

Rev Alex Macdonald - The Folly of Atheism

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Could you turn with me now to a passage in the Old Testament in the book of Psalms, in fact that Psalm that we've just been singing from, Psalm 14 and the first words, the very first words of that Psalm, the fool says in his heart, there is no God.

Psalm 14 verse 1, the fool says in his heart, there is no God.

Karl Marx famously said that religion is the opium of the people and he added the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for the real happiness.

In other words, religion is just a drug that dulls our senses to the harsh reality of life. We live at a time when atheism has come to great prominence in the Western world in particular and in our own society.

The same of course cannot be said of other parts of the world, particularly in developing countries in Africa and South America and the Far East in previously avowedly communist countries like Russia and China.

[1 : 25] The trend is actually in the opposite direction. They have been there and done that and they didn't like it. In Britain, atheism came to real public attention in the year 2009 with an advert run by Richard Dawkins and others that said, there's probably no God.

Now stop worrying and enjoy your life. It seemed a very clever little slogan. Everyone wants to enjoy their lives and everyone wants not to worry.

However, on closer inspection, the idol has got feet of clay. We'd want to know what is the level of probability first of all.

If it said there's probably no God, how probable, how improbable is it? If you were a betting man, would you bet your life and existence on the non-existence of God?

The great French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal certainly said that we shouldn't in what is famously known as Pascal's wager worked out in mathematical terms.

[2 : 36] And several mathematical projects have concluded that the probability of the present complexity of the universe coming about by mere chance is zero.

It's been likened to a hurricane in a scrapyard producing a Boeing 747, in other words, highly improbable. But of course men like Dawkins say that God's existence is even more improbable than that.

But just because something may seem improbable doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. These same men say that it's improbable that the universe came into existence.

But it has come into existence. It exists. So what may seem improbable doesn't necessarily mean that it does not exist. In light of that, perhaps Robert Burns' advice in his epistle to a young friend is worth heeding, he said, an atheist's laugh is a poor exchange for deity offended.

But also would God's non-existence give people grounds for not worrying? It said of Bertrand Russell, who was a leading intellectual atheist in the 20th century, it said of him that he had to read a detective story a day to divert his mind from the fear that mankind was going to destroy the world through nuclear war.

[4 : 04] And anyway, is the belief that human life and the universe are going to be extinguished in darkness forever, which is a basic belief of atheism, is this a cause for not worrying?

The French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, I think, was nearer the truth. He was an atheist for most of his life, and he said, atheism is a cruel long-term business.

And he said, that God does not exist, I cannot deny, that my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget. However, in spite of all that, atheism seems to be in the ascendancy in our culture today.

It's becoming much more assertive and often hides behind what's called secularism, the view that religion or faith should be excluded from public life.

Christina Odom, who was a former deputy editor of the New Statesman, wrote an article in that publication entitled, The New Intolerance, Will We Regret Pushing Christians Out of Public Life?

[5 : 17] Another particular incident where she and others were banned from holding a meeting about traditional marriage in public buildings in London, she decided to do some research.

And she says, my findings were shocking. Not only Christians, but also Muslims and Jews increasingly feel they are no longer free to express any belief, no matter how deeply felt, that runs counter to the prevailing fashions for superficial tolerance and equality, terms which no longer bear their dictionary meaning, but are part of a political jargon in which only certain views and certain groups count as legitimate.

The prevailing attitudes of the ruling and influential elites in our society are generally atheist, secularist and intolerant of any other views.

It's against that background that I want to consider atheism as the true opium of the people or the foolishness of atheism, because the Bible is even more blunt about it, isn't it?

Because it says in our text here, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. In other words, there is an intellectual and moral foolishness about atheism.

[6 : 42] But you might still ask the question, why are we looking at this subject? You might prefer for us to look at something that seems much more comfortable and much more attractive.

Why do we bother with this? Well there are perhaps two reasons that here tonight we should bother with it. Perhaps first of all there may be someone here tonight who doesn't believe in the existence of God or has great doubts about it or who is influenced by a lot of these things that have been mentioned.

Perhaps we ourselves as Christians don't know how to handle this kind of thing when it comes up in conversation. The Scriptures give us great evidence and great material for seeking to answer something like this just as in so many other areas.

I want to look with you this evening at various reasons why atheism is foolish according to what the Bible says. First of all, atheism doesn't explain the universe.

