

7-27-08

Why I Believe, II

Psalm 148

¹⁻⁵ **Hallelujah! Praise God from heaven,
praise him from the mountaintops;
Praise him, all you his angels,
praise him, all you his warriors,
Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, you morning stars;
Praise him, high heaven,
praise him, heavenly rain clouds;
Praise, oh let them praise the name of God—
he spoke the word, and there they were!**

⁶ **He set them in place
from all time to eternity;
He gave his orders,
and that's it!**

⁷⁻¹² **Praise God from earth,
you sea dragons, you fathomless ocean deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and ice,
hurricanes obeying his orders;
Mountains and all hills,
apple orchards and cedar forests;
Wild beasts and herds of cattle,
snakes, and birds in flight;
Earth's kings and all races,
leaders and important people,
Robust men and women in their prime,
and yes, graybeards and little children.**

¹³⁻¹⁴ **Let them praise the name of God—
it's the only Name worth praising.
His radiance exceeds anything in earth and sky;
he's built a monument—his very own people!**

Praise from all who love God!

**Israel's children, intimate friends of God.
Hallelujah!**

Last Sunday I started something I couldn't finish. It's my testimony as to "Why I Believe."

I gave you three reasons last Sunday.

- **I believe that the way that people argue suggests that God exists.**

Now if you weren't here last Sunday and that sounds strange to you, get the CD and find out why it isn't so strange after all because every time you argue about the existence of God, it's evidence for the existence of God.

- **I believe the existence of human beings as personal creatures, argues for the existence of God.**

Want to know why? Get the CD.

- **When you look at persons, they all have this desire to have purpose and meaning in their life, to have significance.**

I believe that's connected to something God has innately put inside every one of us.

Now let me give you three more reasons today:

I believe the existence of joy points toward God.

Sometimes people think that what we really want more than anything else is to be happy. If you ask folks, "What is the Number One desire of the human race?" the answer would probably be "Happiness." We say we want to be happy above everything else. Well, I don't think that is true, and I'll tell you why.

Let's say that there was a pill that, if you swallowed it, would put you into a permanent coma. In this coma, you would have thrilling dreams. You would have uninterrupted happiness surges, eruptions of uncontrolled bliss of orgasmic proportions. You would have pleasure, delight and joy forever. You would be asleep and never in touch with anybody, but you would have never-ending happiness. Would you take that pill? I don't think so.

Imagine that you could plug your brain into an outlet, and it would stimulate your pleasure center forever so that you would feel great pleasure throughout all eternity, but you would never *do* anything. You would never *go* anywhere. You would never *know* anyone. Would you do it? NO! You wouldn't do it, and it would be a nightmare if someone did it to us, because what we want is something deeper than joy. Joy, although we love it, always points us beyond ourselves.

What we want is that to which joy points.

For example, we want joy in beauty. That's why a scene, a mountaintop, or music sometimes pierces our hearts. We want joy in noble thoughts. We want joy in getting lost in a great cause that sets things right and brings happiness to others. We want joy in a person. There is always a desire, an ache, a stab of pain in joy on this earth, because everything tells us, "Um not yet. I'm not quite there yet." No human joy satisfies. Church, I believe our chronic hunger for and our constant pursuit of joy tells us we have been cut off from the reality for which we were made, and that reality is God. That's why there is this restless bondage to joy in our world. That's why the greatest joy that has ever been written about or sung or praised about is what the Bible calls "the Joy of the Lord."

The Joy of the Lord is not that you are happy when you go to church, or when you're singing hymns, or when you're quoting Bible verses. It is the joy that will come one day when you are not broken, when you finally see face-to-face, clear as a bell, that for which you were made. That secret longing that you have carried with you like a wound your whole life long will be met. That's the Joy of the Lord. You and I cry for that joy. You and I ache for that joy. You and I long for that joy. And once there was a Man who had that joy. People saw Him. People knew Him. People really listened to him. One time, He said to His friends,

John 15:11

"The reason I tell you these things is so that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be complete."

Our quest for joy, our search for joy, our broken, messed-up, obsessive, endless pursuit of joy tells us we were made to receive the one who can

brings us joy!

Next reason,

“When I look at the world around me, when I fathom the order and the symmetry of the universe, when I learn about mysteries of the micro and the macro-world I can only say “There must be a God!”

Get your shovel and walk deep into the forest. Dig a one foot square and one inch deep block of soil and start counting and you discover that you’ve been walking on a huge under-world. In that one-foot-square-by-one-inch deep block of soil you’ll find an average of 1,356 living creatures including 865 mites, 265 springtails, 22 millipedes, 19 adult beetles, and 12 other varieties of subterranean life, plus two billion bacteria and millions of fungi and algae. Hallelujah.

So how can you so thoughtlessly hike through the forest trampling a million creatures in the process and return home acting guiltless? And tell the vegetarian not to drink the spring water from the stream because to do so would mean that he imbibes hordes of microscopic animals. Yikes!

Church, there is a whole micro world out there that we never really acknowledge. There’s a whole micro world in here. Did you know there are millions of little micro-organisms running around your eye-lids, over you eye balls, and in and out of your nostrils, and you can’t feel a thing, *until I mentioned it!* Why are you rubbing your eye?

Back in the 1990s astronomers made a startling discovery. They found a concentration of stars that stretches for more than six million light years—that’s more than sixty times larger than our Milky Way. It’s the largest cluster of galaxies ever discovered. They named the new discovery Abell 2029. Abell has one hundred trillion stars, give or take a trillion or two. Our Milky by comparison has three trillion. So this is a pretty big deal. Let me help you understand how big that is. A **Light year** is the **distance light can travel in one year**. **Light** travels at **186,000 miles per second**. So a **Light year = 5.89 trillion miles**. Now multiply **One billion x 5.89 trillion** and you have the number of miles between our galaxy Abell and the earth which looks like this **589, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000** (that’s 21 zeroes folks). That is over a trillion billion miles.

