

“Search Engine Theology: Does God....Exist”

Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

October 8, 2017

Rev. Dave Baldridge

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

We are searching. Searching, searching, searching. You type in on your computer “Does God...” and the first word that pops up is “exist.” People are searching for the answer to “Does God exist?” The scripture read here in Hebrews says “anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists.”

This begs the question---how do you prove God exists. I believe in the wind, although I have never seen the wind. Oh, I have seen the affects of the wind. I believe in love. Sarah and I tell each other every day “I love you.” Have I seen love? Humm...I know I have experienced love. Can I see God? Can I prove God? Well it by faith we know God exists, but more than that.

Hebrews 11 is known as the “Faith Chapter.” It is often known as the “Hall of Faith.” Faith heroes are listed and named in this chapter. Notice how the chapter starts. **Hebrews 11:1-3 New Living Translation 1 Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.** How do we have evidence of what we cannot see? Well, I have faith that Sarah loves me. I have evidence of that love that I cannot see and Wednesday night we went out to eat and I was allowed to get anchovies on my pizza. Now Sarah hates the smell of anchovies, aw...anchovies the evidence of Sarah’s love for me.

³ By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command...

I am a bit simplistic, but I think all we have to do is to look around and see the world, it’s beauty, how it functions and say, “Yes...I believe God exists.”

From Newlfe website I found the following helpful: “If you return from a vacation and walk into your home to find a sentence spray-painted on your living room wall, it’s logical to assume that someone broke in. You have nothing to prove it-no fingerprints, no sign of forced entry, no footsteps, no DNA evidence, no photographs or video footage, no testimonials from the neighbors-no “proof” that a human being did this.

But if someone told you it just happened, that it was just some random occurrence, you would laugh at them. You would say, “Look at the wall. This was not here when I left for my trip. Someone did this. I don’t know who they are or why they did it, but what you see before you did not happen on its own.”

For many people, that’s the way it is with the question of God’s existence. They look around at the world they live in and can’t help but believe that an intelligent being is responsible. There seems to be an order to it all, an incredible complexity that is unexplainable in human terms.”

So in chapter 11 of Hebrews we have many who had great faith. Abel, the first martyr in the Bible; Enoch, the man who walked with God; Noah, a righteous man; Abraham, the father of

the Jewish nation; Sarah, mother of the Jewish nation; Isaac, father of Esau and Jacob; Jacob, father of 12 tribes of Israel, Joseph, interpreter of dreams; Moses, giver of the Law; Joshua, successful leader faithful follower; Rahab, spy for the Israelites; Gideon, reluctant warrior; Barak obedient warrior; Samson, judge and strong man, Jephthah, warrior and judge; David, a man after God's own heart; and Samuel, prophet and last of the Judges. And there is a list of anonymous heroes.

They lived by faith. Do we live by faith? It takes faith in saying that God exists, however, I cannot look at and hold a newborn baby and say there is no God. His evidence is all around us.

An atheist is someone who does not believe in the existence of God. There is also a term called agnostic. An agnostic is someone who is not sure they can have proper information or proof and therefore it is impossible to say if there is or isn't a God.

In 2015 in Psychology Today according to the the latest international survey data, (as reported by Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*,) there are approximately 450-500 million non-believers in God worldwide, which amounts to about 7% of the global adult population. And according to the Pew Research Center, if we broaden the category to include all non-religious people in general — those unaffiliated adults who do not identify with any religion — we're talking 1.1 billion people, which equals about 16.5% of the global adult population. As such, "non-religious" is actually the third largest "religion" in the world, coming only behind Christianity (in first place) and Islam (in second).

(Phil Zuckerman Ph.D. The Secular Life ,How Many Atheists Are There? Psychology Today Posted Oct 20, 2015)

We have our work to do? Amen? In that study it showed that 8% of people in the United States fall into that category.

The following statement has been attribute to several. I believe it is from Albert Camus who said, "I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than live as if there isn't and to die to find out that there is."

Now a similar question in searching for Does God exist is what happens when we search "Where is God?" The 2 most popular autocompletes of that search resulted in Where is God when it hurts and where is God now.

With the Las Vegas shootings some may question, "if God exists then where was He?" Beloved we are living in a broken world. I'm sad, broken heartyed and yes even angry.

These are the top mass shootings in United States history:

1. Las Vegas: Oct. 1, 2017.---58 killed and more than 515 wounded.
2. Orlando, Fla.: June 12, 2016, Pulse nightclub---49 people killed and more than 58 wounded.
3. Blacksburg, Va.: April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech campus 33 killed and 17 wounded

4. Newtown, Conn.: Dec. 14, 2012. 28 killed, including shooter and his mother along with 20 children aged 6 and 7, and 2 wounded at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Beloved, when will it stop. O Lord hear our prayer. Innocent people dying. Children. Got 2 texts from people saying they knew someone who was at the Las Vegas shooting.

So we switch from Does Exist to Where is God? Why didn't he prevent this? Why didn't He show up?

Lee Strobel, known for his book *Case for Christ*...who by the way was an atheist. His wife who was an agnostic finally got him to go to church. Still an atheist he was journalist until writing about and trying to prove faith when he discovering and experiencing Christ.

In 2012 Strobel wrote a sermon "Why Does God Allow Tragedy and Suffering?" It was a response to another mass shooting---the one in Aurora, Colorado at a movie theater where 12 were killed.