Now this is one of the areas where the impression is given that there is now no longer need to believe in God because science explains everything. There's a famous quote, although it's a disputed quote or disputed as to what the scientist actually meant, but it was from the French astronomer Laplace in his conversation with Emperor Napoleon.

[8 : 11] Napoleon had asked him or said to him, you do not mention God in your book. And Laplace answered, I have no need of that hypothesis.

Now as I say people dispute as to what exactly he meant by that, but it illustrates what has been taken to be the meaning of it. In other words, that science squeezes out God.

Science explains things so there's no need for the idea of God. And they're developed what is called the God of the gaps. So that science explains this so there's no need for God to explain it.

There's another area where perhaps we don't know what the explanation is. So Christians tend to say, oh God explains that, but then science comes along and it gives an explanation of that and so God is kind of squeezed out of the picture.

That is a totally wrong way of understanding of course the world because as we'll see, the very existence of science came about through a certain understanding of who God is and what the world is.

[9 : 16] Richard Dawkins probably is the most famous one who has popularized this view. The idea that natural selection or evolution is the blind watchmaker explaining away the need for God.

You know how in the past the idea was, was said by a philosopher, if you found a watch lying somewhere, well you would look at it and you would say, well someone must have designed this, someone must have produced it.

So in the same way, if a watch requires a watchmaker, so a universe requires a universe maker who is God. Not Richard Dawkins and others say, well but science has discovered certain laws and things that show how the world has come to be the way it is.

However we have to say that when Isaac Newton, who was a Christian, one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, when he discovered the law of gravity, that didn't make him doubt the existence of God.

He still believed in God, he believed that this was one of the laws that God had put into place in the world, he was simply thinking God's thoughts after him. So why should any discovery of laws concerning the development of life, whatever they may be, whether we think they're good or not, but why should such discoveries cast doubt on God's existence?

[10 : 35] These laws that may have been discovered, whether they're genetic laws or whatever they may be, they're simply showing us how God has created the world and created life and how it works.

So again, science is showing, instead of being contrary to God, it's showing that we can think God's thoughts after him. But in fact, it is generally recognised that science itself developed in Western Europe because of the Christian view of God as the law giver.

And in this way atheism ignores the origin of modern science. Joseph Needham, who is someone who was expert in Chinese studies, he asked the question, why did modern science never start in China?

And this is what he said, there was no confidence that the code of nature's laws could ever be unveiled and read because there was no assurance that a divine being, even more rational than ourselves, had ever formulated such a code capable of being read.

In other words, he's saying that in spite of all the technological ability that the Chinese had over thousands of years, modern science never developed there because they didn't have this belief in a supreme law giver and creator, God, who unified all knowledge.

[12 : 06] Members of science, like Alfred North Whitehead, stressed that science was born out of a Christian worldview. C.S. Lewis, as so often puts it very succinctly, he says, men became scientific because they expected law in nature, and they expected law in nature because they believed in a legislator.

However, atheism, the idea that the universe began and developed without any intelligent design, does not provide a satisfactory explanation.

First, the very fact of a beginning, as it's generally recognized in science now that the universe had a beginning, the rather trivial term, the big bang, is used to describe it.

And sometimes Christians feel they're not particularly sympathetic to that idea, but you must remember the contrast between that idea and what had come before.

What had come before was the idea that, well, the universe has just always existed, it's a steady state universe, there's no need for God to explain it. But this idea that scientists have come to discover is that the universe did have a beginning, ties in exactly with what the Bible says, that it did have a beginning.

[13 : 21] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Interestingly, the big bang theory was resisted originally by atheistic scientists like Fred Hoyle and Arthur Eddington, and the reason they resisted it was on the grounds that it would provide a rather, it would back up the belief in creation, in the belief that the universe had a beginning.

But also the idea that everything has come about by blind chance is not supported by the mathematical models I mentioned earlier. The physicist Roger Penrose, who worked with Stephen Hawking, Stephen Hawking is very well known, but the man who worked with him on black holes, the discovery of black holes, he computed that the odds of the big bang producing our ordered universe by accident, he worked out the odds, and I can't get my head round this, but this is what it is, one in ten to the power ten to the power one hundred and twenty three.

Now if you're good at maths, maybe you can get your head round that, but it means to put it in more simple terms, it's so large that it has more zeros than the total number of particles in the universe.

In other words, the chance is one in that number, in other words, infinitesimally small. There's another thing, and that is that there is the fine tuning of what are called various constants in the universe.