And get this—this vast universe that boggles our finite minds—scientists tells us that it is expanding at the speed of light. That gives new significance to the Psalmist claim that *he holds the whole world in his hands*. Church, when I look at the vastness, the order, the symmetry, the precision of both the micro and macro universe my only response is “My Lord and my God. How great thou art!

Could I just slip in one more thing? I find this intriguing. A **quark** makes up one of the two basic constituents of matter, the other being the *lepton*. Now quarks make up protons and neutrons which make up the atom which makes up the molecules which makes up you and holds everything in the universe together. But how does it hold it together when every dynamic of the atom suggests that it should explode?

I would submit to you that it is the Word of God which not only holds the atom together but holds you together and the whole the whole universe as well. Listen to this!

Hebrews 1:3

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. He spoke it into existence.

1 Corinthians 1:16-17

16For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Did you get it? Do you see it? The commanded word of God is holding the universe in place, holding you in place. The word of God which brought it all into being is the same word that's holding it together! The same word that birthed it all is the same word that is holding it all. That same declarative word that created it is still sounding throughout the vast universe declaring that “Jesus is Lord!”

Now here's where it gets real interesting. They still don't know what makes up the quark but some scientists postulate that sound waves make up the quark. Now I am far removed from being a scientist, but fellas may I just tell you now that the sound that seems to emanate from the quark is nothing less than the divine word of God!

So “When I look at the world around me, when I fathom the order and the symmetry of the universe, when I learn about mysteries of the micro and the macro-world I can only say “There must be a God!”

Here's another reason I believe

God changes lives, and our lives need changing.

Jesus is in the life-changing business. From the very beginning of his ministry, there was a phenomenon that occurred again and again. People would come to Him—sometimes satisfied people—sometimes messed-up people—sometimes lepers and injured people, forgotten people, despised people, prostitutes, tax collectors, admired people, wealthy people, religious leaders. There was something about this man, Jesus, which made their hearts melt and when they submitted themselves to his way an inner transformation began, it was like something was born again in their spirit.

A proud, vindictive, violent, arrogant, self-preoccupied, religious leader named Saul of Tarsus was going down the road, and then ...BOOM!...he had a vision of Jesus. As a matter of historical record, he became Paul—a man whose mind, whose writings, whose love for people, whose self-sacrificial gift of his life to the world was so compelling that it fascinates human minds to this day, some 2000 years later.

People devote their lives to studying what it was that Paul wrote. What happened to Saul that made him Paul? *Jesus is what happened to Saul!* The evidence of lives changed by Jesus is so abundant that the full story can never be told, and it can never be matched—not by any culture, by any book, by any program, or by any hero.

I've never heard anyone say, “Gary, one day I realized there was no God, no one behind reality, no life after death. I realized existence is a meaningless accident, begun by chance and destined for oblivion, *and it changed my life.*” Or “I used to be addicted to alcohol, but now the “Law of Natural

Selection” has set me free. I used to be greedy, but now the story of the “Big Bang” has made me generous. I used to be afraid, but now “random chance” has made me brave. I’ve never heard anyone say, “Now I have found a meaningful existence from meaningless reality.”

But Jesus has been doing that for 2000 years. A debauched, despicable, despised slave owner named John Newton meets Jesus one day. Overwhelmed by grace, he writes the song that we sing to this day: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”

A guy by the name of Bill Moore, who grew up in poverty, got drunk one time and shot a man for \$5000. He ended up on Death Row. Lee Strobel writes about Bill in his book, *The Case for Faith*.

A couple of guys go into prison and they say to Bill “Bill, there is a man, named Jesus, who loves you, and He gave His life on a cross. He died for you. He went to Death Row for you.

Nobody had ever told Bill about Jesus before. He’d been sitting on Death Row for years. He turned his life over to Jesus, and it changed him so much—changed the darkness and bitterness and hatred inside him so much—that other people began to be drawn to him. And other people started meeting Jesus through this guy on Death Row. He became known as “The Peacemaker.” His cellblock was the safest place in the penitentiary, because so many people were coming to Christ through Bill Moore.

Churches found out about this, and when people needed counseling, churches started sending people to the penitentiary to get counseling from Bill Moore. Can you imagine calling our church to ask for a referral and hearing, “Yes, I want you to go over to penitentiary and see a man there on death row.” Who does that kind of thing? Jesus does that kind of thing.”

Bill Moore was changed so much that he won the love of the family of the man that he killed. It changed him so much over the sixteen year period that all kinds of people wrote letters for him. Eventually, the authorities not only cancelled his death sentence—they not only commuted his sentence, which was unprecedented—they paroled him. Bill Moore now serves as head of congregation in a couple of housing projects in a desperately poor area. When Lee Strobel met with him, he asked, “Bill, what in the world turned your life around? Was it a new medication? Was it some kind of

rehab program? Was it a new approach to counseling?”

Bill said, “No, Lee, it wasn’t any of that stuff. It was Jesus Christ.”

My friend, Atheism really has nothing to say to a guy on death row, but Jesus does. Atheism really has nothing to say to a human being lying on a deathbed, but Jesus does.

But enough about Bill Moore, enough of Saul of Tarsus, and John Newton. What about you?

If you have never made this decision about Jesus Christ, if you’ve never made a personal commitment to him before, here is the invitation that’s been changing lives for 2000 years. Jesus comes to you right now and says,

Would you follow me? You may have questions. You may have doubts, I know, but you have this one life, and you’ve got to build it on something. Will you build it on me?

If you’re ready to do that, you could do that right now....