

There once was a king who loved a humble maiden.

- He was a powerful king.
- No one opposed him because his kingdom could easily crush all opponents.
- And yet, he loved this maiden.



His kingship created a problem for his love. How could he show his love for her? He could easily bring her to the palace give her rich robes and servants and place a crown upon her head. She would not resist – no one dared resist him.

- But would she love him?
- Would she be happy with life in the palace?
- Would she resent losing her common life?
- Would she be happier with the love of an equal?

How great was the difference between them!

- The king wanted a lover, an equal.
- He knew that 'It is only in love that the unequal can be made equal.'¹

And if this maiden were satisfied with all the pomp of being a queen, the king knows it is only a secondary glory – dependent on his status. He wants her to be his equal. Elevating her status would only bring grief to the king's heart.

Their union must be brought about some other way.

- The king reasoned 'If elevating her cannot reveal my love, then perhaps my descending to her is the only way.'
- But if he were to hide his royal clothes under some common cloak, eventually, she would discover the inequality of her station and feel deceived.
- The only solution was for the king to genuinely become a commoner.



'That is the unfathomable nature of love ... it desires equality with the beloved.'²

¹ Adapted from 'The King and the Maiden', in Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *Parables of Kierkegaard*, Thomas C. Oden, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) 42.

² Kierkegaard, *Parables*, 44.

Everyone loves a good story ... well most people. We will get back to that in a minute.

Today, we are continuing our short series, a skeptic's guide to faith. These messages are a little different because my audience are those who doubt or are skeptical of the Christian faith.

- Jude instructs us to 'Be merciful to those who doubt (Jd 22 NIV).' That means listening carefully and helping them past their doubts.
- We will try to keep it accessible to everyone, and I encourage you to bring your friends who doubt or who are skeptics.
- I hope to honestly wrestle with issues. 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1Pe 3:15 NIV).'

We looked at ...

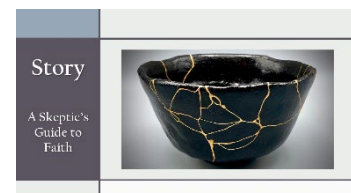
A Skeptic's Guide to Faith

How can we trust that Jesus rose from the dead?

Last Sunday, we tackled a tough one. How do we know there is objective truth? We discovered that even those who believe that all truth is relative hold an objective truth – 'I believe all things are relative' – which is a self-defeating logic.

Today, we are going to look at God's story and our destiny. This will answer the question 'How do we know there is an afterlife?' Interestingly, God's story relates to truth – last week's sermon.

- We believe that God is guiding our lives and history towards its climax – an afterlife.
- Our neighbors believe life is all by chance.³ There are only individual stories, or tribal stories, none of which is truer than others.
- God's big story makes sense of the world.



Story

A Skeptic's Guide to Faith

³ 'Is it chance Or dance moves The world? Eugene Warren, *Christographia XIV*, in Thomas Howard, *Chance or the Dance: A Critique of Modern Secularism*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001).

If there is no big story, 'then nothing in this universe has any ultimate meaning.'⁴ As Paul said, 'Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die (1Co 15:32 NLT)!'

Life is like a puzzle without a picture on the box. But God's big story helps us understand life's biggest questions. Such as ...

- Where did we come from?
- Why are we here?
- What's wrong with the world?
- How can it be fixed?
- Where are we going?

God's story answers all of life's biggest questions.

Today, a key passage is from Solomon: 'He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end (Ecc 3:11 NLT).' We have an eternal longing in our heart but only see a fragment of God's big picture.

Let's retell God's Big Story.

1. God's Big Story.

1. God created the universe and world.

2. He made man and woman. He had a relationship with them. He walked with them in the Garden, Ge 3.

3. God gave them complete liberty, but also one warning: 'You may freely eat any fruit in the garden¹⁷ except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die (Ge 2:16-17 NLT).' Death was not known, life went on forever.

4. Adam and Eve disobeyed by eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil. The consequence brought sickness and death. But God had a plan – someone born of a woman would break sin's curse, Ge 3:15.

5. Humankind multiplied on the earth and God tried many times to get their attention. Humans frustrated God so much (Ge 6:6), but he did not give up. He flooded the earth,

⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 387.

but spared Noah and his family because they sought God. He scattered everyone and confused their languages, but he loved Abraham because he sought God.

6. For centuries God showed special favor to Abraham's family so that we could learn about God, so that we could learn about right and wrong, and so that God's plan could take the next step.

7. God sent a second Adam, only this one did not rebel – he fully obeyed. God Himself descended because of His love for us. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).' The second Adam, Jesus, came to earth because he loved us so much. He died on the cross taking all our punishment.

8. If we believe that Jesus died for our sins then we are born again, too. We become an offspring of the second Adam and all its benefits. 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here (2Co 5:17 NIV).'

9. Jesus rose from the grave and was victorious over disobedience's curse. Jesus' resurrection and new body is a prototype for our future resurrection. Death is no longer the end. God is the God of the new and is making a new heaven and a new earth for us.

10. Jesus said, 'I am going there to prepare a place for you.³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (Jn 14:1-3 NIV)' This is where we are now in the story. We wait for Jesus to come and take us back to a new place he has prepared for us.

11. Here is the finale of God's big story: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ...³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new (Rev 21:1-5a NIV)."' You and I will be restored, rebuilt, to live with God forever and ever.

God's big story makes sense of the world.