There's things like gravity, electromagnetism, strong and weak nuclear forces and so on, you don't need to get your head round all of that, but there are these constants that scientists have discovered.

[15 : 10] And for the universe to exist, and for the human race to exist, it was absolutely necessary that all these constants were as they are.

The scientist John Lennox of Oxford University has put it this way, the explanation of fine tuning is a fine tuner. In other words, this did not come about by chance, it came about by design of the creator God.

And then again, there's also the information code of DNA, we heard a lot about DNA today in genetics, the very basis of life, the building blocks of life.

And DNA has been described as the longest word in the universe, because when you see it written down, each of the compounds have a letter to describe them, and it's a long word made up of these letters repeated in different forms for a very, very long time.

In every other situation where we discover information code, we deduce intelligence. There's an organization called SETI, which is the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

[16 : 21] That means they're looking to see if there's some intelligent life out there in the universe on some planet, some far distant galaxy or whatever it is. Now how would they recognize that?

What they're looking for is some sort of information code coming in the signals, instead of just noise, background noise. They're looking for some sort of information code, and if they discovered that, they would say, ah, that is evidence of intelligence out there.

So why not recognize this most amazing information code in DNA as evidence of intelligence? Not our intelligence, we didn't create it, it's part of us, but the intelligence of the creator who created it.

It's foolish not to believe the same in this regard to DNA. In Romans chapter one we read, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

We're surrounded by revelation of God, and science has discovered so many of these things that reveal the intelligence of the creator behind it all.

[17 : 40] If we ignore that, then we are being foolish, as the psalmist says here, the fool says in his heart, there is no God.

But secondly, atheism is foolish because it doesn't explain us ourselves as human beings. It doesn't explain the unique position of human beings in the universe.

The biblical scholar Michael Green said, it has always seemed to me utterly absurd for the atheist to profess such deep regard for the random products of a universe where chance is king.

In other words, he's referring to the fact that so many atheists would describe themselves as humanists, believing in human beings and our ability to understand things and so on.

But why should we have such a deep regard for what their own philosophy says are just the random products of a universe where chance is king? The poet Francis Thompson said, an atheist is a man who believes himself to be an accident.

[18 : 43] In other words, we just happened with no rhyme or reason. And C.S. Lewis again puts it this way, atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning, just as if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never have known it was dark.

And Victor Hugo who wrote the original book *Les Misérables*, which of course has been made into a very famous musical and film, he said, there are, as we know, powerful and illustrious atheists.

If they do not believe in God, being great minds, they prove God. In other words, what he's saying is even although they are saying they don't believe in God, the fact that they have great minds and they exercise these great minds, it begs the question, where have these great minds come from?

Where does this intelligence come from? Like nothing else in the universe. And the eminent evolutionary biologist, Professor J.B.S. Haldane, long ago pointed out the problem posed by atheistic humanism.

He said, if my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true.

[20 : 03] And hence, I have no reason for supposing that my brain to be composed of atoms. You see what he's saying? It's self-contradictory. Because if we believe our ideas and beliefs just come about by these chance movements of atoms or electrons or whatever, well, why should we believe they're true?

What if we don't believe they're true? Well, that idea that our thoughts are wholly brought about by these movements of particles, how can we know that to be true? So the whole thing is self-contradictory.

A.N. Wilson, who actually was a biographer of C.S. Lewis, and I think when he wrote that he was still himself an atheist since he has come to a different viewpoint, but he said, the existence of language is one of the many phenomena of which love and music are the two strongest, which suggests that human beings are very much more than collections of meat.

Like that expression, you know, because otherwise we are just collections of meat. He said, they convince me that we are spiritual beings and that the religion of the incarnation asserting that God made humanity in his image and continually restores humanity in his image is simply true as a working blueprint for life, as a template against which to measure experience it fits.

So there's someone who was an atheist who comes to see that atheism has no satisfactory explanation. The Bible's explanation that we are made in the image of God as described in Genesis chapter one is much more satisfactory.

[21 : 40] You know that Psalm that we sung in Psalm 8, when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you're mindful of and the Son of man that you care for him?

You know, we look at the vastness of the universe today as revealed by science and we think, we're tiny, what on earth are we? But we're told you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

And of course, we know as we're thinking this morning that is absolutely ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, but Adam originally was also created in the image of God and we still bear that image, although broken and marred in various ways.