In that sermon he says this: "That 'why' question is not a new one; it goes back thousands of years. It was asked in the Old Testament by Job and the writers of the Psalms, and it was especially relevant during the 20th Century, where we witnessed two World Wars, the Holocaust, genocides in the Soviet Union and China, devastating famines in Africa, the killing fields of Cambodia, the emergence of AIDS, the genocide in Rwanda and the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. And the 21st Century didn't start any better. There was 9/11 and now the Syrian slaughters, and on and on. Why do all of these horrific things happen if there's a loving and powerful God? Why do bad things happen to good people?"

If you ask me, "Why did God allow the gunman to spray the Aurora movie theater with gunfire just two days ago?" the only answer I can honestly give consists of four words: "I do not know."

////I could say the same about the shooter in Las Vegas./////

///Strobel in his sermon has several points/// One of them is: *God is not the creator of evil and suffering*

Then Strobel says, "But if God is not the author of tragedy or evil or death, where did they come from? Well, God has existed from eternity past as the Father, Son and Spirit, together in a relationship of perfect love. So love is the highest value in the universe. And when God decided to create human beings, he wanted us to experience love. But to give us the ability to love, God had to give us free will to decide whether to love or not to love. Why? Because love always involves a choice.

When my daughter was little, she had a doll with a string in the back, and when you pulled it the doll said, "I love you." Did that doll love my daughter? Of course not. It was programmed to say those words. Real love always involves a choice.

So in order for us to experience love, God bestowed on us free will. But unfortunately, we humans have abused our free will by rejecting God and walking away from him. And that has resulted in the introduction of evil into the world.

Another one of his points is: *The day is coming when suffering will cease and God will judge evil.*

The Bible says that the story of this world isn't over yet. It says the day will come when sickness and pain *will* be eradicated and people *will* be held accountable for the evil they've committed. Justice will be served in a perfect way. That day will come, but not yet.

Yet another point he makes is this: *We decide whether to turn bitter or turn to God for peace and courage.*

So when tragedy strikes, as it will; when suffering comes, as it will; when you're wrestling with pain, as you will—and when you make the choice to run into his arms, here's what you're going to discover: you'll find peace to deal with the present, you'll find courage to deal with your future, and you'll find the incredible promise of eternal life in heaven.”

Just as our Student Ministries dealt last week with “Where is God in the Hurricane?” we must realize that God does exist. God does care. God has given free choice. There is evil in the world. However: **John 16:33 New International Version "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

Oh we need peace. We need unity. We need the transformative power of Jesus Christ to be lived out in our daily life.

I've used a similar illustration before. This one is just a little different it is from “Life Illustrated,” by Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr., a devotional book.

A Sunday School teacher gave a little boy a picture of a globe to illustrate that “God so loved the world.” On their way home, the boy's father asked him what he learned that day, but he wouldn't answer. He was in a bad mood. He refused to answer, and even tore the picture into lots of little pieces. When they got home, the father took those pieces, gave them to the boy, sent him to his room, and told him not to come out until he had put the picture back together. The boy tried to tape the pieces together, but eventually went to his father, saying, “Daddy, I can't get the picture together. I can tell you what the teacher said, but I can't figure out the picture.” His father said, “You tore it up, so you can fix it. Go back in there and don't come out until you put that world together again. Soon the boy returned happy and smiling with the globe taped together correctly. “Here it is, Daddy,” he said,. “This is what the teacher taught us: that God so loves the world...” But how did you do that so quickly? His father asked. “I couldn't get the globe together, but I remembered there was a picture of Jesus on the other side.” His son replied. “So I put the picture of Jesus together, and when I did the globe came together too.”

Then in his devotional book Johnson says “We have been trying unsuccessfully to put our broken world back together, but we have become frustrated after realizing our efforts are futile. Rather than focusing on restoring our world, we need to focus on restoring our relationship with Jesus. If our relationship with Jesus is whole, the pieces of our world will fall back into place as well.”

We need Jesus, the world needs Jesus. We need to help others in the world find Jesus. Does God exist? Yes. The incarnate God, God becoming flesh occurred when Jesus came to earth.

In a world of darkness we need the Light of Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” You may have wondered why we always have 2 candles on the altar. They are always there...maybe unnoticed by you. Many believe that one candle reminds us that Jesus was God. And the second candle reminds us that Jesus was human.

Human He was. Just as we cry out...O Lord how long? God where are you? Jesus on the cross cried out (Matthew 27:46) in his humanity and said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” A quote from Psalm 22.

Some churches have what are called acolytes. These persons, often children or youth, assist the pastor. Often they will begin the service bringing in the light on a candle lighter and light the candle representing Jesus is God, fully divine, and Jesus is human and the light of the world. He is here with us.

Often during the last song the acolyte would move to light their candle lighter and then extinguish the candles and then recess out reminding us that as we leave we are to be the light of the world like Christ, and for Christ.

Beloved, we need to be that light to prove to the world that God does exist. He exists and sent His son Jesus to bring peace, unity, love, and comfort.

In our last song Great is our Lord by All Sons and Daughters, please note the words

You give life, You are love
 You bring light to the darkness
 You give hope, You restore
 Every heart that is broken

As we leave this place may we through Jesus be that hope, that love and that light.