

**"I Believe In God"**  
**Sermon Series on the Apostles' Creed - #2**  
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**First Presbyterian Church – Winston-Salem, NC**  
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**(Heb. 11:1-16)**

**Introduction.**

Have you ever wondered if God really exists? Has there ever been a time in your life when you doubted whether or not there really is a God and you thought that just maybe this world is all there is to our existence? I mean, you can't see God. You can't touch Him. I've never heard Him speak to me audibly. So how can I know that there really is a God?

Maybe things have happened in your life which have made you wonder, "If God really exists, then why does He allow such evil things to happen in the world? Why does He allow the mass shootings that have rocked our nation? Or why did He allow my mother to get cancer and die? Do you really exist, God?"

I once heard the story of a man who was a prisoner of war in a German concentration camp in World War II. He was standing next to a Jew when all of a sudden a German soldier smashed the Jew in the face with the butt of his rifle and drove the man to the ground. The soldier asked mockingly, "Where is your God? Maybe He's on vacation." Do you ever wonder if God exists when things like this happen in the world?

This morning we're going to consider the phrase "I believe in God" from the Apostles' Creed, and as we shall see to affirm this statement is no small matter. It forms the very foundation upon which our faith as Christians is built. As we take a look at this part of the Creed, and as we consider this passage in Hebrews 11, there are three matters I want you to consider: 1) the existence of God; 2) the self-revelation of God; and 3) our search for God.

**I. The Existence of God.**

In the minds of some people today, the Bible makes a strange omission in that it never makes any attempt to prove the existence of God. The writers of Scripture seem to assume God's existence, and they don't appear to feel the need to prove it at all. To them God's reality was vividly experienced day in and day out, and they thought God's actions were so obvious that they didn't need to address this area of doubt. But nowadays in our modern secular world where science tends to dominate, people think differently. And folks today want evidence and rationality before they're willing to believe in something. Now, I cannot prove to you the

existence of God, any more than you can prove He doesn't exist. However, I can demonstrate that it is very reasonable to believe He does.

Over the centuries people have developed a variety of philosophical arguments for the existence of God, and this morning I want to share with you five of them. Many have big fancy names, but basically the concepts aren't too difficult to understand. First, there is the **ontological argument**, which was developed about 900 years ago by a man named Anselm. He said that all people somehow or other have a concept of God as being bigger than anything else we can think of. And he said that if we have the ability to conceive of something that is bigger than anything we can think of, then there must be a reality behind this human idea. Where else did the idea come from?

The second argument for the existence of God is what is known as the **cosmological argument**. It was first developed by a man named Thomas Aquinas about 750 years ago. He argued that the principle of cause and effect suggests that God exists. Things happen in life, and they seem to have a reason or a cause behind them. We see an effect, so we assume there must be a cause behind it.

For example, if while I am speaking a rock suddenly comes whistling through the air in my direction, I will probably have two reactions. First, I'll duck, and second I'll look around to see who threw it. Now why should I assume that someone threw the rock? Why can't I just assume that the rock decided to hurl itself at me? Because everything in this world appears to have a cause and effect. If that's true, then if we think backwards, eventually we have to ask the question, "Was there ever a first cause? Was there something or Someone who initiated all the effects I see around me? Did all this just happen with the Big Bang, or did God begin it all?"

The third argument for the existence of God is called the **teleological argument**. The French philosopher Voltaire, who was not a follower of Christ, was the first one to suggest this. The argument he put forth simply says that if I walk along the beach and I come across a watch, I naturally assume that there must have been a watchmaker who put it all together. A watch cannot just come into existence by random accident. So, if that is true, then I have to conclude that the creative design of the universe suggests an architect. Just as it's reasonable to assume that the intricate design of a watch presumes the existence of a watchmaker, so it is reasonable to presume the existence of God when I examine something as amazing as the intricacies of the universe.

Another argument for the existence of God is called the **moral argument**. It says that all people in every society have a sense of morality. We have a sense of what is right and wrong, what is fair and unfair, what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. Where did we get this sense of morality if not from God? Some people object and say, "No, people simply learn their morality from their

surroundings and society, not from God." But the problem with that idea is that some of the most moral people we admire in history stood against the prevailing morality of their society, and rather than being products of their culture, they were actually changers of it.

The final argument is the **argument from life**. Human beings can do a great many things in this world. We can change and rearrange; we can alter and develop and elaborate. But there is one thing we cannot do, and that is create life. We also cannot take a dead thing and make it alive again. Only God, who is the source and fountain of life, can create it.

I remember as a high school student lying on a dock on a lake in the mountains of north Georgia with a friend. We lay there looking at the stars, and we contemplated the worlds beyond. I broke the silence and said, "I just don't understand how someone can't believe in the existence of God. This is all too amazing not to believe that someone created it all. It couldn't have just happened."

It is in the midst of the yearnings of our minds and the longing of our hearts that we begin to search for God. That is the beginning of coming to a place of finding Him, or more accurately, being found by Him. The passage we have read together this morning in the book of Hebrews says it well, "*...he who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him*" (11:6).

## **II. The Self-Revelation of God.**

Surveys indicate that 90 percent of Americans believe in the existence of God. But when we try to move beyond that basic statement and define who this God really is, there is a great divergence of opinion and profound disagreement. More often than not, when Americans say they believe in God, what they are talking about is a god of their own making.