And that's why we have the abilities that we do have to understand and to explore and the abilities we have to love and to have fellowship with each other.

These amazing gifts that we're given are explained by the fact we're made in God's image, not that we're just a chance collection of atoms or some kind of chemical machine.

[22 : 42] Thirdly, atheism is foolish because it doesn't explain evil. The charge that atheists often make is that the existence of evil is inconsistent with the existence of God.

This was famously put by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. He said, is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent.

Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Quince then is evil. So he put it in this very succinct way to show, well, how could God exist really or how could he be perfectly good and perfectly able, powerful to deal with evil if he doesn't do it?

Well the argument doesn't really work because, first of all, we can see the purpose of some suffering. For instance, pain warning us of danger. You put your hand near the fire, you draw it away quickly because you would get really damaged if you put it into the fire.

So we can see the explanation of some pain or some trouble. Well, what about the testimony of those who say that their suffering made them better people? Evil things happened to them but great good came out of it.

[24 : 02] The most famous example in the Bible is Joseph who said to his brothers, you meant it for harm. You meant to do evil to me. You did do evil to me. You sold me into slavery in Egypt.

But God meant it for good. In other words, God worked out a great purpose, a highly improbable purpose, that this poor slave boy from Canaan was introduced into Egypt and then was thrown into prison under false charges, that this poor slave boy would become second in command in Egypt and rule the nations so that people were provided for in times of famine.

Amazing. God worked his purposes out through what was very evil. Joseph doesn't solve gloss over it and say, oh well, never mind.

He says what you did was evil. But God meant it for good. God worked out a great purpose through it. And that can be repeated time and again so we can see that in some instances, not in all, but in some instances we can see that things that are evil, things that are bad, things that are painful can be worked out by God.

That God is at work showing that he can overcome evil. The reason that people are so often angry at God for allowing evil is that they think him great enough to stop it and why else would you be angry at God saying, why does God allow this?

[25 : 32] But if he is that great, then he's great enough to have a good purpose in it all that is unknown to us at the present time.

Also atheists and secularists are constantly going on about the evils of religion. But their problem is, however, that they have no basis for calling anything evil at all.

By what standard is something judged to be evil? The 19th century Russian novelist Dostoevsky has one of his characters say in the Brothers Karamazov, without God everything is allowed or it's often translated, if God does not exist everything is permitted.

And that's something that atheists have never really grappled properly with. Because where do you get your standards of what's right and wrong, what's good and evil if there is no ultimate standard?

And that has led to people like film star Catherine Hepburn saying, I'm an atheist and that's it. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people.

[26 : 50] She should have stopped by saying I'm an atheist and I believe there's nothing we can know. That would have been logical. Where does she get this idea that we should be kind to each other?

There's no science that ever produces that. Where does it come from? It comes from the fact we're made in God's image and we have his laws planted in our hearts. Similarly Richard Dawkins says in The God Delusion, there is something infantile in the presupposition that somebody else has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point.

The truly adult view by contrast is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it. Why?

Why? Why not say that well we can choose to make it as meaningless and as ugly and as cruel as we want it. And there's absolutely no standard to say which is right.

Where do we get this optimistic belief and desire to do good? It cannot be from the idea that we're just highly developed animals or that we are accidents in a blind and personal process.

[28 : 01] Dawkins himself says in one of his other books, River Out of Eden, in a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky and you won't find any rhyme or reason to it, nor any justice.

The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect. If there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.

So what effect would these kind of ideas have on people if they really came to accept them? Well, perhaps on respectable middle class academics like Richard Dawkins, perhaps very little.

Perhaps he continues to live a perfectly moral life. But what about an atheist experiment on whole societies where people came to believe things like this?

Well, we don't need to think about it just in academic or theoretical terms because the 20th century contained such experiments where whole societies were imprinted with this belief that there was no God in communist Russia, in Maoist China, under the Nazis in Germany in a different kind of way and in many other places.

[29 : 28] And what was the result? Horrendous lack of respect for human life, horrendous destruction of human life. Disregard for the laws of God.

But the truth, of course, is to refer back to what Dostoevsky said, everything is not permitted. There are universal moral values.

Here's the strange thing, as C.S. Lewis pointed out, we all know the law of human nature, but we all break it. We all know it's wrong to kill, it's wrong to steal, it's wrong to commit adultery.

There may be various ways in which these are understood in various societies throughout the world, but C.S. Lewis made a study of it and he showed in down throughout history and in different religions and philosophies all these basic things were recognized.

