

1 Peter 3:15 4/22/12 (The Reason for God) #1 No Apology Apologetics

Yesterday I sent out a congregational email and I included this provocative slam against our Christian faith:

Slide: “CHRISTIANITY: The belief that some cosmic Jewish Zombie can make you live forever if you symbolically eat his flesh and telepathically tell him that you accept him as your master, so he can remove an evil force from your soul that is present in humanity because a rib-woman was convinced by a talking snake to eat from a magical tree. Makes perfect sense.”

Now, that drive-by assault on the Christian faith didn't **shock** me so much when I saw it a couple weeks ago, as much as it made me aware once again that our faith in Christ is under attack. I said in the email that today's message was vitally important and it is, especially for those who are trying to raise children in today's pluralistic environment...because this little slam is now standard fare for what your children will be encountering in the world in which they live. You might think it's a blasphemous statement, and you'd be right. And you might want to react with anger and denounce it and demand that it be taken off the internet, and none of that would do you or anyone else any good. For every one of these types of statements you could get off, 10 more would spring up. In fact, they are already.

Lately, for your sake, I've been putting myself through the book by prominent atheist Richard Dawkins,

Slide: “The God Delusion” pic

It's a New York Times bestseller - sold over a million copies... Ben Stein gives us a taste of Dawkins in his movie, “Expelled.”

Slide: Dawkins attack clip from “Expelled” 1:27.27 – 1:28.46

So there's one book and author and what he claims is his very “objective” opinion. And many others are out there as well. “God is not Great” by Christopher Hitchens, “The End of Faith” by Sam Harris, “God and the Folly of Faith” by Victor Stenger and so on. And what are you going to do with all this folks, bury your head in the sand and wish it would go away? I suppose you could try the Amish route and try to insulate and protect your kids from these attacks, but the first time they go on the internet at a friend's house, there it will be. Or perhaps next Christmas they'll see a bus drive by with this sign on the side:

Slide: Yes, Virginia there is no God.

Or they'll see a Billboard like this:

Slide: “All religions are fairy tales”

Folks, we are entering a different time in this world. And **we** need to be prepared for that and we need to prepare **our children** for that. In his book and elsewhere, President Obama has said:

Slide: “Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.” -- Barack Obama

Now, you may not particularly like to hear that, and the first time you did hear it, it might have raised your blood pressure a little bit, but it's true. I do believe we once could have been defined as a Christian nation. Certainly our founders were mostly Christian and that is reflected in the wonderful documents they left us to get us started. Of course, as our second president who drafted most of our constitution, John Adams, said:

Slide: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.” – John Adams

And we’re beginning to see that truth play out today also. But that discussion is for another time...

For now I want to focus on how to handle these attacks. And it took me a while to realize it this week, but I’m not going to be able to do that with just one sermon. This is going to have to turn into a series. We’re going to call it “The Reason for God” and I’m going to use a book of that same name written by Timothy Keller for the general outline.

Slide: “The Reason for God” pic

Keller is rapidly rising as one of the best Christian apologists in our country today. (I’ll try to have some of those books available for sale next week if some of you want to pick them up and go a little deeper than we can on a Sunday morning)

So as we talk about handling attacks on our faith, if anger isn’t the answer and lashing out isn’t the answer and putting our kids in media-free bubble wrap isn’t the answer,

Slide: Mom wrapping kid in bubble wrap pic

then what is?

Well, I submit to you that God has a better strategy that He has laid out in his Word for us today. The Bible says:

Slide: “...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

That verse is going to serve as our outline for today and as the theme verse of this series. In context, Peter is telling Christian people how they should live in their relationships with their families, in their relationships within the church, and in their relationships in the world. And in our relationships with the world, Peter tells us honestly that we may have to suffer for the cause of Christ. He says:

Slide: “...even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord...” (1 Peter 3:14–15 NIV)

“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” It’s an interesting phrase there. And I’m not sure I have a full handle on it. What do people who persecute and demean others fear? That they might be wrong? That this life might not be all there is? That some day they may have to give an account of their lives before a mighty God? All things we certainly don’t need to fear when we do the first thing in the simple outline given to us in this theme verse.

Slide: I. In Your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

The word “Lord” in the Greek is “kurios”. It means supreme in authority, controller; God, Lord, master. It means that we recognize that God really is in charge – not just of the world and universe out there, but He’s in charge of me. Folks, “Christ as Lord” is about the farthest thing from a “Cosmic Jewish Zombie” that I can think of. “Cosmic”, yes. He certainly transcends this world, but he also transcends the universe that He created. He is the Uncreated Creator.