Testimony

God's big story leads us to the question, 'How do we know there is an afterlife?' Are there any proofs?

2. How Do We Know There is Life After Death?

We cannot answer as scientifically as most people want because only one person has been there and back, Jesus. You should read what Jesus says about heaven.

- C.S. Lewis reminds us that ... 'By definition, it (heaven) is outside our experience, but all ... descriptions must be of things within our experience.'⁵ – C.S. Lewis If it's in our broken world, it's not heaven but perhaps there are glimpses of heaven.
- Paul encouraged the Corinthians to 'fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2Co 4:18 NIV).' We are often so focused on this world that it is difficult to see the glimpses of heaven all around us.

Here are five reasons to believe in the afterlife ...

Five Reason to Believe in an Afterlife.

1. Ultimate justice.

There is a longing in the human heart for broken things to be made right.

- Our innate moral compass causes us to cry 'unfair' at soccer games when the referee makes a bad call.
- When there is an unprovoked attack on innocent people in our streets or in a war, we demand justice.

That longing for justice is a remnant of the image of God within us – a moral gyroscope. There must be a time and place where justice is ultimately fulfilled. A good and just God must punish evil.

- As Christians we believe that 'For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body (2Co 5:10 NLT).'
- Even though we are broken and fall short of living a morally perfect life, we desire wrong to be righted in the end.

God's 'justice demands that he punish our sin, but because of his infinite love he has taken the punishment upon himself.'⁶ 'For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ (2Co 5:21 NLT).'

⁵ C.S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory,' in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001) 33.

⁶ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 384.

2. Human longing.

We long for meaning, beauty, permanence, and eternity. 'He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end (Ecc 3:11 NLT).'

- We cannot see the big overall picture of life.
- There is something in our hearts that longs for more, for eternity.

'If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.'⁷ – C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Yes, this is like arguing for the existence of bread because of hunger. But if you are hungry, you will look for food.

3. Near death experiences, spiritual experiences, and visions.⁸

I am not going to say a whole lot about these as a skeptic would argue about reliability.

4. The multi-dimensions that physicists believe.

This is beyond my understanding, but physicists believe there are more than four dimensions of our common existence: height, depth, width, and time.

- Superstring theory requires 9 spatial + 1 time dimensions.
- M-theory formulates 11 dimensions.
- Some believe there are endless dimensions.

It is easy to believe that God and heaven occupy one of these other dimensions.

Again, God's story says that before the fall, humans and God lived and communicated together. When we rebelled, we lost the ability to see God – time is a part of the fall as death entered creation.

But the greatest reason is ...

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper One, 2001) 136-37.

⁸ 'Are not reliable', Randy Alcorn, 'Is It Reasonable to Believe in Heaven (and Hell)?', in *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics*, Joseph M. Holden, ed. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2018) 305-309 (306).

5. Jesus' resurrection.

Thomas said, 'I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side (Jn 20:25 NLT).' Eight days later, Jesus offers Thomas the chance to touch him and Thomas says, 'My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28 NLT)!'

We have good reason to believe that Jesus rose from the grave.

- There were hundreds of eyewitnesses over forty days.
- They wrote down their experiences before they died.
- The disciples were changed and died for their belief.
- The Church began and grew despite severe persecution.

Our bodies in heaven – our new bodies - will be like Jesus' resurrected body.

- Recognizable – everyone could recognize who Jesus was.
- A real body – Jesus ate food, talked with them. He said, 'touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have (Lk 24:39 NIV).'

Our bodies in heaven will be different from the way they are now.

- He could appear and disappear at will (Lk 24:31, Jn 20:19, 26)
- He ascended into heaven without any mechanism (Acts 1:9-11)

God's big story makes sense of the world.

Conclusion.

God delights in repairing broken things. 'Biblical salvation lies not in an escape from this world but in the transformation of this world.'⁹ The Bible often mentions the new heavens and new earth.

Kintsugi is an ancient Japanese art form of repairing broken tea ware with gold, creating a new and valuable piece.

In the sixteenth century, a great tea master, Yusai Hosokawa, prepared a cup for the warlord Hidetoshi in one of his favorite cups.¹⁰ A servant accidentally dropped the cup breaking it into five



⁹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (NY, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 234.

¹⁰ Makoto Fujimura, *Art + Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020) 43-59.

pieces. Hosokawa reassembled the pieces using a lacquer technique (urushi) with real gold, creating a 'beauty through brokenness.'¹¹

The name kintsugi means: 金(kin) = gold (継ぎ) tsugi = to reconnect / build

- We broke ourselves through selfishness and sin. 'For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus (Ro 3:23-24 NLT).'
- Then we are made right by the precious blood of Jesus. Look: 'God paid a ransom to save you ... And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹It was (paid for with) the precious blood of Christ (1Pe 1:18-19 NLT).'

More than just fixing our brokenness, Jesus makes us a totally new creation!

- Just like Jesus' resurrected body.
- When Jesus comes again, our new bodies will be perfect, the effect of sin and sickness gone.

Maybe you are here this morning and are thinking, 'yes, God's big story makes sense of the world. I am ready to believe.' The Bible says 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here (2Co 5:17 NIV).'

We are in God's big story and history is moving towards its finale.

When perfection comes – at the end - imperfect things will disappear (1Co 13:10). Let's be a part of the new that is coming!

Salvation Appeal / New Life Packets.

Prayer.

¹¹ Fujimura, *Art + Faith*, 44.