It's as we read in Romans chapter 2, it's the law of God written in our hearts. But the fact is that we know it, but we break it.

[30 : 32] It's not like the laws of science, you know, the law of gravity is always obeyed. But the law of human nature that God has placed in our heart, we break.

I find myself under a law, but one that I rebel against. And that's exactly what God reveals in the Bible. We have an awareness of the moral law because he made us as moral beings in his image, but we rebel against his law.

This of course also gives us the basis to condemn evil on the basis that is contrary to God's law. Atheism has no such absolute basis.

The French philosopher Voltaire, who was not a Christian, said, I would not wish to have to deal with an atheist prince who would find it in his interest to have me ground to powder in a mortar.

I should be quite certain of being ground to powder. It is therefore absolutely necessary for princes and for peoples that the idea of a supreme being, creator, ruler, rewarder, revenger shall be deeply engraved in peoples minds.

[31 : 41] And A.N. Wilson that I referred to earlier said, one thing that finally put the tin hat on any aspirations I had to be an unbeliever was writing a book about the Wagner family and Nazi Germany and realizing how utterly incoherent were Hitler's neo-Darwinian ravings and how potent was the opposition, much of it from Christians, paid for not with clear intellectual victory but in blood.

Read Pastor Bonhoeffer's book Ethics and ask yourself what sort of mad world is created by those who think that ethics are a purely human construct.

Think of Bonhoeffer's serenity before he was hanged even though he was in love and had everything to look forward to.

Cezaw Mewosh who was a Polish poet whom I referred to last night in one of my songs, he said a true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death.

The huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged. It's against such evil products of atheism that this very Sam warns here in verse 1 it follows on by saying they are corrupt, their deeds are vile, there is no one who does good.

[33 : 07] So not only is atheism intellectually foolish, it's morally foolish and leads to such corruption. Finally atheism is foolish because it doesn't explain Jesus.

Some people of course will try to say that the New Testament account of Jesus is just a myth, it's just a story, it's just a legend, they will use all these kind of expressions. Well C.S.

Lewis who was an academic expert in such literature as myths, he demolished this position, you can read it in a delightfully entitled book called Ferencides and Elephants.

He had read a commentary on John's and John's Gospel which called John's Gospel the whole book a myth and he says I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, all my life.

I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this, that is John's Gospel. He said there were only two possibilities, either it was reporting what had happened or else someone nearly 2,000 years ago suddenly invented modern novelistic realistic narrative which is absolutely highly improbable.

[34 : 25] In other words the most probable thing he says is that this is someone just recording what he saw and witnessed.

John Matthews of course will try to say that Jesus didn't exist but the historian Michael Grant who was professor of history at Edinburgh University termed the hypothesis that Jesus never lived an extreme view.

He said if we apply to the New Testament as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.

And we can go back to someone like the ancient Roman historian Tacitus who referred to the fact that Nero, the emperor Nero blamed Christians for the fire of Rome and in that passage he says Christus from whom the name had its origin suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators Pontius Pilatus.

So there's clear historical evidence that Jesus existed. But then the question of the accuracy of the New Testament will be raised. You know how do we know that Jesus did all the things that he did and so on.

[35 : 50] Well Sir William Ramsey who was a professor of archaeology at both Oxford and Aberdeen universities, he went out to Greece and Turkey influenced by the theological understanding of that time that you know Luke was unreliable as a historian in the book of Acts and so on.

He came to reverse his view totally when he investigated the archaeological sites and read it in conjunction with the book of Acts and compared it with what ancient Roman writers said and so on.

And he came to the view that Luke was a thoroughly reliable historian in the book of Acts. But perhaps the most famous example of all concerns Galeo whom Luke says was proconsul of Achia, you can read about it in Acts chapter 18.

He was this Galeo was a well-known brother of Seneca who was again a well-known Roman and so doubt was raised as to whether this was accurate because there was never any record in any Roman writings of him being proconsul of Achia in Greece.

But then an inscription was found at Delphi in Greece which proves not only that he was proconsul but it actually gives the date which can be determined as 51 to 52 AD.

[37 : 10] So instead of it being a kind of embarrassment that Luke mentions this, it has become the very keystone of dating the whole of that New Testament period.

So this is backed up by strengthening evidence from many examples of archaeology at the present time. But it is the character and the claims of Jesus that pose the greatest threat to atheism.