Slide: “For 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. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16–17 NIV)

And it really is pretty hard to move on from that main point. The idea that Christ is Lord and that He set the world in place is absolutely galling to atheists like Dawkins. Again, Stein brings that out in His interview:

Slide: Expelled clip - 1:29:56 – 1:31:54

So, Dawkins has no problem imagining that Aliens came and seeded life on earth,

Slide: Alien priest pic

but an all-powerful God is something He has trouble believing in. And the more you read in his book, the more you see that assumption rules his model of the world. His mind is closed to the idea of God to begin with, therefore any other mechanism to bring about life is preferable. And we'll talk more about that later in the series. Dawkins isn't a scientist and he really doesn't make a very good case for evolution as we'll see, even though he loves to talk about it, but he **has been** effective at getting young people to lose their faith. I've been emailing some of these ideas back and forth with different pastors the last two weeks and one of my good friends shared this with me:

Slide: "The God Delusion was dumped on my desk...by a parent who lamented that her high school child got the book from the Library, read it and has now denounced her faith..."

Another said that one of his members has a son that is buying into a recent book by David Fitzgerald, called "Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed At All." The sad thing is that anyone who would claim such a thing should have no credibility at all, because the evidence for the fact that Jesus existed is overwhelming from non-Biblical sources alone.

But folks, this clearly is the battle line. And it's clear that Jesus wants that line drawn. He wasn't interested in being thought of as a good man or a prophet or philosopher, or a law-giver. Time after time in the Bible He said, "I tell you the Truth." Not, "a truth", "The Truth": Capital "T". Either He was hugely arrogant, or nuts, or a liar, or He is Who He says He is, as **C.S. Lewis** put it: "**Lunatic, Liar or Lord.**" Jesus does not leave room for Christianity to be just one of many ways, or just a philosophical way of life. He said, "**I am** the Way, the Truth and the Life."

So to be honest, we also come to this debate with certain assumptions, with a bias. We believe the Bible can be trusted, that it is the Word of God, not just the Word of man. We believe God is the Creator of the Heavens and the earth just as it says in the Bible. Dawkins is right in saying that no human was there in the beginning to record how life on earth came to be. But we believe that God was there and He caused to be written down what He wants us to know about Him. And we'll talk more about that in this series when I focus the message on the reliability of the Bible.

As we continue through the Easter season, I love how Jesus dealt with this with the disciple we call "Doubting Thomas." He challenged him to "be not unbelieving, but believing." Nevertheless He still responded to Thomas' request for more evidence. He invited Him to put his finger into the nail holes he still had in his hands and to put his hand into the spear wound in his side. And he does the same with us. The Bible says that

Slide: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9 NIV)

And to faith... God knows that there's a lot for us to think through and process, and that it takes time for us to do that. And folks, that is so comforting for me as I muddle my way through what can be very confusing models of the universe and ideas that are out there. And I hope it's

comforting for you as well, as you sometimes wrestle with these things. God doesn't want you to just have a hand-me-down faith from your parents. He wants you to see for yourselves that He really is Your Lord, and to "come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4)

Slide: "CHRISTIANITY: The belief that some cosmic Jewish Zombie can make you live forever if you symbolically eat his flesh and telepathically tell him that you accept him as your master, so he can remove an evil force from your soul that is present in humanity because a rib-woman was convinced by a talking snake to eat from a magical tree. Makes perfect sense."

And yes, we believe the Truth of God's Word, that Jesus Christ is your Lord, the One who loved you enough to die for you on the cross, not just to remove some evil force from you, but to stand in your place and satisfy the justice of a holy God against the sins of the world. Those sins and wrongdoings are real because there was a real tree in the Garden of Eden. There was nothing magical about it. There was just a choice in it – a choice to follow God or to follow the temptations of the evil One, a fallen angel, created by God. And yes, we believe all this because the Bible says so, and because we know the Bible can be trusted. We'll give that a whole separate message in this series. And yes, we believe because Jesus died on another tree, the "just for the unjust", so that our sins, our wrongdoings, the good we should have done and didn't, has all been paid for by Him. We believe that Jesus also rose again, not as some Zombie to run away from, but as the living, victorious Lord to run to so that we may truly live forever with Him. We go even further and believe that He loved us so much that He left us a meal, not just to symbolically remember what He did on the cross for us, but to actually take into ourselves what He offered for us there, His Body and Blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. We believe it all, and we'll get to it all more specifically as we walk through this series.

Now if He really is my Lord, then how should I be living in this world? Again, Peter gives us the answer.

Slide: II. Always be prepared

Part of that preparation we've already talked about. It's preparing by understanding the kind of attacks that are out there. We talked about some and we'll look at others throughout this series. Obviously a great deal of our preparation needs to be in the Word of God. That's what we were doing in the last Sunday series as we walked through the Armor of God. Paul told us to:

Slide: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:14–17 NIV)

The more you know the Word of God, the more the Holy Spirit will use that Word to strengthen your faith and help you stand up against attacks.