Robert Bellah wrote a landmark book entitled *Habits of the Heart* in which he examined American society to find out what makes us tick. He was particularly interested in American belief systems, and he made some startling discoveries. One of the people he interviewed was a woman named Sheila Larson, a young nurse who had this to say in an interview: "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church, but my faith has carried me a long way. It's just my own little voice." She described her faith as "Sheilatism".<sup>1</sup>

Bellah points out that for many people today, they have a cafeteria approach to religion. "I'll take a little of this and a little of that." It's a blending together of beliefs where a person shops along the cafeteria line of religion and picks out what they like and leaves behind what they don't. Jesus may even be the main course on the tray, but there are also a variety of others beliefs added to it, such as the idea of

reincarnation, or a belief that hell doesn't exist, or the notion that God is in everything, or maybe that God is The Force in *Star Wars*.

But the Bible says that we aren't left alone to our own devices to determine for ourselves who God really is, making Him in our own image. We can no more determine who God is than we can determine who the person sitting next to us here in the sanctuary really is. They are who they are, and no amount of our imagining can change that. And in order to understand who that person is, you can learn some things about them by observation, but ultimately you won't really know them unless they open up and reveal who they are to you.

I remember when I first met my late wife Lorie in seminary. Early on in our courtship, I was so taken with who she was, and I was so eager to get to know her. So one night I said in a burst of enthusiasm, "I want to know everything there is to know about you!" But as I learned over the months that followed, that took time, and I was totally dependent upon Lorie to reveal herself to me. And as she opened up to me I learned that she loved the mountains, and she loved to hike. I learned she loved a good cup of coffee, and she loved Triscuit crackers and port wine cheese. Later on I also learned that she loved me, and that made me feel really good! But I only learned these things as she revealed herself to me.

Christianity says that God has revealed Himself to us through the Bible, and we can know something of who He is through what we learn about Him in Scripture. We also learn that God has revealed Himself most fully in His Son Jesus Christ. We can't know everything there is to know about God, because He is infinite, and we are finite. But we can something of who He is by what is revealed in the Bible and through His Son Jesus Christ.

There was once a little girl who was drawing a picture one morning at the breakfast table, and her mother asked her, "Honey, what are you drawing?" And the little girl replied, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The mother said, "Well, that's nice, dear, but no one knows what God looks like." And the little girl confidently said, "They will now!"

In truth, we're often like that little girl, and like Sheila Larson, drawing a picture of God in our own mind after the fashion of who we think He ought to be, and we make Him in our image. But the only way you and I can really know who God is is by learning from the Lord Himself through what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible. That's our only source for truth. We may come to a place where we believe that God exists, but how can we know Him? Christianity says that the only way to know God is through His revelation in Scripture and through His Son Jesus Christ. And we can know from what we learn about Jesus in Scripture that God cares about the awful things that happen in the world, and He sent His Son to enter our mess and bring redemption to all the sin and brokenness and pain we feel in this life.

### **III. Our Search for God.**

Augustine once said, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." In every single person there is a yearning to search for God, to find Him in order that we might know Him. Blaise Pascal, the French physicist and philosopher, once said, "Within every person there is a God-shaped vacuum which we try to fill with all manner of things, but only God will satisfy."

There is a great hunger for God these days. If you Google the word "spiritual", you will find over 749 million results! If you type in the word "spiritual" in Amazon's website, you'll find over 80,000 book titles! I think this reveals a deep yearning for God unlike anything we've ever seen in our lifetime. Sadly, however, many people are longing for something deeper and searching for God outside of Christianity, and they will only find themselves at a spiritual dead end when they do this.

Other people trying to satisfy this hunger for God choose to follow after little gods that never deliver. They choose the god of money, or the god of basketball, or the god of power, or the god of sex, or the god of status. But these little deities satisfy only for a while, and in the end they suck you dry and steal your soul. They exchange the best part of you and leave you empty.

Years ago, a young man named Doug Coupland wrote a book entitled *Life After God*. In a very revealing and vulnerable way he wrote of the spiritual hunger of our day in these words that hit home for a lot of people:

"Ours was the life lived in paradise, and thus it rendered any discussion of transcendent ideas pointless. Life was charmed, but without politics or religion. It was the life of the children of the children of the pioneers, life after God. A life of earthly salvation on the edge of heaven. Maybe this is as much as we can get. Yet I find myself speaking these words with a sense of doubt. Because there is a trade-off. I believe that the price we pay for the golden life is the inability to fully believe in love. Instead we gained a cynicism that scorches everything it touches. And I wonder if this irony is the price we paid for the loss of God.

"I think I am a broken person. I seriously question the road my life has taken, and I endlessly rehash the compromises I have made in my life. I have an insecure and vaguely [bad] job with an amoral corporation, so that I don't have to worry about money. I put up with half-way relationships, so I don't have to worry about loneliness. I have lost the ability to recapture the purer feelings of my youth in exchange for a narrow-mindedness that I thought would propel me to the top. What a joke.

"Here's my secret. I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I will ever achieve again. So I pray that you are in a quiet room when you hear these words. My secret is that I need God, that I'm sick, and I can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be able give; to help me be kind, because I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love."<sup>2</sup>

Does this describe you? Are you searching for God today? Do you agree with Augustine's words, "Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You, O God"? Then come to God. Give your life to the Lord and begin a relationship with the living God of the universe through the Person of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion.**

Last week we talked about the meaning of the word "to believe" in the Greek language, and we learned that *pisteuo* means more than merely intellectual assent. It also involves a conviction of the heart and a commitment of the will. It means to place the full weight of your trust in something. Many people today believe in God, but they don't really know Him personally. They know about Him from a distance, but they haven't come to a place of putting their trust in Him as their own Lord and Savior. They know information in their heads, but they don't trust God in their hearts, and they haven't committed to Him with their lives.

God wants to know you, and He wants you to know Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostles' Creed begins by saying, "I believe in God," and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, "*He who comes to God must believe He exists, and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him*" (Heb. 11:6). Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart - Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, p. 232,233.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Coupland, *Life After God*, p. 359.