Here is one who lived the greatest life of self-sacrificial love and he gave his life for the salvation of others. But he also made the stupendous claim to be God.

Then at his trial, and this is in the book of Mark which is generally recognised by even those who are critical of the New Testament, recognised as the earliest and most reliable of the gospels, he was asked, are you the son of the blessed?

Now the reason that the high priest simply used the word blessed was because they wouldn't pronounce the name of Yahweh, the name of the Lord. Are you the son of God? He was basically asking him. And what did Jesus say?

[38 : 12] According to Mark's Gospel, he said categorically, I am, thereby not just saying he is the son of God, but by using that very clear expression he was referring back to the very word Yahweh itself which comes from I am that I am.

And so it was quite clear to the high priest and the others what he was claiming. Thus we are presented with what Rabbi John Duncan called a trilemma.

That is Jesus is either mad or he is bad or he is God. Either he was trying to deceive people or he was himself deluded or he was stating the sober truth.

And this argument was developed again by C.S. Lewis in his book, Mere Christianity. Of course there are those who say, as Richard Dawkins does, that there is perhaps another possibility that, well, Jesus isn't mad or he is not bad, he is not lying, he is not trying to manipulate people, but he was just mistaken.

You know, he just made an honest mistake. That I find is the most pure, I had most ridiculous statement that anybody has ever made. How could a monotheistic Jew make such a mistake?

[39 : 28] It wasn't as if it was somebody in Hinduism that believes in 30 million gods or whatever. It's someone who believes in the absolute unity of the one God.

And yet this one claimed he is the Son of God and co-equal with God. Others of course criticise this argument by C.S. Lewis because it's based on the reliability of the gospel records, but we have shown these to be reliable.

Then of course there is the resurrection of Jesus, which again people would say, well, we can perhaps believe in Jesus, that he was a good man and that he was crucified and so on, but someone rising from the dead.

Again the historian Michael Grant states, and as far as I know he made no Christian profession at all, he states that historian cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb because normally applied historical criteria indicate that the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty.

Now that's falling short of saying he believed that Jesus rose from the dead, but he's saying, historians have got to explain how the tomb was empty because the fact seems to be that the tomb was empty.

[40 : 47] It's the only thing that explains all the events around it. And I would say how do we explain the birth and the growth of the Christian church without the resurrection?

Something amazing happened there that transformed cowardly and fearful disciples into those who fearlessly proclaimed on the day of Pentecost that Jesus was the Christ and he had risen from the dead.

Atheism, you see, has no adequate explanation of Jesus, but the apostle John has. He said, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

So in all these ways we see the foolishness, the intellectual and moral inadequacy of atheism. It's the true opium of the people. It's the wishful thinking that we will never have to answer to the judge of all the earth.

But you know it's possible for us to appreciate all these arguments that we've been looking at drawn from the Bible based on this passage in Psalm 14.

[41 : 55] And yet for all practical purposes for us to be atheists, we may not be intellectual atheists, we may not say we're intellectual atheists, but every day we live as if God doesn't exist.

We live our lives according to our own desires or the desires of people around us with no thought for God, without hope and without God in the world, as Paul put it.

Pascal said, in every person's heart there is a God-shaped blank. You can have that blank filled if it's not already been filled simply by trusting in this Jesus that we've been thinking about, the Son of God.

Jean-Paul Sartre, through my mentioned earlier, the great French existentialist philosopher, before his death it seems that he said these words, I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured, in short a being whom only a creator could put here, and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.

Now I don't know what Jean-Paul Sartre came to in the end, whether he came to a full belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as saviour or not, but he certainly came to see the inadequacy of his atheism.

[43 : 24] And so we today, we tonight, reflecting on these passages in God's Word, we need to grapple with what's going on in the world around us and seek to be able to explain to people the foolishness of atheism and the wisdom of God in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the wisdom and power of God.

Let's pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we have to confess that we struggle to understand what's going on in the world around us today and the various forces that are at work.

Enable us to see that your Word has predicted all these things and your Word is perfectly competent to deal with whatever we come up against at the present time.

Start as confidence in your Word and confidence as we seek to engage with people and interact with the way in which they may be thinking to show this great wisdom and power of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and in him crucified.

We thank you and praise you that we have a Redeemer who died, yes, but rose again, dying for our sins and rising again for our justification. We praise you that we can base our life for now and for eternity on that great fact.

[44 : 46] So we ask all of this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.