippus ...

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All of these Christians knew that Jesus was a real living, breathing, eating, walking, talking man. He lived.

But these were Christians. Couldn't they just be spreading the lies to promote their agenda?

JEWISH EVIDENCE

Good thing that is not the only evidence we have. We also have Jewish evidence. Remember who the Jewish evidence represents as we look at this. These are the Pharisees, the religious leaders, the very people that hated Jesus and wanted Him killed. For them it would be better to pretend Jesus never lived than to historically record His existence. But, the recorded His existence nonetheless. What they have said about Jesus has proven to be rather interesting as well.

DISCIPLES – The Talmud not only speaks of Jesus but it speaks of His disciples as well. One passage says, “Yeshu (Jesus) had five disciples – Mattai, Makkai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah.” It is assumed that Mattai is referencing Matthew, but it is anyone’s guess as to who the other four are. Remember Jesus at one time sent out 72 disciples.

VIRGIN BIRTH – The Talmud also speaks of Jesus virgin birth. This is especially interesting, because the Talmud is speaking against His virgin birth. It is actually making fun of the very idea that He was born of a virgin. Which is expected. But the fact that they, on numerous occasions, bring it up, means that it was common knowledge among Christians from the beginning that Jesus was born of a virgin and not something that hundreds of years later got made up. If you were a Christian you knew that Jesus was born of a virgin, His disciples would have known that He was born of a virgin and still believed.

Finally there are several testimonies from Josephus who lived from 37 A.D. (Just years after Jesus died) to around 100AD. Josephus was a Jewish Historian and on several occasions he speaks of Jesus. In his Jewish Antiquities he writes:

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“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles.”

Even those that have nothing to gain recorded the life of Jesus.

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SECULAR EVIDENCE

Finally, there is the secular evidence. By this I mean non-Christian, non-Jewish and generally anti-Christian evidence.

Suetonius, Roman Historian, in his works “Life of Claudius” writes:

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“As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (Christ), he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome.”

This event happened in 49 AD and Luke actually refers to this event in Acts 18:1-2

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¹After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

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²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

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Around 70 AD Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian and probably a Stoic Philosopher, wrote a letter from prison to his son encouraging him to pursue wisdom. In his letter he talks about Socrates, Pythagoras, and the wise king of the Jews that was executed by his own people. He said that even though he was executed he still lives on in the teaching which he had given.

The list of secular sources goes on Phlegon, Lucian, Pliny, Thallus, Cornelius Tacitus ... All of them agree that Jesus lived. Some of them have hateful things to say about Jesus, but they agree that he lived nonetheless.

IS THIS ENOUGH?

British Philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote in 1957 "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him."

You would be hard pressed to find very many knowledgeable people today who would agree with Russell's radical claim. There is overwhelming evidence that Jesus lived. But is that enough?

Is it enough that Jesus lived? Is it enough that He had these incredible teachings that were passed down to us? Is it enough that we show love to each other? Is it enough that we look toward the interest of others? Is it enough that he was a man?

Absolutely not. If Jesus was just another man then He was no different than Peter, Paul, Socrates, Plato, Muhammed ... but I know that Jesus is more than a man. He is the son of God, He is God.

And if we stop with Jesus being just a good man with good teachings, then we are still left asking: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? It is only through His death and resurrection that we find our purpose, our eternity, our life in Him. So I want to encourage you to come this Friday to our Good Friday service as we look at the evidence of His death and next Sunday as we look at the most important ... the evidence of His resurrection.

In the meantime, I want to challenge you to read through the book of John this week as you prepare for Easter.

PRAY

COMMUNION MEDITATION

Something here

PRAY AND TAKE THE COMMUNION