And obviously in this day and age our preparation must also include a defense against the arguments and attacks that our children are facing. In his book, and DVD, "Already Gone," Ken Ham brings out a sort of hidden little gem in one of the Old Testament lists:

Slide: "...men of half the tribe of Manasseh, designated by name to come and make David king—18,000; 32 men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command; 33 men of Zebulun, experienced

soldiers prepared for battle with every type of weapon, to help David with undivided loyalty— 50,000;” (1 Chronicles 12:31–33 NIV)

“Who understood the times and knew what Israel should do...” in their day. Do we have that in our day? Unfortunately, not nearly enough. Too many churches today are far too willing to compromise the Truth of God’s Word, just to get along in this culture. What they don’t realize is that this culture and Satan behind it, won’t be satisfied until we give up on God’s Word altogether. And so we need to defend the faith. We need to be prepared to:

Slide: III. Give an Answer

...to “give the reason for the hope that you have.” Yes, there are probably more attacks on the truth of God’s Word in your day than ever before in the history of the world. And yet, Ken Ham points out that America has more:

Slide: Churches – Seminaries – Christian Colleges – Christian stores and resources – Christian radio, TV, websites and podcasts

...than any other nation in the world. We have more resources to defend the faith than ever before in the history of the world. And we need to take advantage of those resources...

Now folks, what we’re talking about under this point and with 1 Peter 3:15

Slide: “...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

...and with this whole series, is a church word called “Apologetics”. I don’t often use church words, but that is one that’s out there and it’s in here (in the text). To “**give an answer**” comes from the Greek word “**apologia**” from which we get that word “Apologetics”. It covers that whole category of how we are going to logically defend the Christian faith against the skeptical questions of this age. And so this is an “Apologetics” sermon, not one in the sense that I’m embarrassed for my beliefs and have to hang my head and apologize, but as the title of this message suggests, I make “No Apology” for standing up and saying that I believe what the Bible says, especially what it says about my Lord Jesus.

By the way, I’ve put a number of Apologetics Resources out on the table in the narthex. Some of them are Library resources that you can check out. Some of them haven’t been cataloged in the library yet, so I’d appreciate it if you waited until they have a library thing on the spines... The Case for faith and case for Christ books you can have, the Jesus: Fact or fiction videos you can have as well to give to your family, friends, co-workers, relatives as you engage them in your sincere desire not just to keep the faith yourself, but to share with those you love the greatest message and hope the world has ever known.

Now as I said, this is going to be an Apologetics series, so you didn’t get all the answers today – and you won’t get all of the answers in this life. But you’re going to more than enough if you stick with us. The outline of the series is going to give answers to the following atheistic questions and challenges to our faith:

Slide:

There Can’t be Just One True Religion.

How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?

Christianity is a Straitjacket.

The Church is Responsible for So Much Injustice.

How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?

Science Has Disproved Christianity.

You Can't Take the Bible Literally.

It's true that all of these I've talked about in different ways before, but I'm going to try to do that again – as effectively as I know how, because I believe the times and the challenges before us call for it. I ask you to invite your relatives and friends and coworkers, maybe your children who have checked out - if they're so certain the Christian faith is wrong, why not check out this defense of it? Don't chuck your faith just because you've encountered something like "The God Delusion". That's an eternal decision. It deserves deeper research, and that's what we'll be doing in the next seven weeks together. And we're going to try to do this, as Peter tells us:

Slide: IV. Do this with gentleness and respect

Not the way we are always treated as evidenced by the very disrespectful "Cosmic Jewish Zombie" quote. And unfortunately, Christians have not always responded with "gentleness and respect." But that's how Christ responded and how he wants us to respond.

Now, if you haven't been listening, or thinking this doesn't really apply to you, you probably want to drift back in and consider something that is making this discussion hit closer to home. Some of you know that we now have a new group meeting on campus at the Coopersville High School. It's called the Secular Student Alliance, from the national group of the same name. It is not setting out to be an immoral group, but a group, according to one of the brochures, whose "purpose and morality are less about personal salvation after death and more about celebrating and contributing to the human condition."

But of course, speakers and thinkers for the group are people Dawkins and others who aggressively attack the Christian faith. Now, would I like it if we didn't have to face these challenges? I think so. But it's a public school and they have a right to meet and we have the obligation according to the word of God to treat them with gentleness and respect, and that's the way I do expect our students and our parents to deal with this – while preparing to give an answer to the many questions these young people may raise within our community and particularly to your high-schoolers.

Well, as I said, there's a lot more to say about these things – that's why I'm going to need a series, and I'm looking forward to engaging many of you in discussions on these topics and hopefully giving you some answers that you can in turn use to provide answers to the questions of your friends, relatives, coworkers, neighbors... That's apologetics and we all need to get better at it. In the meantime, I just want to close today by saying: I make no apology and neither should you, that:

Slide:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord,

who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,

that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true!

Amen!

